Social Isolation Across the Life Course
Adolescents & Young Adults

Erin Upchurch, MSSA, LISW -S
Executive Director, Kaleidoscope Youth Center
(she/her/hers)

Health Consequences of Loneliness and Social Isolation
Health Policy Institute of Ohio

Kaleidoscope Youth Center

– – –

Mission: To serve and support LGBTQIA+ youth and young adults.

Vision: To work in partnership with youth across all spectrums of sexual orientation and gender identity to live healthy, whole lives with acceptance and freedom from oppression.

What We Do

KYC is the largest and longest standing organization dedicated to serving
– – – LGBTQIA+ young people in the state of Ohio .

- Drop-In Center (ages 12-20)

- Education & Training

- Ohio GSA Network

- Leadership Development

- Advocacy & Civic Engagement

- KYC Connections (ages 16-24)

- KYC Housing Program (ages 18-24)

Drivers of Social Isolation

Drivers of Social Isolation

– – –

Loneliness is a painful emotional state that occurs when there is "a discrepancy between…the desired and achieved patterns of social interaction."

Those who perceive themselves as lonely may not necessarily lack social relationships, but *instead may consider their relationships as inadequate or poor in quality*.

The **perceived** availability of social support is associated with loneliness.

Drivers of Social Isolation

_ _ _

Loneliness is most prevalent during adolescence with more than 70% of adolescents.

★ Lack of a sense of belonging
★ The inability to engage and connect with others
★ Deterioration of social relationships
★ Rejection by their peers may be the most intense fear that adolescents face
★ Research indicates that the same parts of the brain are activated by social rejection as by physical pain

Drivers of Social Isolation

– – –

'Difference' intensifies experiences of loneliness in marginalized individuals and communities.

★ Social Isolation

★ Emotional Isolation

★ Cognitive Isolation

★ Concealment/Hiding of Identity/Code Switching

★ Recognition of self as different (BIPOC; LGBTQIA+/Queer, etc.)

Social, Emotional, & Cognitive Isolation

– – –

★ LGBTQIA+ youth are often unable to talk with others about their sexuality/gender identity; and BIPOC youth are unable to discuss race and/or ethnicity.
★ LGBTQIA+ and BIPOC youth often feel separated (emotionally) from social networks; can include the family.
★ Lack of safety/sense of safety lead to experience of being guarded (trauma response), which may heighten the feelings of emotional isolation .
★ Youth often do not have access to identity specific information and role models. Much of the information they are exposed to is negative and harmful, and thus only reinforces the feeling of isolation and otherness.

Concealment/Hiding of Identity/Code Switching

− − −

★ Because of the pressures to be "normal", and/or lack of safety, LGBTQIA+ youth will often try to conform to heteronormative expectations.

★ For survival, many will isolate themselves from other people who may outwardly appear queer to avoid being discovered.

★ Survival…
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aAhXbY9wvV0

Recognition that Self is Different From Mainstream Society

★ LGBTQIA+ youth know that they are different than societal expectations as soon as they acknowledge their own sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

★ Transgender/Non Binary are publicly discussed as it relates to bathroom use and validity of existence.

★ Knowing that oneself is "different" can be an extremely isolating feeling.

★ Black Girl in a White School*

Impact on Thriving

There is a crisis that is not political - an epidemic of loneliness, of sadness - and we're completely unequal to dealing with it.

Richard Flanagan

PICTUREQUOTES.com

PICTUREQU♥TES

How Loneliness Can Affect Your Health

Heart problems

Depression

Higher stress

Decreased memor[y]

Drug abuse risk

Brain changes

In a study out of Fenway Health:

Over forty percent of youth reported symptoms of depression and/or anxiety.

Nearly one in five youth attempted suicide within the prior 12 months.

Half of the sample reported binge-drinking and half reported marijuana use in the past 30 days.

Related:

Suicide is now the second leading cause of death for American teenagers.

Impact on Thriving - *Trauma Response*
– – –

Loneliness and the drivers of social isolation show up in our bodies and nervous systems as trauma. The experience is related to the impact of neglect and emotional distancing/withholding.

We need to be seen.
We need to affirmed.
We need to belong.

Impact on Thriving - *Trauma Response*

———

★ During adolescence a massive remodeling occurs in the cortex, the highest functioning part of the brain that is needed for good judgment, planning, and other essential functions of adulthood.

★ The frustrating behavior of teens can be better understood in the context of what's going on in the adolescent brain .

★ Because the cortex is under construction, teens use more primitive parts of the brain (limbic) to manage their emotions, thus **they are more likely to react versus think and to operate from their gut response versus reasoning.** They are more likely to misinterpret body language and are generally more vulnerable to stress at this time.

Impact on Thriving - *Trauma Response*

★ In extreme cases, chronic exposure to trauma causes a state of hyperarousal or disassociation. Hyperarousal is characterized by an elevated heart rate, slightly elevated body temperature, and constant anxiety.

★ Disassociation involves an internalized response in which the child shuts down, detaches, or "freezes" as a maladaptive way of managing overwhelming emotions and/or situations.

★ The younger the child is, the more likely he/she will respond with disassociation. Children are more susceptible to post-traumatic stress because in most situations they are helpless and incapable of either "fight or flight." *A state of learned helplessness can pervade children's development as they learn - through the repeated experience of overwhelming stress -to abandon the notion that they can impact the course of their lives in a positive way.*

Impact on Thriving - *Transgender/Non -Binary Youth*
_ _ _

The American Medical Association has identified **violence against the transgender community as an epidemic.**
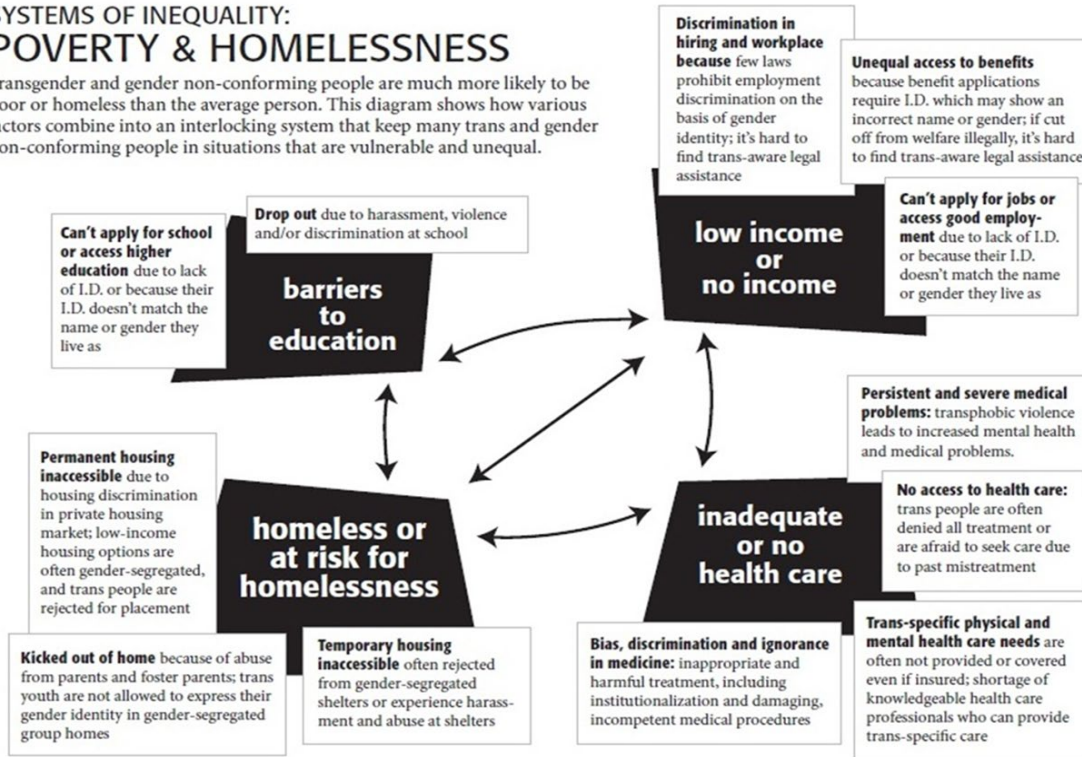
As we near the end of 2019, our community has seen over 20 Black trans women/gender non-conforming individual's lives ended by violence.

Impact on Thriving - *Transgender/Non-Binary Youth*

SYSTEMS OF INEQUALITY:
POVERTY & HOMELESSNESS

Transgender and gender non-conforming people are much more likely to be poor or homeless than the average person. This diagram shows how various factors combine into an interlocking system that keep many trans and gender non-conforming people in situations that are vulnerable and unequal.
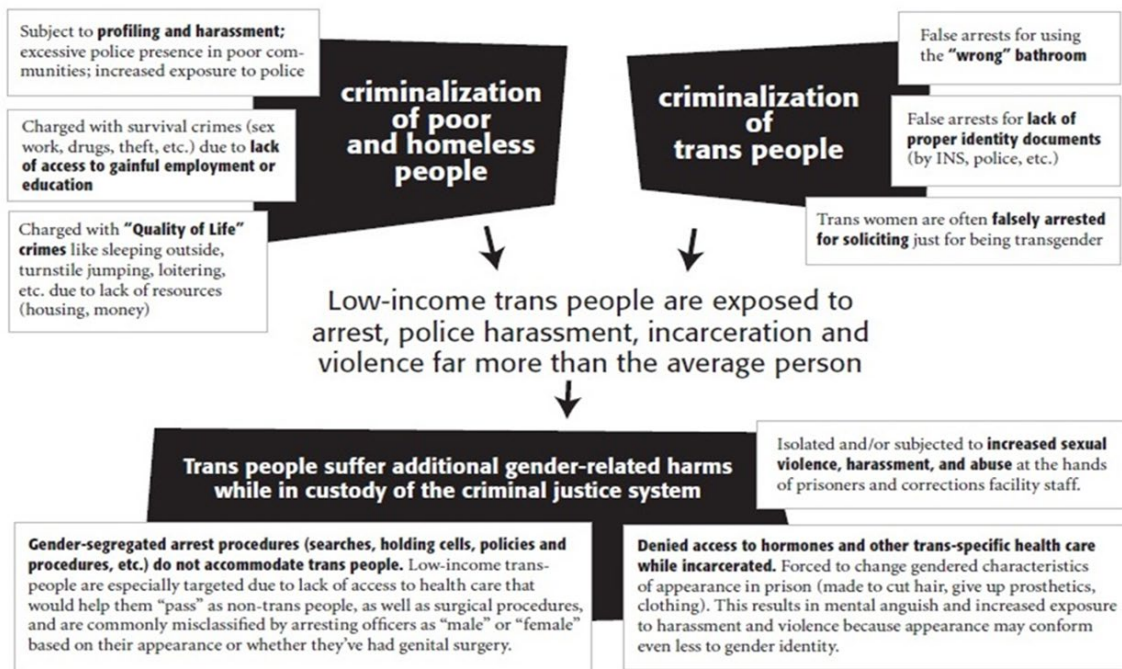
barriers to education

Can't apply for school or access higher education due to lack of I.D. or because their I.D. doesn't match the name or gender they live as

Drop out due to harassment, violence and/or discrimination at school

low income or no income

Discrimination in hiring and workplace because few laws prohibit employment discrimination on the basis of gender identity; it's hard to find trans-aware legal assistance

Unequal access to benefits because benefit applications require I.D. which may show an incorrect name or gender; if cut off from welfare illegally, it's hard to find trans-aware legal assistance

Can't apply for jobs or access good employment due to lack of I.D. or because their I.D. doesn't match the name or gender they live as

homeless or at risk for homelessness

Permanent housing inaccessible due to housing discrimination in private housing market; low-income housing options are often gender-segregated, and trans people are rejected for placement

Kicked out of home because of abuse from parents and foster parents; trans youth are not allowed to express their gender identity in gender-segregated group homes

Temporary housing inaccessible often rejected from gender-segregated shelters or experience harassment and abuse at shelters

inadequate or no health care

Persistent and severe medical problems: transphobic violence leads to increased mental health and medical problems.

No access to health care: trans people are often denied all treatment or are afraid to seek care due to past mistreatment

Bias, discrimination and ignorance in medicine: inappropriate and harmful treatment, including institutionalization and damaging, incompetent medical procedures

Trans-specific physical and mental health care needs are often not provided or covered even if insured; shortage of knowledgeable health care professionals who can provide trans-specific care

Impact on Thriving - *Transgender/Non -Binary Youth*

SYSTEMS OF INEQUALITY: CRIMINAL JUSTICE

This diagram illustrates how overpolicing and profiling of low income people and of trans and gender non-conforming people intersect, producing a far higher risk than average of imprisonment, police harassment, and violence for low income trans people.

Subject to **profiling and harassment**; excessive police presence in poor communities; increased exposure to police

Charged with survival crimes (sex work, drugs, theft, etc.) due to **lack of access to gainful employment or education**

Charged with **"Quality of Life"** **crimes** like sleeping outside, turnstile jumping, loitering, etc. due to lack of resources (housing, money)

criminalization of poor and homeless people

criminalization of trans people

False arrests for using the **"wrong" bathroom**

False arrests for **lack of proper identity documents** (by INS, police, etc.)

Trans women are often **falsely arrested for soliciting** just for being transgender

Low-income trans people are exposed to arrest, police harassment, incarceration and violence far more than the average person

Trans people suffer additional gender-related harms while in custody of the criminal justice system

Isolated and/or subjected to **increased sexual violence, harassment, and abuse** at the hands of prisoners and corrections facility staff.

Gender-segregated arrest procedures (searches, holding cells, policies and procedures, etc.) do not accommodate trans people. Low-income trans-people are especially targeted due to lack of access to health care that would help them "pass" as non-trans people, as well as surgical procedures, and are commonly misclassified by arresting officers as "male" or "female" based on their appearance or whether they've had genital surgery.

Denied access to hormones and other trans-specific health care while incarcerated. Forced to change gendered characteristics of appearance in prison (made to cut hair, give up prosthetics, clothing). This results in mental anguish and increased exposure to harassment and violence because appearance may conform even less to gender identity.

KALEIDOSCOPE Youth Center
25 YEARS
1994-2019

Impact on Thriving

— — —

GLSEN's 2017 National School Climate Survey reported that *"Ohio schools were not safe for most LGBTQIA+ students"* It continued, "many LGBTQ students in Ohio did not have access to important school resources, such as LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum, and were not protected by supportive and inclusive school policies."

Additionally:

❑ Transgender and gender non conforming youth continue to face increasingly hostile school climates; noting that 75% of transgender youth feel unsafe at schools.

❑ 87.3% of LGBTQIA+ youth reported being verbally harassed in school, up from 85% from the 2015 NSCS survey.

❑ Approximately 35% of LGBTQ+ students missed at least one day of school because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable.

Impact on Thriving - *Transgender/Non-Binary Youth*
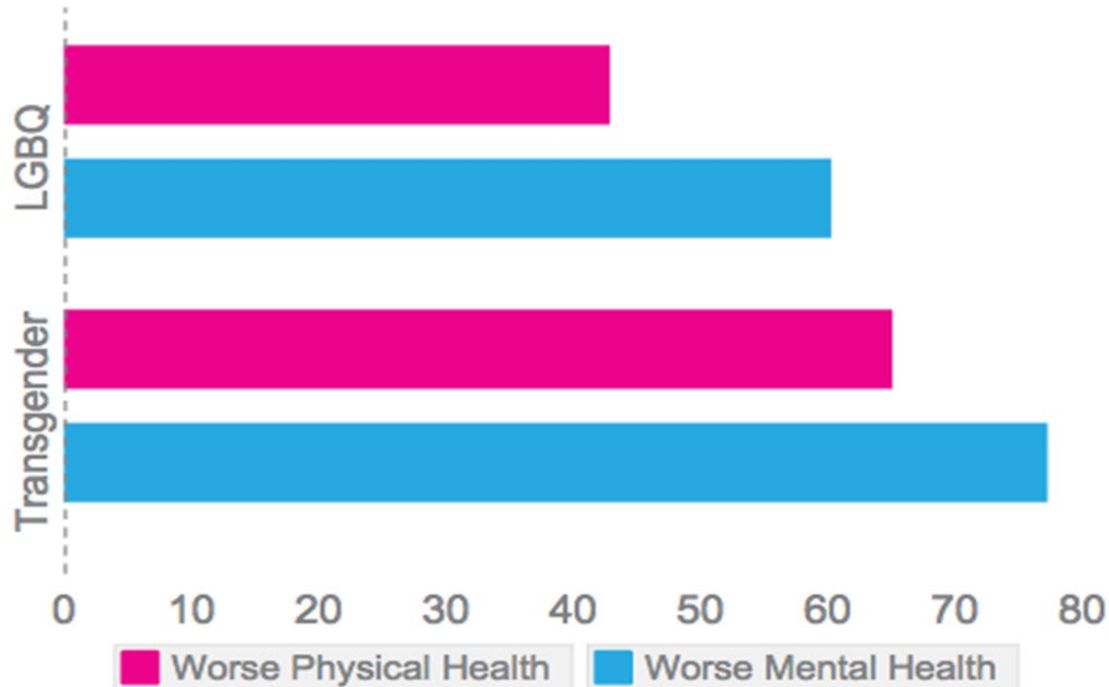
Implications for Change

" What should young people do with their lives today? Many things, obviously. But the most daring thing is to create stable communities in which the terrible disease of loneliness can be cured. "

– Kurt Vonnegut

#LonelinessFeelsLike
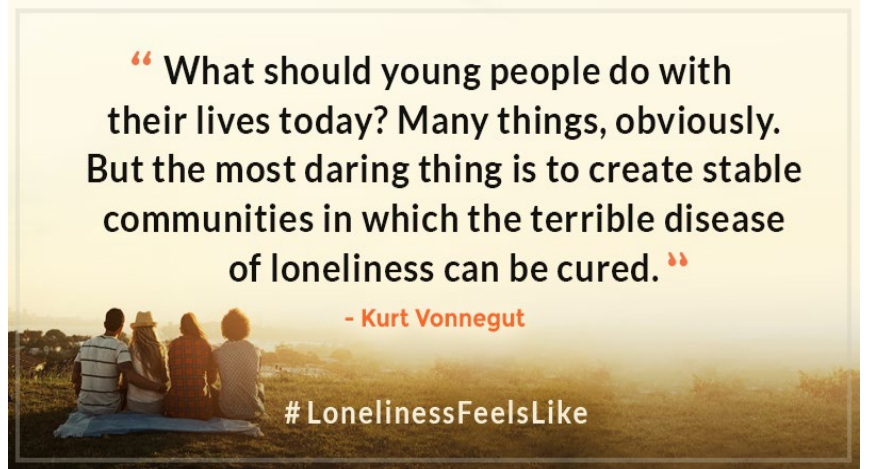
Implications for Change

– – –
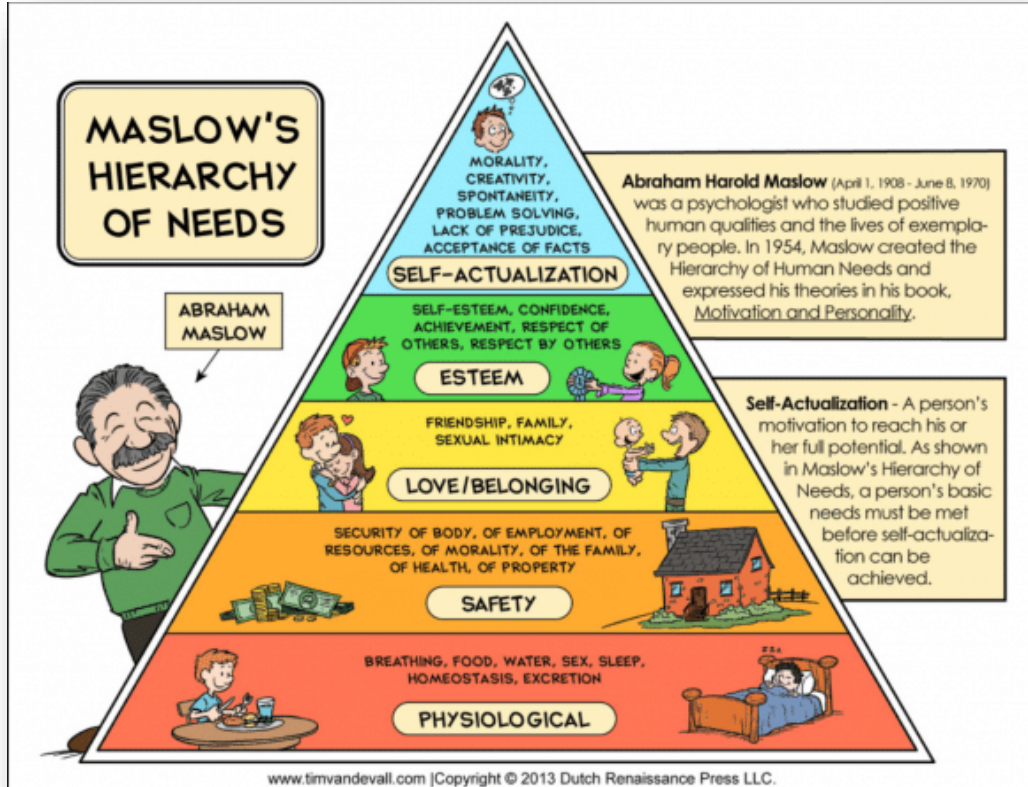
Implications for Change

– – –

Knowing what to do, support and lobby as a community, can be difficult but organizations and professionals who specifically address community needs play essential roles in deconstructing systems of oppression formed by western culture.

In community situations it's important that we advocate for inclusion. Cooperative programming that brings together community members of different backgrounds and age groups, like a buddy program which partners older members of the community with youth creates opportunities to bridge the generations and build community .

Implications for Change

– – –
We need to appropriately and adequately address the needs of vulnerable and isolated youth and young adults in need of support.

★ *Street- and community-based outreach services* to build trusting relationships and help youth navigate systems to receive resources and services.

★ *Prevention services* dedicated to stopping child abuse, preventing homelessness, etc.

★ *Housing models* that are housing first and oriented toward positive youth development and mastery of life skills.

★ Invest in and support safer schools, educational, and recreational spaces.

Implications for Change

‒ ‒ ‒

o   Address the institutional and social root causes of health disparities for marginalized communities — *including racism, poverty, homophobia, transphobia, discrimination, victimization, minority stress, and inaccessibility.*

o   Invite young people to be active partners in developing strategies to improve the health and social conditions of their lives.

o   Ensure that culturally responsive and affirming mental health and substance use prevention and treatment services are available to all who need them.

o   Support collaborative, participatory approaches to research that value science and practice, as well as adult and youth partnerships.

o   Include SOGIE data/questions (sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression)
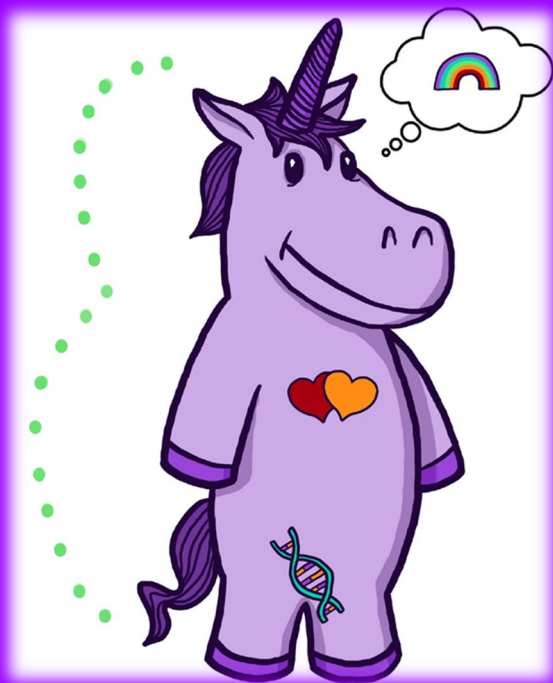
It is not enough to simply welcome people into our spaces.

We must affirm them.

We must let them know that they belong.

Thank You!

Kaleidoscope Youth Center

www.kycohio.org

614.294.5437

Resources

Resources

— — —

http://www.theprouddiplomat.com/facts/2018/6/10/tackling-loneliness-in-the-lgbtq-community

https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3810978/

https://www.newportacademy.com/resources/empowering-teens/teenage-isolation/

http://fenwayfocus.org/2015/11/new-report-addresses-health-disparities-faced-by-lgbtq-youth-of-color/

https://nonprofitquarterly.org/american-medical-association-transgender-deaths-are-an-epidemic/

https://www.glsen.org/research/school-climate-survey

https://www.nbcnews.com/think/opinion/white-gay-privilege-exists-all-year-it-particularly-hurtful-during-ncna1024961

https://www.courier-journal.com/story/opinion/2019/06/28/pride-month-do-work-end-white-lgbtq-privilege/1566820001/

https://impakter.com/privilege-power-and-pride-intersectionality-within-the-lgbt-community/

https://www.vox.com/the-highlight/2019/5/20/18542843/intersectionality-conservatism-law-race-gender-discrimination