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## **Transgender Children on the Margins: Impacts of Colonialism, Racism, and Poverty**

Abstract: Transgender children are to be found in every population of children, whether they make themselves visible or not. The trans kids who are visible tend to be disproportionately white, relatively wealthy, binary-conforming, and supported by activist parents. This chapter makes the case that social justice for all trans kids is impossible without targeting the interlocking systems of colonialism, white supremacy, capitalism, and national security state policies and institutions for transformative change. Putting the most vulnerable trans kids at the center of social change efforts is crucial to this project.

Trans kids are present in every population whether they make themselves known or not. Educational scholar Mark Hellen (2009) observes that the majority of them are “non-apparent” (p. 92); they hide because they expect a lack of acceptance. This is the self-perpetuating logic of “the Thomas Theorem,” whereby “situations that are defined as real become real in their consequences” (Thomas & Thomas, 1928, p. 301). Ultimately, both visible and invisible trans kids are vulnerable to high-risk behavior, self-harm, and suicide. It is important to emphasize that it is not being transgender, *per se*, that increases the likelihood of self-harm and suicide; rather, it is cultural and social prejudice that does the damage. Trans kids represent normal and healthy gender variation and are not new, as Jules Gill-Peterson (2018) documents in her recent book, *Histories of the Transgender Child*. I should know; I was one of them.

I identify as trans-non-binary. For the past eight years, I have been attending conferences and meetings for trans kids and their families in Canada and the United States, conducting interviews, participating in online groups, and publicly advocating for queer and trans kids as well as LGBT people in general. This research resulted in the publication of my (2018) book: *The Trans Generation: How Trans Kids (and Their Parents) are Creating a Gender Revolution*. The central argument of the book and this chapter is that we need to center the most precarious trans kids—those who are some combination of Indigenous/racialized/living in poverty/disabled/undocumented—in our scholarship and social change efforts. I begin by outlining the importance of an intersectional analysis and focusing on the shortcomings of mainstream trans rights initiatives that center more privileged trans people.

It is crucial to situate trans kids within broader relations of power and oppression. Canada and the U.S. occupy huge, varied, and contested geopolitical spaces. Both nations brand themselves as democracies, but each is more accurately understood as a “white settler society” (Thobani, 2007) albeit with different histories of displacing/committing

genocide against Indigenous populations and subjugating racialized minorities. These histories provide a crucial genealogy of contemporary socio-economic inequality and the contexts within which we find trans kids.

I will now talk about three trans kids in particular—Wren, Finn, and Hunter—to emphasize the importance of paying attention to ways that varying degrees of social inequality shape the life chances of trans kids. I will then discuss problems with mainstream approaches to supporting trans kids and conclude by outlining key aspects of an anti-oppression approach to supporting trans kids.

The hostility to children who are assigned male at birth but express feminine qualities is keenly felt by kids like Wren. When I first interviewed her at age seven, she told me, “I was born a boy, but I like being a girl.” Wren wishes she had been left alone and not forced to identify as *any* gender. Yet she switched to female pronouns because the gender confusion she provoked in other people—and their insistence on making it *her* problem—was too anxiety-producing for her.

When I asked Wren about her vision of herself in the future, she was very matter of fact in explaining that she did not see transgender womanhood as an option. She told me of her plan to “change back” into a boy when she turned 10. I was a bit surprised to hear this given how stereotypically feminine she is, although I never doubt anyone’s assertions about their gender identity. When I interviewed her again at age 11, her timeline for changing back had shifted, but the vision of her future had not: she was operating in stealth mode at a new school and now planned to “change back into a boy” at 14 or 15. Wren consistently refuses the possibility of trans adulthood for herself, explaining, “I’m Black. I don’t want to be trans too.” In seeing no future for herself—literally—Wren displays a sophisticated and heartbreaking awareness of the harmful effects of trans-negativity and anti-Black racism.

Finn also saw no future for himself. Two years ago, I learned, via his mother’s heartbreaking announcement in an online group for parents of trans kids, that Finn had committed suicide. I obtained permission from his mother, Heidi, to share some of what she wrote:

It’s been five weeks since my 14-year old transgender son Finn took his life. We had a discussion that night at dinner about his next hormone blocker shot, and how we were going to pay for it since we’d just gotten a letter that day of our second denial of state insurance and had been told by the drug’s owner company that we were slightly over income for their patient assistance program. We couldn’t afford the \$1400 a month out of pocket payment. He begged me to do a GoFundMe for him, but I told him we couldn’t do it for something ongoing. He left the table upset. Oh, how I wished I would have checked in on him. But he spent most of his time holed up in his room, and I was trying to be respectful by not intruding. Later that night, while I slept in the next room, he quietly left the house and walked to the railroad a few blocks away and lay his body across the track. It was the 11:00 train.

Finn found puberty too difficult to bear, and faced with what he saw as limited options for

the future, chose death. I am struck by the power of his will. This was no cry for help but rather a grim and determined choice.

Heidi agreed, saying, “I was struck by the [sheer] determination and courage it must’ve taken to stay on those rails as the train roared down towards him.” Heidi described Finn as gifted and wise but lacking the maturity to manage his considerable emotional sensitivity, saying:

He had to lay down that load he was carrying somehow. The hopelessness he felt in the road ahead of him is what broke him that night. Even if he had no problem getting hormone blockers, he still had his internal demons. But if the barriers to taking the drug were not there, I don’t think he would have died that night.

Hunter was attending a special education program for kids with learning disabilities when he announced to his class one morning that he was transgender. He says his teachers responded by calling his mother to ask her “if she was accepting this.”

He continued: And, of course, she said, “I wouldn’t be sending my kid to the school dressed like this or saying a different name if I wasn’t accepting it,” but they called her at least three or four times, like farther apart, and just kept asking the same question. But they would never say anything straight to my face.

Hunter was understandably angry that they didn’t take *his* word for it. However, the multiple calls to his mother bespeak another troubling dynamic: Hunter’s mother is poor, First Nations, and a single parent, all of which make her particularly vulnerable to state surveillance, oversight, and child apprehension. The fact that adults at Hunter’s school responded to his transition by questioning his authority and that of his mother is consistent with both the pervasive assumption that children lack knowledge about and authority over themselves, and the Canadian assumption that Indigenous parents do not know what is best for their children.

As with many trans kids, being trans is only one dimension of vulnerability for Wren, Finn, and Hunter. However, lack of family support is not one of them. Family acceptance is known to be the most significant factor in shaping mental health outcomes for trans kids, yet the socioeconomic status of their families is also key to their life chances.

Activist parents of trans kids have been one of the driving forces behind the emergence of support networks for kids and families, legal and policy changes, and increasing access to affirming healthcare. Although not exclusively and often with the support of their children’s fathers, most parent advocacy on behalf of trans kids in Canada and the U.S. is carried out by well-educated white mothers, many of whom at least appear to be heterosexual. Given the gendered nature of emotional labor in general in Western societies, it is not surprising that the frontline fight has been led by women, most of whom are able to call on a degree of race and class privilege and/or the cultural capital that comes from experience engaging in other social justice struggles. Political scientist and parent of a trans kid Kimberley Manning (2017) explains this tendency by pointing out that more marginalized families are also struggling under the harmful effects of racism and/or poverty and the disadvantage their trans kids experience is not confined to gender identity.

However radical the more mainstream-appearing activist moms of trans kids may *actually be*, their ability to project as nonthreatening and motherly enables them to intervene on behalf of queer and trans kids in uniquely powerful ways. Trans and queer adults *have* certainly played a major role in pushing schools to be more LGBT-inclusive, but the power of these “normal” moms to challenge schools and other institutions to change the way they do gender and sexuality cannot be overstated. Sometimes the challenges faced by trans kids from marginalized families can be overlooked in this process because their parents face more barriers in advocating for them. Manning (2017) observes,

Under the glare of the media spotlight personal testimonials can contribute to the erasure of some trans\* lives: it can become easy to lose sight of the struggles of parents who may not teach at a university, for example, and of the racialized transgender kids who are at far greater risk of violence than are our own white children. (p. 590)

Kai, a parent of a trans kid and an LGBT youth worker, addressed this reality by asking, “How do we protect young people who don’t have privileged activists as parents?”

I began writing my book in 2015, amid unprecedented yet far from mainstream support for lesbian, gay, and transgender rights in Canada and the United States. LGBT activism had been successful in achieving significant changes in legal and policy landscapes, although more uniformly in Canada than in the United States. There are now consequences for discriminating against queer and trans people in many institutions and jurisdictions.

Canada legalized same-sex marriage in 2005. Bill C-16 became law on February 14, 2017, amending the *Canadian Human Rights Act* to include gender identity as a prohibited ground for discrimination and updating the *Criminal Code* to make transgender people an identifiable group protected by hate speech provisions. Though many Canadians appear to feel smugly superior about Canadian inclusiveness, viewing racism and intolerance as an American rather than a Canadian problem, colonial, racist, and heteropatriarchal patterns of oppression persist as foundational components of Canadian society. Additionally, while trans rights have been enshrined at the federal level in Canada and in all but two provinces, the current hateful shift in the political landscape of the United States, the election of right-wing governments in Ontario and Quebec, and ongoing anti-sexual orientation and gender identity inclusion policy movements continue to negatively impact the life chances of trans kids.

In 2011, in her capacity as U.S. secretary of state, Hillary Clinton declared that “gay rights are human rights” (Capehart, 2011). State bans on same-sex marriage were ruled unconstitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court in 2013. On May 9, 2016, then U.S. Attorney General Loretta Lynch announced that the federal government was taking the North Carolina state legislature to court over HB2, its controversial law requiring transgender people to use the bathroom corresponding to their assigned birth sex (Davis & Apuzzo, 2016). The Obama administration followed this statement on May 13, 2016 by sending a letter to every school district in the U.S. directing them to allow transgender students to use the bathroom appropriate to their *self-determined* gender identity. This letter clearly communicated the federal government’s intention to include gender identity as a protected

category under the gender-equity provisions of *Title IX*.

I do not need to tell you that the 2016 U.S. presidential election resulted in a dramatically different political landscape for vulnerable groups, LGBT people and trans kids among them. In the first two years of the Trump presidency, executive orders radically deepened forces of precarity for Muslim people, racialized migrants, and undocumented people, people of color in general, Jews, refugees, the poor, Indigenous people, people with disabilities, women, and queer and trans people. Trump specifically targeted trans kids for persecution on February 22, 2017 when he announced that he was revoking the directive by the Obama administration to interpret gender-equity provisions in *Title IX* to allow trans students to use bathrooms and locker rooms consistent with their gender identities. The Trump administration has reversed a number of pro-LGBT decisions by the Obama administration, including most recently the right of transgender people to serve openly in the military.

Mainstream LGBT campaigns tend to focus on gender and sexual identity in isolation from other dynamics of oppression, and this is a problem because queer and trans people are not all white and financially secure; the impact of colonialism, racism, and/or poverty makes some of us more vulnerable than others. Dan Savage's "It Gets Better" campaign, initiated in response to highly public suicides of gay teens, for example, has been criticized for speaking only to those LGBT kids who are otherwise privileged. It fails to acknowledge that for many visible minority and poor LGBT young people, it *does not* get better. As they grow to adulthood, they remain dogged by discrimination and poverty, continue to be vulnerable to self-harm and suicide, and are disproportionately at risk of spending time in prison.

LGBT scholars and activists of color and their allies draw attention to the ongoing violence of settler colonialism, the prison industrial complex, and neoliberal restructuring and trouble historically inaccurate narratives of Western progress and national myths of foundational social justice propagated by Western political leaders when making pro-LGBT statements. When she announced that the federal government was filing a civil rights lawsuit against the state of North Carolina to declare its bathroom bill discriminatory, for example, then Attorney General Loretta Lynch invoked the mythical narrative of the U.S. as a justice-seeking country, referencing "the founding ideals that have led this country—haltingly but inexorably—in the direction of fairness, inclusion and equality for all Americans" (Lynch, 2016). Lynch stated that North Carolina's anti-trans bathroom legislation harmed "innocent Americans." The implication is that harm remains the just deserts of the "non-innocent"—those who are racialized, impoverished, incarcerated, disabled, undocumented, street-drug-addicted, and suspected brown terrorists. In an unprecedented statement, toward the end of her announcement, Lynch spoke directly and movingly to transgender people:

No matter how isolated or scared you may feel today, the Department of Justice and the entire Obama Administration wants you to know that we see you; we stand with you; and we will do everything we can to protect you going forward. Please know that history is on your side. This country was founded on a promise of equal rights

for all, and we have always managed to move closer to that promise, little by little, one day at a time. It may not be easy—but we’ll get there together (Lynch, 2016). Although such historically inaccurate statements obscure ongoing structures of oppression, they have undeniable cultural power to lessen the vulnerability experienced by some trans kids. What would we give to have a U.S. Attorney General speak in this way now?

Two things are true here: it was definitely better for some trans kids under Obama, but that administration was far from heroic. Things are definitely better for some trans kids under the Trudeau government than they were under Stephen Harper, but Trudeau’s loyalty to big business and resource extraction and his government’s refusal to equitably fund Indigenous children amounts to no meaningful redistribution of wealth and power. Advances in LGBT rights in Canada and the USA have taken place at the same time that we have seen widening social inequality, the expansion of a racialized prison system, ongoing colonial relationships with Indigenous peoples, and severe cutbacks to public education and social services. These contexts continue to disproportionately increase the precarity of trans kids who are impoverished, racialized, Indigenous/disabled, and/or undocumented.

Movements that focus on achieving transgender rights and changing government policies rely on legal discourse as a strategic frame and view legal and policy changes as key mechanisms for improving the life chances of transgender people of all ages. These are part of broader LGBT campaigns and typically focus on achieving two key measures:

1. The inclusion of gender identity and expression as protected categories in human rights statutes and public policies that recognize these rights by enabling transgender people to access sex-segregated facilities and sex-differentiated activities according to self-determined gender identities.
2. The enactment of hate crime legislation as protection from anti-queer and anti-trans violence.

The basic rights that LGBT movements have achieved and that I benefit from include freedom from discrimination and police persecution, marriage rights and/or benefits for same-sex couples, and the right to adopt and retain custody of children.

On a visceral level, when I stand in the dugout as a coach at a Little League game, although I experience feelings of gendered otherness quite often, I am still able to do so as an openly queer and gender nonconforming person. That this was not possible in the past but is now is not a small thing, and frankly, when I was 16, I never imagined this would be possible. Yet in spite of the way the attainment of rights has changed the lives of many of us, there is considerable debate among scholars and activists within trans communities about the appropriateness of prioritizing legal rights granted by the state over working collectively to oppose state and corporate power. Much of this debate mirrors that which occurred within lesbian, gay, and queer communities and scholarship about the appropriateness of same-sex marriage as a primary goal of lesbian and gay movements. The logic of “marriage equality” involves gays and lesbians pushing for recognition as fully human, that is, “respectable” people, thereby qualifying us for the rights and responsibilities that go along with full citizenship. Critics argue, however, that this perspective only rehabilitates and reinforces oppressive liberal humanist hierarchies and systems of governance and expands the power of the state while normalizing private

familial responsibility for social and economic welfare. In this sense, previously rejected but comparatively privileged white, middle- and upper-class, avowedly monogamous lesbian and gay people are “folded into life” (Puar, 2007) or welcomed into the nation and accorded citizenship.

Trans scholar Eric Stanley (2014) laments the “normalizing force of mainstream trans politics” (p. 90). Assemblage theorist Jasbir Puar (2008) observes that “any single-axis identity politics is invariably going to coagulate around the most conservative normative construction of that identity, foreclosing the complexities of class, citizenship status, gender, nation, and perhaps most importantly in the context of very recent events, religion” (n.p.). In writing about queer movements, educational scholar Kevin Kumashiro (2001) observes that a single-issue focus on sexuality risks “complying with other oppressions and excluding their own margins” to the extent that “such movements become just like the mainstream except with different identities taking center stage” (p. 5). Mainstream LGBT social movements privilege queer and trans people who are white, documented, relatively wealthy, and gender conforming. Radical critiques of these movements emphasize the failure of rights-oriented measures to redistribute wealth and resources more equitably, even as they expand legal and cultural recognition.

If the rights framework has such clear limitations, to what extent, then, does it make sense to pursue rights for trans kids? After all, a certain degree of privilege is required for trans kids to exercise these legal rights and the beneficiaries are disproportionately white and relatively wealthy. I am convinced that while rights initiatives have limits, abandoning them would be a terrible mistake. Rights *do* deliver important measures of harm reduction and can be strategically important in challenging oppressive cultures. Anti-homophobia and trans-inclusion policies that recognize and value gender and sexual diversity by focusing on changing school cultures to be more inclusive, for example, do challenge oppressive aspects of heteropatriarchy and are not irrelevant—or the Christian Right would not mobilize so forcefully against them!

Rights do matter, because they shape cultural climates, legitimate experiences of discrimination, and provide avenues for recourse. According to the Canadian Civil Liberties Association (CCLA) (2014), “Studies have shown that LGBTQ students feel safer and more accepted when they know their schools have policies and procedures that explicitly address homophobia” (n.p.). Schoolboard policies that entitle students to form gay-straight alliances are also crucial, as they “contribute to making school safer for LGBTQ students” (CCLA, 2014, n.p.). In a recent article in the *Guardian*, Nicola Davis (2017) reports that lesbian, gay, and bisexual students feel safer and report better mental health indicators in states where marriage equality has been achieved, as evidenced by a 14% drop in suicide attempts among queer teens in states that have legalized same-sex marriage.

Bill C-16 in Canada and pro-trans pronouncements by the Obama administration signaled to trans people of all ages that we matter and that hatred and fearmongering should not guide policies concerning us. The value of obtaining trans rights in shaping the cultural climate for trans kids has been driven home very sharply by the damaging change

in tone and policy coming from the Trump administration and the Ford government in Ontario. Rights- and policy-oriented changes can and do make undeniable improvements in the lives of many trans kids that I know and care deeply about, though these improvements rarely contribute to greater socioeconomic equality. Punishment-oriented laws and school policies, on the other hand, do far more harm than good.

While many LGBT organizations celebrate the classification of anti-gay and anti-trans violence as a hate crime, a more critical analysis draws our attention to the way this perpetuates structural racism and classism and reinforces the power of the state to enact violence. Trans scholar Sarah Lamble (2014) notes that race- and class-privileged LGBT people's support for hate crimes legislation and harsh punishment for offenders means "many LGBT communities now partly measure their citizenship status on whether the state is willing to imprison other people on their behalf" (p. 151). In Canada and the USA, evidence that an offence was motivated by hatred or bias towards a particular group may contribute to a tougher sentence for an individual offender,<sup>2</sup> but it *individualizes* anti-gay and anti-trans violence and bolsters the power of the state to harm other vulnerable populations. The structural violence of heteronormativity and patriarchy remain unaddressed. This is complicated by the fact that such measures do not significantly deter people from acts of violence.

A prison abolitionist framework draws our attention to the fact that the employment of state repression against offenders as a measure for improving the lives of trans people reinforces the power of the state to police and incarcerate. Over the past 30 years, a phenomenal expansion of the U.S. prison industrial complex has dovetailed with massive cuts to public institutions and programs that support the most economically vulnerable. The state has a demonstrated record of disproportionately incarcerating Black and Indigenous people of color and poor people, among whom the most vulnerable LGBT people are to be found. According to a 2017 report by the Williams Institute at the UCLA School of Law, the "Incarceration of lesbian, gay, [and] bisexual people is three times that for the general population" (Herman et al., n.p.). While not rivaling the United States and Russia, the two nations with the highest percentages of their populations in prison, Canada's prison population is expanding fast and is equally racialized: Indigenous and Black people are disproportionately subject to incarceration (Lupick, 2018).<sup>3</sup> From this

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<sup>2</sup> Under the provisions of section 718.2 of the Criminal Code, "Evidence that [an] offence was motivated by bias, prejudice or hate based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age, mental or physical disability, sexual orientation or any other similar factor" may contribute to a tougher sentence.

<sup>3</sup> According to the John Howard Society of Canada (2017), "*The extent to which blacks and Aboriginals are over represented in Canadian correctional institutions is similar to that of African Americans in the United States.*" Blacks are over represented in federal prisons by more than 300% vs their population, while for Aboriginals the over representation is nearly 500%. The same disparities exist in provincial jails. In Nova Scotia Blacks are 2% of the population but 14% of the jail population. In Manitoba Aboriginals are 16% of the population but 70% of the jail population. In Alberta the numbers for Aboriginals are 6% and 39%. Moreover, these imbalances are getting worse, not better" (n.p.). In addition, "Aboriginal and Black people are more likely to be victims of

perspective, many trans people, kids included, have more to fear from the state than they have to look forward to with regard to protection.

The issues raised by critics of hate crime measures are also at play with regard to the adoption of punishment-oriented “anti-bullying policies” in many school districts. Many schoolboards have passed anti-bullying or anti-homophobia policies that contest what has long been a normalized practice of targeting queer and gender-nonconforming children for harassment and abuse. Without question, official statements that this kind of behavior is inappropriate are an improvement over the long-standing normalization of such violence. Indeed, policies that are accompanied by adequate resources and that focus on changing school cultures and protecting vulnerable students are badly needed. Considerable research demonstrates that punitive responses to bullying, however, fail to protect vulnerable LGBT kids and instead contribute to a “school-to-prison pipeline” for racialized and disabled children and youth. Social work scholar Amanda Gebhard (2012) draws attention to the role of Canadian schools in placing Indigenous students “on a trajectory to prison”:

Getting into trouble at school is often the first slip into the “school-to-prison pipeline.” This is a term coined by researchers in the United States, who have been making the links between schooling and prison for several decades. The term describes systemic practices in public schooling such as special education, discipline, and streaming programs that move poor, racialized youth out of school and place them on a pathway to prison. (n.p.)

In the past two decades, many school districts in Canada and the U.S. have passed “zero-tolerance” anti-bullying policies, often in an effort to protect themselves from legal action. Child and youth studies scholars Monique Lacharite and Zopito Marini (2008) cite the 2005 case of *Jubran vs. North Vancouver School District* in Canada, in which a student took his school district to court because he was subjected to extreme bullying for years. The ruling assigned legal responsibility to the school district for failing to uphold its student code of conduct. While the case was a victory in the sense that it placed the responsibility for keeping students safe squarely on the school’s shoulders, increasing the punishing capacity of schools has had very negative consequences for vulnerable kids.

Evidence suggests that punitive responses to bullying do not make LGBT kids safer because rather than attending to heteronormative structural factors, they individualize anti-gay and anti-trans aggression and punish troubled kids rather than marshaling appropriate resources on their behalf. In their analysis of the zero-tolerance policy associated with *Ontario’s Safe School Act*, Lacharite and Marini (2008) observe that the policy “outlines specific punishments for inappropriate behaviors by using suspension and expulsion more often as well as police involvement and disciplinary measures”; they go on to note that as the policy “was employed more and more, expulsion and suspension rates

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crime. The Aboriginal murder rate in Canada is 7 to 8 times higher than the overall rate. In Toronto, where Black people are 4% of the population, they account for as many as 40% of murder victims” (John Howard Society of Canada, 2017, n.p.).

rapidly increased, leading to another problem altogether. . . an increase in dropout rates” (pp. 306-307).

Research establishes that Indigenous, Black, and immigrant youths of color and disabled and LGBT kids are disproportionately targeted for discipline practices that push them out of school. Such exclusion is a strong predictor of future precarity, as many of these children in fact drop out, remain or become poverty stricken, and are later incarcerated (ACLU, 2013).<sup>4</sup> As critical childhood studies scholar Lucia Hodgson (2013) observes, “The criminalization of black children is a major component of their social oppression” (p. 41). Strong-armed anti-bullying policies actually reinforce institutional racism by exposing more kids to criminalization, family intervention, and systems of law enforcement. This is complicated by the fact that bullying and interpersonal violence are often multidirectional. In a 2011 report titled *The Health of Canada’s Young People: A Mental Health Focus*, the Public Health Agency of Canada noted that “33% of the students who reported high involvement in bullying or victimization” did so as dual participants, that is, they were involved in both” (Freeman et al., 2011, p. 157). Another study notes that students are often bullied because they are visibly poor, and often resort to violence as a mechanism of defense.

In the context of ongoing cuts to school budgets, policies that respond to student behavioral problems by allowing expulsion are attractive. Educational scholars Therese Quinn and Erica Meiners (2013) observe that if teaching staff are cut and those remaining are pressured to meet the needs of the same number of students, there is a greater likelihood of authoritarian systems of discipline. This does not benefit any kids and is particularly harmful to the most vulnerable.

As I emphasized at the outset of the chapter, trans kids are to be found in *every* population, whether they make themselves visible or not. No discussion of trans kids’ life chances in British Columbia—the province where I live—and Canada as a whole would be complete without talking about children living in poverty and/or in government care, among whom the most vulnerable trans kids are to be found. One in five BC children grow up in poverty, and Indigenous children, children of new immigrants, and visibly racialized children are disproportionately likely to be part of this 20%. This statistic also applies to Canada as a whole.

According to the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA), one in two status First Nations children live in poverty (MacDonald & Wilson, 2013), with the number climbing to 60% for Indigenous children living on reserves (MacDonald & Wilson, 2016). As of 2011, the National Household Survey showed that 38% of Indigenous children in Canada live in poverty compared to 7% for non-Indigenous children (Government of Canada, 2020). Two-thirds of the 6,500 children in government care in BC are Indigenous, with 45% of the 185 babies under 31 days old taken into care in 2018 being Indigenous

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<sup>4</sup> A 2013 ACLU report “concluded that students of color and disabled students are disproportionately suspended, expelled, and sent into the justice system, in comparison to white and nondisabled students” (n.p.).

(MacDonald, 2019). In Canada, 52% of children under the age of 14 in care are Indigenous, in spite of constituting only 7.7% of all children (Government of Canada, 2020).<sup>5</sup> The particularly precarious position of Indigenous children in Canada reflects ongoing colonialism, intergenerational trauma from residential schooling, and the unwillingness of the federal government to fund Indigenous children at the same level as non-Indigenous children (Blackstock, 2018).<sup>6</sup>

It is important to note that a central aspect of colonialism in Canada and the United States has been the forceful imposition of Eurocentric binary gender and hetero-patriarchal systems upon Indigenous peoples. Forces of oppression relating to racism, poverty, and colonialism combine with an imposed binary gender system to impact the life chances of some trans kids more than others. In order for social change to support *all* trans kids, social movements must build powerful coalitions with other marginalized communities.

The trans kids we see via mainstream and social media are typically the ones with the most support. Yet centering social change efforts around these kids will not produce a sufficient increase in life chances for all trans kids. We need to do this the other way around, by focusing on increasing the life chances of the most precarious trans kids, because this will incorporate the gender self-determination needs of all trans kids. To support *all* trans kids, we need to do four things:

1. Generate room for all kids to determine their own gender identities within a wider range of possibilities.
2. Transition environments away from the binary gender system while respecting and supporting people for whom binary identity is meaningful.
3. Protect trans kids without harming other kids: it's not a zero-sum game where only some kids can thrive.
4. Put the most precarious trans kids at the center of our social change efforts by fighting for intense social and material investment in all children via an expanded welfare-state model.

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<sup>5</sup> Some additional statistics: "Forty per cent of homeless youth were in foster care at some time. Almost half of former youth in care will go on income assistance within a few months of their 19th birthday, compared to 2.5 per cent of youth (age 19-24) in the general population. More than two-thirds of youth in care will reach age 19 without a high school diploma" (Vancouver Sun, 2014, n.p.).

<sup>6</sup> According to Cindy Blackstock, Executive Director of the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada, "While the multi-generational effects of residential schools and other colonial policies explain some of the outcome gaps, the federal government's chronic underfunding of public services for First Nations children and families on reserves and in Yukon rubs salt into the colonial wound...inequalities arise because the Canadian government funds public services on First Nations reserves whereas the provincial/territorial governments fund it for all others. Federal funding levels for First Nations fall far below what non-Indigenous Canadians receive and Canada has repeatedly squandered numerous opportunities to fix the inequalities...The result for First Nations children is that they experience inequality across all areas of their life experience, ranging from an under-funded education system to water and food insecurity" (Blackstock, 2018, n.p.).

Social justice for trans kids requires establishing a baseline of security for all by not only reversing cuts to social services, school budgets, community centers, and healthcare services but also transforming our current National Security State and its primary allegiance to global capital into an expanded welfare state. Crucial components of this model include guaranteed housing and basic income for all, fully public not-for-profit delivery of healthcare, and equitable nation-to-nation relationships with Indigenous peoples that include concrete reparations for land theft and genocide. Thinking in terms of the most vulnerable trans kids is a powerful orientation for a vision of a more just and equitable future for all of us.

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