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Reframing Schooling to Liberate Gender Identity

sj Miller
New York University

Gender and gender identity are policed by the social environment in myriad ways. For those who challenge normative binaries, they can be positioned to experience different forms of violence. Though mindsets, social movements, and changes in policies have spurred material, social, and economic gains for those who challenge expectations of gender identity binaries, schools continue to inherit dichotomous messages about gender identity. On one hand, schools are expanding anti-bullying policies by enumerating gender identities, shifting names of Gay-Straight to Queer and Sexuality Alliances to attend to intersectional identities, addressing gender identity concerns in professional development trainings, but the field of teacher education has yet to systemically and longitudinally address gender identity for students from pre-K to university levels. As a result, educators are left ill-prepared about how to affirm and recognize gender identity in coursework, curriculum, and pedagogy. As we come to understand how and in what ways schools foreclose possibilities for students to experience gender identity self-determination, shifts in awareness can open up possibilities for schools to honor and liberate gender identities.

In the United States people are born into a culture still fastened to a historical policing of gender and gender identities. Certainly, while social and political movements have helped galvanize and afford some degree of material, social, and economic gains for gender and gender identities, schools inherit gender norms and their subsequent attributions (Lesko, 2012; Petrone & Lewis, 2012). While changes in some locales have led to the enumeration of antibullying laws, the changing of names from Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) to Gender or Queer and Sexuality Alliances (QSAs), and the embedding of more teacher professional development about gender identity, there has yet to be a systemic threading of these

areas across all pre-K through university-level teacher education programs. Educators are left ill-prepared to sufficiently address gender identity affirmation and recognition through coursework, curriculum, and pedagogy because limited attention has been focused on such important topics (GLSEN, 2013; Kosciw, Greytak, Diaz, & Bartkiewicz, 2010; Miller, 2016a, 2016b; Quinn & Meiners, 2011). To address the dichotomy between how U.S. schools delimit boundaries of gender identity and how they sanction and authorize certain configurations of gender, this work aims to (a) reflect on why schools are vulnerable to constructing and positioning normative gender identities; (b) surface manifestations and root causalities of violence against gender noncompliant-identified students; and (c) provide insights for improving schools and liberating gender identities. The ultimate goal underscoring this work is irrefutable: All students should have equitable opportunities for success and achievement in school.

Gender Identity Violence: A National and Social Condition

Neoliberalism functions as part of the root cause of gender identity violence (Miller, 2016a). As an ideology, neoliberalism is maintained by adherence to conformity, obedience, and capitalism. Harper (2014) drew on Giroux's (2005) explication of neoliberalism to define it as a mode of governance that produces identities, subjects, and ways of life driven by a survival-of-the-fittest ethic that is grounded in the idea of the free, possessive individual and is committed to the rights of ruling groups and institutions to accrue wealth removed from matters of ethics and social costs.

This definition provides a lens through which to read and understand how insecurities are produced for those whose gender identities are positioned at odds with gender-typical identities (Duggan, 2003; Enke, 2013; Puar, 2009). To interrupt how gender identity is vulnerable within this ideology, it is

Correspondence should be sent to sj Miller, 6 W. 126th St. #6B, New York, NY 10027. E-mail: sj.miller@nyu.edu

important to understand how those who are noncompliant gender identified (definition below) experience violence. By violence, I mean how beliefs and mindsets create prejudice and reinforce practices that take the form of denied or diminished access to material and economic goods, public and social services, schooling policies (i.e., lack of protections and a hyper-focus on cisgender-based curricula), and political protections.

Neoliberalism interlocks the social, economic, and political conditions with their relationships as the default through which it controls and maintains its citizens (Giroux, 2005, 2012; Lipman, 2011). As such, neoliberalism can determine who is of value and who is expendable. It is rooted in historical biases and prejudices and is still maintained in some people's beliefs and values. While neoliberalism distributes opportunities and rewards for those who are compliant, its coercive measures tend to operate invisibly to maintain these ideologies. These measures control emotional and affective registers that funnel all notions of freedom and choice through financial incentivizing. This telegraphs that gender-typical identities are the appropriate way to behave, dress, and appear, and those who conform are awarded with financial benefits (e.g., health insurance, marriage), educational benefits (e.g., local- and state-sanctioned protections, college career pathways), and access to institutions without fear of redress (e.g., places of worship, Social Security, banking, immigration centers, etc.); simultaneously, it can pushout any person whose gender identity lacks social conformity. Neoliberalism, then, functions similarly to a prison by interlocking bodies to authority, where gender norms are regulated.

Gender Identity

Gender identity is the soul and spirit of a person. It is how an individual feels about themselves (Levine, 2008), intuitively themselves, and then writes themselves into the world (Perl, 2004). Gender identity is how someone wants to be seen and legitimated through the eyes of others in the world—just as someone *is* (Federal Interagency Working Group, 2016; Herbert, 2016).¹ Understood and fashioned in these ways, gender identity can be the embodiment of gender, or lack thereof (i.e., (a)gender). Gender identities are formed through a constant integration of new ideas, new concepts, and the

¹Though beyond the scope of this work, scientific arguments have been made for how gender identity is informed (Henig, 2017), but there is no concrete proof of how and why someone thinks or sees themselves to be a particular gender identity.

invention of new knowledges comprised of multitudes, as well as through a moving away or sometimes a refusal to accept essentialized constructions of binaries, genders, and bodies (Miller, 2017). It is how the self narrates gender identity; understood this way, gender identity is self-determined.

Gender Identified and Gender Noncompliant Identified

Gender identity is never singular nor easily located within rigid or fixed gender binaries (Enke, 2013; Puar, 2009). Gender identity is intersectional because it is always experienced through other indices of identity, including Black, Brown, Asian, Native American, Indigenous, poor, queer, transgender, nonconforming, disabled, immigrant, undocumented, and/or English language learners, among others (Brockenbrough, 2015; Bryson & MacIntosh, 2010; Crenshaw, 1995; Mayo, 2017). Schools are inheritors (though with lasting effects) and temporal guardians of such bodies, and they are expected to maintain and reproduce neutral students who are prepared to support a U.S. capitalist economy (Apple, 2002; Giroux, 2005; Greene, 1965; Lamont Hill, 2013). Therefore, schools situated within these structures function as prisons for some (Saltman & Gabbard, 2010). By drawing on research and analyses in critical race studies (Balfanz, Byrnes, & Fox, 2015; Wozolek, Wotten, & Demlow, 2016), schools are expected to enforce conformity, limit movement, and reinforce Christian-dominant morals and values (Christle, Jolivet, & Nelson, 2005; Puar, 2009). Students who are taught and fashioned through these structures may experience these forms of indoctrination as the normal or correct way to function in the world—with limited agency. I call these students *noncompliant gender identified*.²

I use the nomenclature *noncompliant gender identified* to refer to youth whose gender identities pose threats to gender-typicality, which I define as the way someone acts, dresses, and/or appears. In some spaces, when youth express identities that fall outside of what is perceived as the typical gender binary, their identities can be felt as threats to an established gender order (see statistics from GLSEN, 2016). When this occurs, youth and their gender identities can be problematized, pathologized, and categorized as inferior (Arnot, 2002; McRuer, 2006; Puar, 2009). However, when gender-typical identified bodies act, express, and behave in ways that are already legible and recognizable as ordinary or typical, they *may* be afforded formal recognition within school

²Other types of fears beyond gender identity contribute to pushout (e.g., xenophobia, racism, transphobia, homophobia, etc.).

policies (e.g., less likely to be in contact with school authorities regarding bullying and expressions of dress and gender) (GLSEN, 2016; McRuer, 2006; Miller, 2016a). This is by no means always the case: Bodies are invariably intersectional,³ and some identities are subject to a lack of representation in school policy. This is especially evident for queer students of color who are positioned with increased vulnerabilities (GLSEN, 2016; James, Brown, & Wilson, 2017; James & Salcedo, 2017; Meiners, 2016; Wozolek et al., 2016). When bodies are constructed as problematic, youths are vulnerable to a cascade of negative social, emotional, economic, and educational consequences and thereby experience diminished capacities to access material, social, economic, and emotional resources (Spade, 2011).

Manifestations of Violence Against Vulnerabilized⁴ Bodies

To an extent, then, schools mirror our country's social, cultural, and economic modes of reproduction. This means that only some students' cultural capital is affirmed (Bourdieu, 1980; Yosso, 2005). When all representations of gender identity fail to be affirmed, some youths become positioned to experience gender identity insecurity disparities.

There are limited studies in education that focus on gender nonconforming or gender nonbinary⁵ youth (GLSEN, 2016; Greytak, Kosciw, & Diaz, 2009; Miller, 2016a), so this work draws on statistics about transgender youth to show how these bodies experience particular vulnerabilities in school. Some transgender youths do identify as gender nonbinary, with their gender expressions blurring lines of social conformity. These identities are not mutually exclusive.

GLSEN (2016) found that 75% of transgender students felt unsafe at school because of their gender or gender expression (i.e., not allowed to wear certain clothing or buttons of expression or were forced to use a bathroom or locker room that matched their birth sex). Furthermore, 61% of genderqueer⁶ students and students

with another gender felt unsafe at school because of their gender or gender expression (manifesting as lower academic gains as well as higher rates of truancy and dropping out). Across these students, 25% were physically harassed and 12% were physically assaulted at school. GLSEN (2016) also found that about 75% of genderqueer students and students with another gender had experienced some form of discrimination at school for holding hands or showing affection with someone of the same gender presentation, forming a GSA/QSA, going to a dance, and/or using their chosen name or pronoun. Yet even more startling was the fact that transgender and gender nonconforming youth of color, when combined with a queer sexual orientation, experienced higher and *the* highest rates of school violence and discriminatory sanctions (GLSEN, 2016; James & Salcedo, 2017; James et al., 2017).

GLSEN (2016) reported that 45.2% of transgender and 48.9% of students who are gender identity nonconforming experienced exclusionary discipline and criminal sanctions, including 1.7% who appeared before a juvenile or criminal court, 1.1% who were arrested, and 0.5% who served time in a juvenile or adult detention facility. About 9.7% of these students who experienced pushout ended up in unstable housing situations and/or became homeless. With each suspension or disciplinary action, their odds of not graduating high school increased by 20% and their odds of attending post-secondary school decreased by 12% (Balfanz et al., 2015). For all of these reasons, as well as those rationales hidden in the minds of people, Ybarra, Mitchell, and Kosciw (2014) reported that attempts and completions of suicide for transgender and gender nonbinary youth continue to surpass *any* population of teens to date—50% of such youths will have attempted suicide at least once by their 20th birthday; for gender nonbinary youth of color the statistics are even higher⁷ (James & Salcedo, 2017; James et al., 2017). I provide a conceptual framing that surfaces how bodies are at risk to be vulnerabilized so we can better understand the root causality behind these statistics.

Root Causality: Bodies Interlocked by Power Dynamics in Schools

Bodies are bound and tied to dynamics of structural and institutionalized manifestations of power (Bourdieu, 1980). Such power relations illuminate the presence, absence, and futurity or cultural reproduction of bodies that have more access and increased capacities to social,

³Though I mention intersectionality throughout this article, there are limited studies that attend to the intersectionality of gender nonconforming bodies. I have noted some of the research studies that address systemic issues with such bodies in schools.

⁴*Vulnerabilized* refers to bodies that are positioned or made to be vulnerable.

⁵*Nonbinary* refers to gender as a broader, less defined, more fluid, more imaginative, and more expressive matrix of ideas. It challenges power differentials by deconstructing and reconstructing ideas; reflecting on disjunctures; unpacking gender, gender identities, and gender expressions; and providing opportunities for new knowledges to emerge.

⁶*Genderqueer* refers to the rejection of binary roles and language for gender; it is a general term for nonbinary gender identities.

⁷Gender identities that are positioned to be at odds with the schooling system reflect statistics similar to students of color who are pipelined out of schools (Meiners, 2016; Wozolek et al., 2016).

material, and economic success (Bordo, 1993; Bourdieu, 1980). For instance, Foucault (1986) and Bourdieu (1980) suggested that the effects of power in spaces, and their surveillance, construct identities—these forms of expression are vulnerable to conformity as a result of power. To this, Bordo (1993) added that “the human body is itself a politically inscribed entity, its physiology and morphology shaped by histories and practices of containment and control” (p. 21). When gender noncompliant identified bodies threaten to shift power and control away from cisgender and/or gender-typical bodies, states implement measures to preserve their authority.⁸

State violence controls and misrecognizes bodies when they threaten the material and economic benefits (e.g., policies that still maintain gender or heteronormative regulatory logics), comforts (e.g., access to safety), and social values (e.g., unchallenged norms) that produce security. These reflexes seek to erase, annihilate, and make extinct the threat (Arnot, 2002; Enke, 2013). This is perhaps rooted in an unease that can expose how sponsors of violence have not proven effective as arbiters of justice, protection, and/or safety. In other words, the system itself produces the problem, and, when challenged, both metaphorically and literally imprisons its “troublemakers” because of the discomfort noncompliance produces in some who still cling to historical comforts.

To safeguard the system against those whose gender identities threaten conventions, people are denied access to certain spaces (e.g., bathrooms, locker rooms, and schools as well as in a prison, detention, psychiatric, or immigration center), benefits (e.g., medical care, lack of protections), and choices (e.g., school dress, mannerisms, affect, jobs). Some who are denied these benefits and who have lost family support may be forced to turn to the streets for sex work and other types of labor. Without access to basic human needs, “The impact of denial can have significant mental and physical consequences. Depression, anxiety, and suicidality are conditions commonly tied to the unmet need[s]” (Spade, 2011, p. 149). When people know that other desired groups have access to these privileges, they can feel a negative sense of self-worth and incapacitation (Spade, 2011). Unless disrupted, this cycle becomes a type of internalized oppression.

Such forms of state violence trickle down into our schools, even more drastically for those dependent on federal, state, and local funding. Some of these revenue

streams stem from, but are not limited to, property taxes, special education sources, child nutrition programs, school lunch charges, tuition, transportation, vocational programs, and monies from Title 1 (which provides financial assistance to local educational agencies and schools with high numbers or high percentages of children from low-income families), Reading First (federal education program mandated under the No Child Left Behind Act to provide science-based reading instruction), the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of English Language Acquisition, and teacher quality grants. School expenditures include, but are not limited to, operations and management, pupil support services, instruction and support staff, program development, administration, and transportation. While most of the monies that support schools come from local property taxes, schools are vulnerable to losing monies when students fail to meet annual yearly progress (AYP) scores on state exams. States that receive federal assistance can apply for waivers for not meeting AYP scores, and funding will not be affected. While those schools with waivers are exempt from sanctions under No Child Left Behind, the lowest performing “priority” schools are faced with federal support to increase test scores and to reduce disproportionality or face sanctions.

What does this have to do with gender identity? When schools are made safe only for a specific type of student (i.e., those who are gender-typical identified), students who are noncompliant gender identified may be pushed out because of beliefs, practices, and policies that fail to secure their position in school. When they are not recognized and valued as members of the school community, students have diminished capacities to access jobs, benefits, and basic human needs; denied access can create significant mental and physical health issues as well as socioeconomic consequences (Enke, 2013; Meiners, 2016; Spade, 2011). These interlocking effects highlight how neoliberalism mediates, reinforces, and sustains what I identify as the *educational gender identity industrial complex* through schools shaping “engagements in spatial tactics of power and in everyday social, cultural and literacy practices” (McCarthy & Moje, 2002, pp. 234–35). When students present as noncompliant gender identified and are not readily identified by their relationship to that space, their identities are destabilized (Hagood, 2002; Miller, 2016b; Miller & Norris, 2007; Vadeboncoeur, 2004; Wallowitz 2008).

When schools are left without processes of disruption or strategies to address a systemic analysis of root causes, the cycle will continue to reproduce systemic gender identity inequalities that reflect a form of incarceration. Somewhat left without tools to be gender identity self-determined, or the freedom to name the self in

⁸Cisgender individuals have gender identities aligned with their birth sex and therefore have a self-perception and gender expression that matches behaviors and roles considered appropriate for their birth sex. *Cisgender* also refers to a person who by nature or choice conforms to gender-based expectations of society.

such a way that students' gender identities are legitimized by the self and others, students *are* imprisoned by our current educational gender identity industrial complex. Therefore, school systems and all of their stakeholders must work to address and support schools in how to recognize and affirm an indeterminate continuum of gender identities. But first, to understand how to reframe schooling to free gender identities, it is important to look more deeply into the root fear that produces anxiety concerning and informs violent conditions for noncompliant gender-identified youth in schools.

Reinforcement of the Norm as Technology for Gender-Identity Assimilation

Bodies are regulated in schools and fastened by an interlocking of a gender-typical identified norm, a privileging environment, and the medical model. The interrelatedness of these domains produces rationales that create structured violence and act as safeguards to maintaining those who have power over students in schools.

The Gender-Typical Identified Norm Combined with a Privileging Environment

According to Lakoff (1975) and Siebers (2008), people are typically conditioned to believe in “a set of social narratives, myths, ideas, values and types of varying reliability, usefulness, and verifiability” (p. 15). Then, through institutional practices or policy gaps that replicate inequities, a reproduced gender-typical identified norm (among others) has symbolic capital that puts in place socially desired behaviors, appearances, stances, roles, and statuses. When left unchallenged, a social environment can foster, enable, and sanction bullying behavior. An acceptance of gender-typical identities as de facto sumptuary mores generates oppressive and dichotomous beliefs, such as normal/abnormal, superior/inferior, desirable/undesirable, and inclusion/exclusion (Siebers, 2008). Because fear of being “queered” or “othered” is so pervasive and powerful, acquiescence to the norm operationalizes and polices gender-typical identified conduct. Any deviation from the gender-typical identified norm may pathologize the individual, who can then be encumbered with myriad social, emotional, academic, and health consequences (Kosciw, Greytak, Giga, Villenas, & Danischewski, 2016; Meiners, 2016; Spade, 2011; Ybarra et al., 2014). Securing the norm is dependent on this process of pathologizing because it allows governments, institutions, and agencies to cultivate “health” for populations and deem

others as “unhealthy.” When a population is not cared for, it is weakened and thus suffers.

The Medical Model

The medical model has a biological orientation that focuses on binary identifiers of sickness and mental health. Within this model lives the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders 5* (DSM-5), which is largely used by the psychiatric field for sanctioning and naming mental-health diagnoses. When someone is assigned a diagnosis, they are considered abnormal, unhealthy, requiring intervention, or in need of fixing. Attunement to any “deviations” are used to define what is and isn't socially acceptable. For instance, *gender dysphoria* is such a diagnosis. According to the DSM-5, *gender dysphoria* is a condition in which someone experiences distress with their biological gender and strongly identifies with, and wants to be, the opposite gender (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Prior research has shown that when narratives of normalcy are threatened, some people use the medical model as a justification of attack (Miller, 2012; Miller, Burns, & Johnson, 2013).

How Noncompliant Gender Identified–Rooted Fear Sanctions Violence

Under current policies as of the time of this writing, the country faces a strong likelihood of having over \$23 million that funds public education cut. Some of these cuts would prohibit schools and universities from receiving funds they once received for professional development, before- and after-school programs, work-study programs, programs that prepare minority students for college, “student support and academic enrichment that is meant to help schools pay for, among other things, mental-health services, *anti-bullying initiatives*, physical education, Advanced Placement courses and science and engineering instruction” (italics used for emphasis; Brown, Strauss, & Douglas-Gabriel, 2017). These cutbacks will force states and schools that are dependent on federal dollars into modes of compliance that will both legalize and sanction prejudice for states that put into place antibullying laws that enumerate protections for youth who are noncompliant gender identified. As a country, we must now embrace collective action as critical, or the consequences will be deleterious and, perhaps in some cases, irreparable. Below is a current example of how these issues impact bodies that are noncompliant gender identified.

Federal Guidance on Transgender Students' Rights

A specific example of the removal of protections can be observed in the rollback of the federal guidance that protected transgender and gender nonconforming students' rights to use a bathroom that matches their gender identity. The guidance, while not law, was statutory (Department of Justice, 2016) and encouraged schools to protect the rights of transgender and gender nonconforming (term used in the guidance) students and those with nonconforming gender identities. Specifically, in addition to bathroom (and locker room) access, students should be able to:

- Have their names, pronouns, and student records be addressed by how they self-identify;
- Dress in ways that match how they self-identify;
- Be respected and treated according to their gender identity;
- Be protected for identifying as nonbinary or genderqueer;
- Have all personal information held confidential under FERPA;
- Access student health plans under the Affordable Care Act; and
- Be protected from antitrans state laws under Title IX⁹

If schools failed to comply with the guidance, they could be sued by the Department of Civil Rights and the Department of Education.

Currently, there is a delayed Supreme Court case that will likely challenge the guidance. This case involves Gavin Grimm, a female-to-male student who was denied access to the bathroom that matches his gender identity in his high school in West Virginia. Grimm's case was taken up by the American Civil Liberties Union, a group that fights on behalf of those discriminated against because of historically institutionalized forms of prejudice. Grimm won the case at the local level. Then the school board fought the case and it went to the Supreme Court. Though initially meant to be heard by the Supreme Court, the case was removed from the docket because of surrounding controversy; the different sides argued that the Obama administration failed to roll out the guidance by allowing for commentary, and that Title IX was expanded to include gender identity under the definition of sex. Due to the additional delay in the decision for the *Grimm* case, states that do not have protections for students to use bathrooms that match their gender identity have powerful opportunities to put into place discriminatory practices. With the federal guidance now removed (although many

⁹In 1972, Title IX was created to ensure fair and equitable treatment for women and men for any educational program that receives federal funds.

states have their own plans in place), the taking away of bathroom privileges in those states that receive Title IX funding, in theory, has created widespread panic and even hysteria in many school communities.¹⁰ Many fear that this removal is only the first of many other forms of revoking privileges.

Currently, 18 states (as of this writing) plus Washington, D.C., have bathroom protections (among other types of safeguards) in place for transgender and gender nonconforming (antibullying law's term) public school students, which means that 32 states can create dangerous practices until the case makes its way back to the Supreme Court (Kralik, 2017). Of concern here, and regardless of safeguards that are in place for schools receiving Title IX funds, transgender students and those who are noncompliant gender identified continue to receive messages that their bodies are expendable and disposable, which opens them up to a cascade of material, physical, social, academic, emotional, and psychological violence. This also positions them at odds with the schooling system. It means they are vulnerable to internalizing negative messages that claim they are inferior, wrong, immoral, ugly, useless, and, even, better off dead. The evidence by GLSEN (2016) and others (Miller, 2016a) is incontestable: It clearly indicates that when transgender and gender nonconforming students are not supported and recognized, they begin shut to down.

Not only does the rollback of the federal guidance have deep consequences but also great uncertainty remains for what could still come. When schooling fails to include beliefs, practices, and policies that recognize the expansiveness of gender identities, the system as a whole is left with a myopic and vulnerable understanding of the lived realities of people. Such perspectives create a flattening, unidimensional, and nonintersectional perspective of gender identity and delegitimize those who do not ascribe to gender identity norms. This absence of recognition reinscribes gender-typical identity as the desired or correct way of being and enhances policies of exclusion. Its absence condones an anxiety and feeds systemic forms of in-school and out-of-school gender identity-based violence. Schooling practices that do not affirm differential bodied realities become coconspirators in not only reproducing current understandings of gender but also in reproducing rationales that can lead to gender identity-based violence (Miller, 2016a).

While some of these realities may paint a bleak picture, the system can be changed through shifts in policies and mind-sets. So how can shifts help ensure that students'

¹⁰Though, as of this writing, they remain on the Department of Education's website under the heading "Resources for Transgender and Gender-Nonconforming Students" (U.S. Department of Education, 2017).

gender identities are respected, affirmed, and recognized so as to position them with increased capacities for life? If we begin to reframe gender identity as a mediator for animating learning, we can develop increased capacities for kindness, understanding, and gender identity justice. Planting new roots that attend to topics of gender identity in schooling practices can shift mind-sets and change both practices and policies. This means digging into, unearthing, and disentangling these interlocking conditions that propagate myths about gender identity. No doubt this is messy, complex, and nonlinear work.

Recommendations for Shifting Conditions and Mind-Sets about Noncompliant Gender Identity in Schooling Practices

Although the interlocking of beliefs, practices, and policies has somewhat changed to include noncompliant gender identified student recognitions in schools (Kosciw et al., 2016), cosmetic changes do little to help establish fairer and more equitable schooling environments. This work must continue to look into root causes and ways to change the exclusionary political, economic, and affective practices and their subsequent conditions that have created injustice in the first place. Such work should be started before kindergarten so that its impact can be seen, felt, and sustained over time. For this work to have a transformative effect, it must be built collaboratively and require levels of commitment from various stakeholders, such as ourselves, students, teachers, administrators, staff and school personnel (anyone who has contact with youth), parents, communities, teacher education programs (deans, professors, preservice students), researchers, and policymakers that orbit and work in, for, and on behalf of schools. When possible, this work should be done collectively, meaning that, although it may appear some of this work is done in silos, the voices of all stakeholders attend each other's tables so as to create well-rounded and informed decisions. For this work to be sustained, it must be built collaboratively from the bottom up. To this end, named below are several commitments and possibilities to bring about these changes. The suggestions can be modified to suit and meet the context of each individual school.

Commitment One: Invest Emotionally in the Well-Being of Students so They Can Exist in Schools Without Redress for Gender Presentation

For Commitment One, stakeholders can begin by asking, "In what ways are students harmed? What should be changed?" They can then look closely at how codes of conduct, forms, bathrooms, locker rooms, physical education classes, extracurricular participation regulations

(especially in sports), school counseling and mental-health services, and language and terminology use attend to the needs of, and reflect, a continuum of gender identities (see Miller, 2015, 2016a for detailed examples). In all areas noted above, groups can strive to ensure that all students' gender identities will be supported, recognized, and valued in school as well as work to ensure that professional development prepares teachers, administrators, staff, and other school personnel to use language and terminology that reflect a continuum of gender identities.

If we begin to reframe gender identity as a mediator for animating learning, we can develop increased capacities for kindness, understanding, and gender identity justice. Planting new roots that attend to topics of gender identity in schooling practices can shift mind-sets and change both practices and policies.

Students can be asked how they want to be called on or referred to. Any ensuing professional development must prepare teachers, administrators, and curriculum specialists to include opportunities that mirror or expand awareness and respect regarding a continuum of gender identities. There should be concerted attempts to include texts, films, writing assignments, images, art(ists), media representations, trailblazers, political movements, histories, musicians, poets, key figures, and others that reflect different representations of gender identities. An ongoing focus group to study the effects these artifacts have on the schooling environment can provide key recommendations for continuing change. Expanding on these efforts, small or large groups might be formed to study a text, an issue, or a policy or to visit a local community organization and fold in strategies that can support gender identity inclusivity in schools.

Commitment Two: Carve Out Strategies to Address the Inclusion of a Continuum of Gender Identities School-Wide

Commitment Two asks what kinds of support do stakeholders need to effectively attend to this work. Surveys and interviews can assess what stakeholders know and want to

know as well as how to apply knowledge to their contexts. Questions about background knowledge related to gender identity can be used to generate professional development opportunities. Stakeholders can be invited to name experts they would like to learn from; which films, videos, and texts they would like to see or read; and which conferences they would like to attend. Stakeholders can be encouraged to engage in research between PK–12 schools and university teacher education programs to better understand the school through students' eyes and build findings into both contexts' curricula.

Commitment Three: Plan and Map How to Create New Opportunities Where New Social Relations Can Form

For Commitment Three, stakeholders can be asked, "How is power built into the dynamics of gender identity and how do those dynamics need to be shifted?" In surveys, focus groups, professional development, and other settings stakeholders can be asked to reflect on how their own gender identities maintain and sustain gender identity hierarchies of power and how they create harm. Opportunities to closely reflect (as a group and individually) on how gender-typical identities maintain and sustain gender identity power dynamics can be offered. Facilitated groups can look into how intersectional identities are maintained through neoliberalism. Based on what emerges, a long-term plan for both how to study those effects and how to shift the schooling environment can be developed. Some possible questions that can lead this process might include, "Do certain students cluster in only some classrooms?" "Is there a Gay Straight, Gender and Sexuality, or Queer and Sexuality Alliance, and who attends those meetings?" "Do we need to rename the club to be more expansive?" "How can we bring students and teachers together so our school is safe for everyone?" Finally, a committee can be formed to put up gender identity expansive posters, signs, billboards, and art throughout the school; to generate recommendations for classroom rearrangements; to ensure that more books with diverse gender identity representations are in classrooms and the library; to invite speakers; to host movies and videos; and to work with others to rename spaces in the school where all gender identities are recognized.

Commitment Four: Plan and Map How to Shift Power Dynamics Around Allocations of Social Space, Curricula, and Innovations

Commitment Four asks how to navigate this work from the ground up. To this aim, stakeholders can take a group walk through the school to determine what spaces are funded more than others. After, a group can be assembled to

examine and create a portfolio about how power operates and is sustained in the school. Based on those findings, resources (money, larger rooms, technology, etc.) can be redistributed so power is shifted for evenness. Pedagogy and curricula can also be assessed to identify if trans-sectionality (the intersections of trans bodies with school practices; see Miller, in press) is reflected in school practice. For example, pedagogies that are monologic, authoritative, pedantic, and not culturally responsive can diminish students' motivations to learn. Based on what is identified, curricula can be changed to ensure that trans-sectional voices are not peripheral, misrecognized, or unnamed and that equity for all is rooted in the classroom. Beyond this, stakeholders can develop whole-school models for assessing ongoing processes related to shifting dynamics of gender identity. For instance, long-term checks and balances can be implemented to continually assess the suggestions in Commitment Four.

Next, the school can work closely with neighboring universities' teacher education programs. This might include discussions about how to embed gender identity work across grade levels and disciplinary areas in pre-service teacher education, account for gender identity, develop lesson plans and pedagogy, and/or consider cocreated possibilities for research. Last, schools can review if and how spaces at school are liberatory; how spaces reinforce dynamics of power about gender identity; and how and by whom power is held in that space so they can collectively plan how to reframe the space so different gender identities have equal parity.

Commitment Five: Continually Assess How Changes Are Working and Invite Stakeholders to Help Address and Create Forward-Thinking Solutions

Commitment Five, the final commitment, asks stakeholders to consider how strategies have been effective in exposing or confronting the root causes that maintain an educational gender identity industrial complex (i.e., gender policing) and what needs to be done to build the school (world) they want to live in. Based on the answers stakeholders can generate a list of reflections that addresses awareness about root causes of gender identity subjugation. A survey can then be compiled and distributed. Once the findings are collected and analyzed, they can be folded into continued efforts to challenge root causes about gender identity inequities.

Additionally, stakeholders can reflect on what the school environment should look like and then construct a plan for wants and needs that will galvanize its realization. To achieve this, working groups can be formed to identify issues that need improvement and to generate an action plan that will help achieve the desired outcomes.

Throughout these efforts, it is important to reflect on whether root approaches to work are trans-sectional. This can be achieved by evaluating how students' transsecting identities frame the core of discussions. Disaggregating data can help to reveal where disproportionality is situated so changes can be made.

Another strategy is to cultivate new leaders who have the vision to challenge and change the system. For example, schools can create a strategic action plan that addresses the kinds of leadership styles and vested interests that should be manifested in their school and then work to ensure that those styles and interests are present. Then schools can determine strategies for district, school-wide, and individual accountability. Once those strategies are developed, teams can revisit and/or create the mission and vision statements for the district and the schools, develop an equity profile that assesses how these criteria are implemented, demonstrate how to assess changes over time (e.g., by informal, formative, or summative means), and map out how to make changes.

Schools can also develop a statewide network dedicated to working with legislatures who can create and change policies. Schools can map out policies and policy changes and plan to have ongoing discussions and meetings for their schools related but not limited to sports, enumeration of antibullying laws, dress, bathroom and locker room access, mental-health services, health care, body safety, disciplinary practices (e.g., zero-tolerance policies and overuse of subjective discipline infraction categories), identification rights, and others.

Concluding Commitment Five is the need to assess whether efforts are process-oriented rather than end-oriented. This means striving to ensure that all endeavors reflect a continuum of gender identity inclusivity and the indeterminate for any person's self-identification. It also means staying open and aware to what may still come and remaining open to the work that will continue to support elasticity.

A Reframed Schooling that Liberates Gender Identity

For schools to truly support the affective, social, economic, and political lives of gender non-conforming students, society cannot mobilize from the top down. Mobilization for transformations must move beyond empty declarations of equality: We need a social movement infrastructure built from the bottom up. This work must start with a commitment from ourselves. In other words, we have to do and stay committed to our inner work. This means, myself included, not reseating the privileges I've been granted as a White,

male appearing (though I am trans-agender), able-bodied person by positioning myself or taking from the system that is reductive. This means standing up and stepping up with others and not waiting until there is an issue for all those whose gender identities incur attacks. It means being active and with the work the entire time—it's a life commitment to closely working with others on shifting the conditions that have structured the schooling system that positions certain bodies as vulnerable.

This commitment entails divesting from relations and structures that continue to fuel and sustain gender binaries and that continue to dismiss its importance as a long-term project for liberation. It means living a life that embodies and is committed to eschewing certain privileges even when some have access to them, knowing full well they have architected power for some while minoritizing others. It means staying focused on learning about how (school) systems have and continue to grant power, falsify security, and sustain neo-iterations of change or reform. It means understanding how logics continue to open different doors for some to access certain privileges while generating mediocre opportunities, at best, for others.

Collectively it is possible to shift neoliberal logics and reconstruct a society that embraces all gender identified differences so that we can liberate gender identity in schools. My lasting hope is that students will not be remembered as a footnote or endnote, and that they will not have to explain how they express themselves; they will be free to be gender identity self-determined in a world ready to embrace them.

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