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# Fear and Loathing: How an Engrained Fear of the Unknown Fuels Transphobia

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Fear and Loathing: How an Engrained Fear of the Unknown Fuels Transphobia

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### **Abstract**

As a way to increase legitimate education around a historically marginalized population, research was conducted around the fear of the unknown and how this fear contributes to opinion formation and informs prejudice, particularly toward the Transgender community. This research was used to inform the planning and facilitation of a panel discussion aimed at humanizing the Transgender community and encouraging critical opinion formation. A workshop and panel event was held and analysis of responses from post event surveys, interactive posters, and participant submitted questions was completed. Applying exposure theory, those who attended the panel had an overall increase in positive feelings about the topic and almost all participants agreed with the statement, "I have thought more critically about how I might interact with Transgendered individuals." It is clear that fear, specifically of the unknown, plays a large role in fueling transphobia. Due to a natural preference for what is familiar and centuries of social conditioning, those who identify as Transgender and do not fit into the societally accepted gender binary, are met with discomfort and fear, which, unexamined, can morph into transphobia. Because it is an emotion, fear cannot be controlled, however, it can and should be challenged, examined, and questioned.

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### Fear and Loathing: How an Engrained Fear of the Unknown Fuels Transphobia

As human beings, we experience a vast array of emotion on a day to day basis. Among these are the most basic emotions of happiness, sadness, anger, and fear. Current studies list numerous theories arguing that fear has a largely negative impact on opinion formation. Two of these theories are most applicable for this particular argument. The first is the “Need for Cognitive Closure” (NCC) which argues that firm answers are appealing to most humans and that because of this, we have a natural aversion to the ambiguous (Brizi, 2016; Makwana, 2018). The second is Pyszczynski’s “Terror Management Theory” (TMT) which takes the stance that humans’ fear of death specifically leads to a desire to comfort themselves (2013). Typically, this comfort is found in what is known and familiar, whether through common opinions among friends or a favorite restaurant.

Baker and Carson (2011) argue that there are generally two responses when faced with any level of ambiguity: adaptation to the unknown idea and attachment to the dominant idea. Adaptation to the unknown can be seen in something as trivial as a friend arguing in favor of an actor replacement in a favorite television series or something as important as genuinely listening to a differing point of view. Similarly, attachment can appear in refusing to take a different route home, despite an earlier arrival time or people intentionally misgendering those who use “they/them” pronouns.

In today’s binary society, people are divided into groups based on a variety of socially constructed categories such as race and gender. In many issues surrounding social justice, the “us versus them” mentality is apparent. Anyone who does not fit the societal norms and expectations is given the simple but harmful label of “other.” Applying the above ideas, this



“othering” of people can be viewed as a response to a general fear of something that is different. This is not to excuse such actions, rather to explain some of the “why” behind them.

Over the past centuries, cultural norms have been made clear and refined over time. In the case of gender, there have been distinct roles set out for the two genders that are argued to exist. Men are to be strong, providers, always in control. Women are to be nurturing, dependent, and submissive. In the case of this norm, these are the only two genders that exist and the gender must match the person’s genitalia. Beginning publicly in the 1960’s, this idea was challenged by Transgender activists.

For decades, the Transgender community has remained largely in the shadows. Stereotyped as sexual deviants, liars, or even mentally ill, those who identify as Trans have been forced into invisibility. Historically as well as currently, the Transgender community has been persecuted even within the LGBTQ+ community as a whole, ridiculed as fakers and posers. Statistic after statistic has reported that Trans people suffer from higher incidences of violence, suicide, and lack of access to proper medical care than do their cisgender counterparts (Bauer, 2016). Understanding how fear, whether of the unknown or more specifically of death, contributes to opinion formation is crucial to being critical of one’s own opinion, thus challenging, clarifying, and strengthening them.

This project proposes an educational panel discussion through which participants will engage in learning around the Transgender community and the impact of fear of the unknown on opinion formation. This will be done through a brief introduction of the topic and its relevance and an hour-long panel. Participants will be given the opportunity to engage through written prompts and by submitting questions for the panelists. This project hopes to use emotion as a

way to make the content memorable so that after the program, attendees will continue, even if unintentionally, to recognize, question and criticize their opinions with regard to difference.

### **Literature Review**

The fear of the unknown and its incredibly powerful influence have been recognized for ages. From philosophy to religion and even moralistic tales, fear of the unknown, or agnostophobia, is seemingly timeless and universal. Gnostiophobia on the other hand refers to the fear of knowledge. Although they may not sound similar, fear of knowledge and fear of the unknown are very closely related and have been used as powerful tools and motivators. Ultimately, the fear of the unknown has become the basis for prejudice and acts of discrimination. Before looking at the long and fascinating history of the fear of the unknown, it is important to understand key terms.

Fear has been defined in a number of ways. Such definitions include “the expectation of evil” (Price, 2010) and “an unpleasant often strong emotion caused by anticipation or awareness of danger” (Merriam-Webster, 2018a). For this argument, I will also add that emotions, particularly fear, are especially influential on humans and their opinions (Kuhne, 2014).

The unknown has been defined as “absence of information” (Carleton, 2016) and while many associate the unknown with a lack of tangible knowledge on a particular subject, it has morphed into a term almost synonymous with “other”. This has come about through rapid advances in technology and years of being conditioned to subscribe to societal norms. Historically, lack of technology and capacity left much unknown to humans, making the unknown a daunting and dangerous idea. In a time when entire computers fit in our pockets and answers to most questions are just moments away, the unknown has become a reminder of our limitations as humans, namely our mortality (Pszczynski, 2013).

As humans, we tend to create groups – the “in” and the “out” groups, the us and the them, those who belong and those who do not (Allport et al., 1954). This tendency to form groups, opposing or not, unavoidably creates a divide between those like me and the “others”. Although not always intentional, this divide often becomes hateful and violent.

Prejudice will be defined as a “hostile attitude or feeling toward a person...that resists facts and ignores truth and honesty” (Allport et al., 1954). Although the definition given by Allport et al. (1954) is accurate, it is not whole. Because prejudice is linked to thoughts, it cannot be controlled, only recognized, identified, and challenged. An opinion is “a belief, judgement, or way of thinking about something” (Merriam-Webster, 2018b) that may or may not be grounded in legitimate fact.

Transgender has been defined as “someone whose gender identity is different than their biological sex” (UCSB, 2018b). For the purpose of this paper, the term Transgender encompasses all members of the Transgender community, regardless of where they fall on the gender spectrum and inclusive of intersecting identities. Lastly, transphobia is defined as “a strong dislike, hatred, sense of disgust, or fear related to Trans\* people” (Russo, 2018).

Throughout history, the fear of knowledge has largely informed the fear of the unknown that now so negatively impacts our society. Around 400 BC, Greek philosopher Xenophanes was one of the first to be documented pondering such thoughts (Buller, 1998). He was largely known for his reflections on what comprises the universe and the nature that fills it, which seamlessly led him to think on matters of divinity and truth. The conclusion Xenophanes reached was simple. He felt that the gods were the only beings who had access to the most defined truth. In his exact words, “No man either has known or will know the clear truth about the gods...Belief [and not certain knowledge] is produced for all men” (Buller, 1998). Here, Xenophanes argues

that there are some truths that humans simply do not have access to, therefore, leaving them to believe in that which they cannot prove. This idea of human knowledge as intrinsically limited was thought provoking at best and life changing at worst. Whether or not he knew, Xenophanes had begun a long-lasting conversation about knowledge and more specifically, how to approach it.

Less than fifty years after Xenophanes' death, Plato was born. As a philosopher, Plato was deeply influenced by Xenophanes' idea of limited knowledge. Aside from their shared general skepticism, Plato drew from his predecessor the idea of reserving the highest amounts of knowledge for the divine. In Plato's *Republic*, a strict hierarchy is enforced, all while perpetuating the "noble falsehood" that social mobility was not feasible because "one's status is divinely preordained" (Ramsey, 2009). This idea of the "noble falsehood" claims that in order for society to function properly, there needs to be withheld knowledge, referencing Xenophanes ideas. Ultimately, Plato is responding to his own fear of change. At the time *Republic* was written, mid 400s BC, new thoughts or changes in societal structures were often responded to unkindly (Ramsey, 2009). Rather than taking the risk of allowing new ideas to be developed and shared, Plato felt it safer to structure knowledge as a way to resist change and preserve the familiar.

Stretching beyond philosophy, fear of knowledge arises again in the cautionary tale of Icarus, the man who tries to explore the sky and sun by crafting a pair of wings and tragically falls to his death when he gets too high up (Ginzburg, 1976). While subtle, the message is still there. If you try to discover, to seek out new knowledge, the outcome will be bleak, even deadly. Moralistic tales such as that of Icarus or the Tortoise and the Hare are told and retold as a way of creating and establishing social norms. The tale of Icarus conditions us to believe that seeking

new knowledge does not come without consequence. The Tortoise and the Hare engrains in us that cheating is wrong, and that honesty will ultimately prevail. These tales are seemingly timeless and widely known, told over and over again until the moral is part of day to day life, whether or not we realize it. Although we may not think about them often, these tales and their morals are imbedded in us and in our behavior.

This idea of fear as preferable to seeking the truth reemerges in the fourth century when the Vulgate, what later became the traditional Bible for the Roman Catholic Church, was completed. In what is now known as St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans, it was written "noli altum aspere, sed time" in Latin, or "be not high-minded, but fear" (Ginzburg, 1976). Once again, the idea of fearing the unknown is brought to the forefront, this time a bit more directly. In religion, particularly in Catholicism, one mustn't look far to find this idea of knowledge as forbidden. For example, in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve have access to everything necessary for happiness with the exception of the fruit that grows from the tree of knowledge. This, they are told, is only for God. When at last they give into temptation, they are immediately fearful of the God whose knowledge they have taken (Genesis 3:2, The New King James Version).

The Vulgate also includes in it a warning against seeking knowledge in three specific categories (Ginzburg, 1976). The first category is cosmic, meaning the secrets of nature and the sky. The second is religious, pointing again to the knowledge reserved for the divine. The last is political, reiterating Plato's idea of withheld knowledge being used to maintain hierarchy. In these years, and increasingly in years to follow, Catholic ideas were taken as absolute and unmovable. Although it was not labeled as such at the time, the perpetuation of these religious ideas as irrefutable is a prime example of religious fundamentalism, or the claim that religious

beliefs are absolute and the categorization of anything in opposition as evil (Parent & Silva, 2018).

The unavoidable idea of truth and knowledge as frightening maintained strength throughout many centuries by means of moralistic tales and religion until it appeared in the spotlight once more. First in Alcati's *Emblemata* in which Prometheus is punished for defying the gods by having his liver clawed out by an eagle. As this gruesome scene unfolds, it is written that the gods declared, "the hearts of the learned men who want to investigate the nature of the skies and of gods are gnawed [that is, tormented] by every kind of trouble" (Ginzburg, 1976). Once more, there is an explicit warning against seeking out knowledge, particularly from the divine.

Then, just shy of the Enlightenment, seeking out knowledge was arguably more controversial and frowned upon than ever before. For thinkers of the time like Galileo, this was extremely frustrating, to the point that it was not obeyed. For this reason, Galileo and many like him, were punished by the government which was largely grounded in the Catholic faith (Ochs, 2018). Despite his targeting, Galileo still managed to make huge academic leaps such as the understanding that the sun was in fact the center of the solar system, not the Earth, as was previously believed. It can be argued that this is when the seemingly ancient debate of religion versus science began. This debate reemerges frequently following a natural disaster. In the aftermath, it is often debated if the event was caused by God, nature, or human error (Furedi, 2006).

The most prominent and recent example can be found in the ideas of German philosopher, Martin Heidegger. Heidegger is known most for pondering the idea of why anything exists at all as opposed to simple nothingness. It is in his works that the fear of

knowledge, somewhat abandoned post-Enlightenment, transitions into thoughts regarding the unknown. Heidegger points to science, realizing that it can explain so very much about the world surrounding him, yet it could not explain how they were caused or why they existed (Polt, 2013). For example, science can explain a great deal about the environment and the ecosystems that reside within it, however, it cannot provide with certainty the “why” behind planet Earth. While the Big Bang can be used here, it is simply a theory to be believed, not a fact to be known, revisiting Xenophanes’ thoughts on believing versus knowing. Even so, with the explanation of the Big Bang, Heidegger argues, comes the question of “Why the Big Bang and not nothing?” (Polt, 2013). On the other side of the Big Bang argument are creation stories across religions and cultures, furthering the divide between religion and science.

Due to its controversial history, the fear of the unknown is a popular theme that emerges throughout art and popular culture. For example, in Wolfgang Peterson’s 1984 children’s film *The NeverEnding Story*, the main character, young Bastian, has just lost his mother (Eichinger et al., 1984). As a child, functioning without his mother is one of the greatest unknowns that Bastian has ever had to face. The plot follows as Bastian uses a magic book to escape his harsh and scary reality. *Black Mirror*, a popular Netflix series, toys with human’s reliance on technology and the knowledge it provides on a daily basis, often taking a dark turn when the knowledge is somehow limited (Brooker et al., 2011). Countless scary movies have been produced playing with the fear of the dark, a visual unknown.

After centuries of receiving messages, both explicit and subtle, forbidding curiosity and a preference for fear over learning, this fear of knowledge has morphed into a fear of the unknown. Further, this fear of the unknown has become more harmful as it is becoming increasingly clear that the fear of the unknown contributes to the development of prejudice and therefore the acts of

discrimination that often follow (Roets, 2011). As a result of lack of encouragement to seek new ideas, we have been conditioned to lean into our preference for familiarity. Because fear is such a strong emotion, researchers have been looking into humans' fear of the unknown, striving for a deeper understanding of this fear, why it is caused, and the impact it has.

In Pyzszczynski's (2013) Terror Management Theory (TMT), the author suggests that fear of mortality has a "profound and pervasive influence", particularly when it comes to politics. This influence occurs as a result of the fear of the unknown. For humans, especially in a time when knowledge on most topics is a mere Google search away, the idea of death can be terrifying for the simple reason that no one knows what follows. Because this unknown is quite literally with us to our death, Pyszczynski (2013) argues that in order to cope, people initially invent and then cling to something. For example, many religions clearly outline one's fate following their death. If they practice their faith properly, a person will end up in a desirable place, and if they do not, they will end up in a much less desirable place. Due hugely to the clear and confident statement of what happens after death, religious beliefs are clung to time and time again in moments of uncertainty. For instance, following any kind of disaster, a common question to hear asked is, "why would God let this happen?" Ultimately, this question assumes the will of a higher power and allows humans to wash their hands of responsibility.

Historically, this can be seen in things like Max Weber's works concerning the Protestant ethic. Those who were in poverty were believed to be that way as a consequence of not meeting god's will. Rather than offering to help those in need, it was the community understanding that those who were in poverty were there because god wanted them to be. According to this Protestant ethic, one must work hard in order to be rewarded with salvation (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2018). Additionally, because the divine cannot be directly contacted, there is no way



for will or responsibility to be questioned or explained – whatever is assumed becomes truth. Because religion and government do not often stray from one another, this religiously based fear of the unknown becomes apparent in politics. Later ideas will revisit this same concept.

Similar to the Terror Management Theory, Need For Closure (NFC) or Need for Cognitive Closure (NCC), is more directly tied to the fear of the unknown and points to humans' distaste for uncertainty and preference for an absolute answer. It has been argued that NCC is the "motivated cognitive basis of prejudice" (Makwana et al., 2018). Makwana et al. (2018) support this claim by arguing that with such a desire for closure, one is more likely to make decisions quickly and with limited information. Consider the example of a white woman and a Black man walking toward one another on the street. If the white woman had grown up in a white neighborhood and attended a largely white school, the limited information she may be left with is the media's portrayal of Black men as violent and dangerous, causing her to cross the street rather than pass the man. While on the surface, this action may seem harmless, it is silently feeding prejudice and furthering already existing divides.

A test was created to measure reactions to unknowns and detect characteristics of those who fear the unknown and those who do not. It was determined that those with high scores tended to be less tolerant and more group oriented, turning largely to social networks for information, while those who scored lower were more open-minded overall, seeking information from without (Brizi et al., 2016).

This Need for Closure is strongly correlated with two closely tied systems, Right Wing Authoritarianism (RWA) and Social Dominance Orientation (SDO) (Makwana et al., 2018). RWA is essentially enacting authoritarian ideas as a way of resisting change in the system. SDO, in line with Plato's thoughts, more directly supports existing hierarchies as a result of a

desire for inequality (Makwana et al., 2018). These “status quo systems” work together to maintain structures by way of creating a hierarchical society in which only those in power have the ability to enact change, yet they choose not to. These models also revisit the idea of knowledge as reserved for the elite. Further broken down, they can be understood as “social cultural attitudes” (SDO) and “economic hierarchical attitudes” (RWA) (Van Hiel et al., 2018).

Additional theories include Uncertainty Identity Theory (UIT), which argues that an aversion for uncertainty is the strongest motivator for building one’s social identity (Brizi et al., 2016). Without a need for familiarity, why else would humans choose to continually associate with specific groups rather than expanding their network? Next is Uncertainty Management Model (UMM), suggesting that humans manage feelings of uncertainty by clinging to and defending their views (Brizi et al., 2016). Last is Intolerance of Uncertainty (IU). IU refers to a person’s inability to cope with any levels of uncertainty (Carleton, 2016). Together, these final three theories support humans’ inclination toward “in groups” and “out groups” (Allport et al., 1954).

In more explicit terms, there are generally two reactions to fear of the unknown: attachment or adaptation (Baker & Carson, 2011). Attachment refers to one’s attaching themselves to the ideas or values of the dominant group in times of change as a way to ensure predictability and control (Baker & Carson, 2011). Adaptation is a more proactive approach that involves adjusting to one’s surroundings as a way to prepare for the future (Baker & Carson, 2011). For example, in the social issue of immigration, there are many connections to the above theories. TMT supports the idea that immigrants are feared simply because they are unknown, the “other”, and therefore believed to be harmful. NCC backs the quick judgements often made about immigrants based on misinformation. For example, Mexicans coming to take jobs or those

from the Middle East being terrorists. UIT and UMM combine to further solidify the “us versus them” mentality, enforcing the “we are right, and they are wrong” paradigm. Keeping Baker and Carson (2011) in mind, it becomes clear that in times of increasing immigration in the United States, some have chosen to attach to nativist and xenophobic ideas of rejection and hatred while others have adapted by learning about other country’s cultures or taking on a new language.

As a result of the foundation of fear laid by multiple sources over time combined with the availability of answers, we are living in a “culture of fear” in which we are “taught to approach the human experience as a potential risk to our safety” (Furedi, 2006). This culture can be seen across many aspects of human life. The General Strain Theory (GST), for example, argues the simple point that crime is a direct result of some kind of emotional suffering (Bonn, 2017). For example, if someone is unable to provide food for their family, they may fear that they will be considered a failure, angering them, and leading them to steal food from the grocery store. Because fear is a negative emotion and as such upsetting to humans, Bonn (2017) argues, it eventually morphs into anger, leading to action of some kind. He claims that fear is at the root of all anger and that anger, unfortunately far too often, becomes violence. This is crucial because it points to the direct connection between the emotion of fear and actions of anger and hatred.

In relation to politics, the fear of the unknown is seen prominently in the “worldview specific bolstering hypothesis” (Brizi et al., 2016). This argues that in times of “existential and economic stress” (Brizi et al., 2016), those who typically lean left on the political spectrum lean more heavily in that direction while those on the right more heavily prefer the right – in short, the socio-political nature of the US is a pendulum, swinging from more conservative to more liberal and back again. For example, under the Clinton administration, restrictions on family planning implemented by Reagan and Bush were done away with, among other liberal policy

changes. Combined with the tragedy of September 11<sup>th</sup> and the unsafe and uncertain feelings that linger still, the following presidency was even more right leaning. Under the Bush administration, immigration, more specifically limiting immigration, became a widely debated topic. This tug of war is evident again in the liberal Obama Presidency followed by the far-right leaning Trump Presidency.

This pendulum-like sociopolitical climate can have toxic effects on US citizens. Policies become temporary and are constantly being fought over, ideals are inconsistent, changing with leadership, and because of this, it becomes difficult to know who and what information is trustworthy. As a result, we are relying more and more on our social networks for information despite the fact that they may be reinforcing worldviews that thwart adaptation to an ever-changing society.

The influence of this aversion to things unknown runs deep, particularly in the United States. It is due to this fear around unpredictability that laws and religions have been established as a way to maintain the norm, what is known by all. These group norms, both known and enforced, reduce ambiguity in day to day life (Baker & Carson, 2011). In today's society, decision making occurs regularly throughout the day, both large and small. When making these decisions, it is simply impossible to consult all sources, so we as humans must be rather selective when deciding from whom we want to get information (Kruglansky, 2006). This desire for control over the information being received appears in the ability to choose who you follow on certain social media platforms, what news networks you tune into, and the exclusivity of some social circles. By continually surrounding oneself with these familiar groups, the ideas become engrained and inform everyday decisions.

The impact of emotion on opinion formation, particularly with regard to prejudice, has not been given a huge amount of notice among research. While studies have been done around cognitive abilities and prejudice thoughts, there are very few regarding emotional abilities. In one of the few studies available, the researchers looked at emotional ability as being defined as the abilities to identify, understand, and regulate emotions (Van Hiel et al., 2018). Based on these criteria and research, they found that those who scored low on emotional abilities showed high scores of Right-Wing Authoritarianism, change resistance, and Social Dominance Order, a preference for hierarchy.

When it comes to how gender functions in the United States, fear of the unknown is playing a growing role. For example, the norm for men in US society is one of rigid masculinity characterized widely by physical strength. While many studies have looked at the fear women experience when entering unfamiliar spaces, few have been done with regard to men. One study in particular found that men tend to fear new spaces due to lack of predictability, but this lack of predictability was tied directly to the man's familiarity of the space in relation to the ability to navigate conflict as a way of proving one's masculinity (Day et al., 2003). Here, it is clear that fear of the unknown is explicitly tied to gender roles. Women, on the other hand, are more worried about navigating situations in which their bodies are at risk, usually as a result of male perpetrated violence (Valentine, 1989). Clearly, the combination of fear of the unknown and perceived gender roles impacts the emotions as well as behaviors of individuals.

While the idea of fear of the unknown informing prejudice has been explored with regard to race (Allport et al., 1954), it has become widely applicable to gender, particularly in recent years. With discussion around the Transgender community, specifically their rights (or lack thereof) growing louder each day, many new ideas have been introduced. New terms like

“gender fluidity” and the use of preferred pronouns have brought to the forefront once more this preference for what is familiar. The gender binary, a social construction, claims that there are two genders, males who identify as men and females who identify as women, and that these two genders are directly associated with one’s genitalia at birth (UCSB, 2018a). “Therefore, any quality (feminine or masculine) attributed to the way a certain sex is widely perceived to act within the confines of social norms refers to the gender binary” (UCSB, 2018a).

This is a perfect example of Pyszczinski’s (2013) Terror Management Theory which suggests constructing and clinging to ideas as a way of coping with what is unknown. The binary was created as a way to make it easier to fit people into neat boxes based on appearance, making life that much more predictable and therefore manageable. Now that the binary is being called out as a fallacy, entirely changing the current societal structure, from pronouns to bathrooms, the Transgender population is becoming violently “othered”.

As Makwana et al. (2018) previously suggested, humans are becoming increasingly more likely to make quick decisions with limited information. Limited information, often coming from the examples listed above of social media, selected news networks, and chosen social groups, in addition to personal experiences, can lead to uninformed opinions. More often than not, these opinions formed from little information tend to be prejudice. Going back to Baker and Carson (2011), people have two choices based on this fear – a deepening of an attachment to their preconceived ideas or adapting to the changing social landscape. For example, if one chooses to seek out news from a generally conservative network, they will likely receive news framed against the Transgender population due to conservatives’ higher preference for familiarity (Brizi et al., 2016). This ultimately leads to a reinforcing of prejudice ideas that are further circulated through societal groups, whether friend groups or formal organizations. On the

other hand, should they turn to more liberal news sources, they will likely receive information more empathetic of the Transgender population. This will lead to eventual adaptation to new and unfamiliar groups.

Because gender presentation is generally visible, this seemingly new “unknown” is evident throughout most of society. When someone who identifies as gender nonconforming (GNC), for example, and chooses not to subscribe to the binary or gender roles (UCD, 2018) and presents in a gender-neutral fashion, it is not possible to subconsciously fit them in the box of “man” or “woman”. This inability to identify an answer is what triggers fear, “the most powerful and motivating emotion” (Bonn, 2017). In response to this fear, people tend to attach to narratives, generally negative, that they have heard about the Trans community. These narratives often include words such as “deviant” and “unnatural”, both pointing to something straying from the norm. Alternatively, in response to this fear, they can choose a more Galilean approach by seeking out knowledge for themselves rather than relying on what has already been produced.

With regard to the Trans population, this preference for familiarity has two levels and both stem from a preference to fit people into one of two boxes that society ascribes to gender. The first level relates to those who are transitioning from one gender to the other gender. They are provoking fear by breaking out of the “box” into which they were born, but still moving into the other “box”, making them somewhat able to be categorized by those who feel the need to do so. The second level relates to gender nonconforming people. Because they do not identify with either gender exclusively, they do not fit into either box, pointing to more unknowns than someone who is transitioning from man to woman or vice versa. This perpetuates the idea that those who fit a stereotype are often more broadly accepted than those who do not because they are predictable, what is known (Brizi et al., 2016). Although they identify differently under the

umbrella of Transgender, those who identify as MTF (male to female) or FTM (female to male) Trans and those who identify as GNC can experience prejudice in a variety of ways including things like avoidance, hate speech, and acts of physical violence.

This violence as a result of fear becomes apparent when looking at statistics of acts of violence against those who identify as Transgender. For example, in 2017, twenty-nine Transgender individuals, the highest number since tracking began, died as a result of “fatal violence” (Human Rights Campaign, 2018). Marsha P. Johnson is a historical example of such acts. A Transgender woman of color living in New York City in the 1960s, she was found dead in the Hudson River. The cause of death was declared suicide with no autopsy or investigation, despite reports of Marsha being seen followed by two men the night prior (France, 2017). The fear felt as a result of the perpetuation of harmful and false stereotypes leads to the dismissal of the murders of Transgender people. In one particular study, Transgender individuals were interviewed about the hate they experience, both direct and indirect. One person told the author:

“A few months ago, a young Black Trans woman was killed, and the media kept using her legal name versus her chosen name. I heard and read stories where they misgendered her. There was also a constant reminder that she was homeless, and she was a prostitute, and it was like, ‘These are all the list of reasons why it does not really matter that this woman is dead, but it’s kind of our job to report the story, so we’re doing it anyway’” (Rood et al., 2017).

While the woman who was murdered certainly faced direct physical violence, the viewer and interviewee were clearly impacted by the verbal and social violence invoked by the news reporting, on top of the occurrence of the murder itself.



Within the Trans population, fear is just as prominent. In the same study mentioned above, a number of responses pointed unmistakably to the fear of the unknown (Rood et al., 2017). For those answering, this unknown was first with regard to coming out, a horrifying experience for many in the queer community. More specifically, this fear was with regard to becoming the negative stereotypes that they had heard perpetuated about Trans people (Rood et al., 2017). The negative stereotypes mentioned ranged from “monster” and “pedophile” to even more egregious examples such as “sexually deviant crazy people who are gonna kill you and rape you” (Rood et al., 2017). All of these stereotypes were examples of comments the Trans people being interviewed had experienced on one or more occasions and are clear examples of how fear becomes anger and how this anger can be expressed in such hateful ways.

The fear of the unknown’s impact on societal functions can be viewed through a lens of conflict theory. Here, the fear of the unknown is used to reserve knowledge as a means of upholding hierarchies. From the times of Xenophanes and Plato to current refusal to recognize the existence of Transgender individuals, this fear of the unknown has worked as a way to keep one group in power and many groups left fighting for their most basic human rights. This is visible in the challenging of the historical and socially constructed ideology of gender and society’s generally negative reaction to it. While we have moved into an age of wonder and discovery of unknowns such as space and the ocean, due to centuries of conditioning, we are still under the strict influence of our fear of the “other”.

As with most emotions, fear serves a function. To understand this function, one must understand the biology behind the emotion. It all begins when something frightens you and causes your body to prepare you for danger (Vazquez, 2016). Clearly, there are different kinds of fear. Anything can invoke fear, from a sudden loud noise like a balloon popping to a near

death experience crossing a street. Depending on the level of threat, the brain will react in one of two ways (Vazquez, 2016). If something has simply surprised us, our brain will, in a matter of instants, simply compare the threat to previous threats and decide what the best response is (Vazquez, 2016). On the other hand, if the threat is new or particularly dangerous, the more emotional part of our brains, the amygdala, jumps into action (Vazquez, 2016). Although fear is biologically a means of maintaining safety, it has changed, particularly with regard to the unknown. Due to our preference for familiarity, we have begun to react with varying levels of fear to anything different from ourselves. What started as an instilled fear of knowledge and truth, transformed into a fear of what is left unknown through years of conditioning. While it started as a protective tool, in more recent years, this has mutated into a generally negative fear of anything different from our version of the norm.

There are two main ways to combat this fear of the unknown. The first is through education, both about how prejudice opinions are formed with relation to the unknown and around the communities that feel the impacts of the prejudice. The second is through exposure theory, arguing that by encountering that which we do not know, we come to know it, and fear is lessened if not eliminated (Knobloch-Westerwick, 2014).

Using previous research on fear of the unknown and the general philosophy of these two theories for combatting the fear of the unknown, the intent of this project will be to conduct a panel discussion focusing on fear of the unknown and how this can impact issues of social justice and gender.

The opening to the panel laid out a brief explanation of the relationship between the fear of the unknown and the Transgender community. The concept was related first to day to day experiences like trying new food before relating it to gender, allowing participants of all

experience levels to grasp the concept in a tangible way in line with where they are in their learning process. The panel in the second part of the workshop allowed for empathy building through an ability to put a face to the complicated and pervasive issue of gender-based oppression. By drawing upon personal experiences and emotions, the content will be more memorable and easier to draw upon in the future.

Fear of the unknown has permeated our society since almost the beginning, starting as thought provoking but becoming harmful. Because it is an emotion (fear) causing the thoughts (prejudice), it cannot be controlled. Fortunately, it can be recognized, identified and then challenged. The goal of this project is to challenge people to think about how and why they form their opinions, or recognize if they simply choose the one that is most convenient and beneficial for them. By using education and exposure, perhaps we can lessen the fear around the Transgender community and with it, prejudice-based words and actions.

### **Project Plan**

In a time when people are flooded with information, opinions are increasingly difficult to form honestly and critically. More often than not, opinions are latched onto rather than formed independently and formed largely out of emotional reaction rather than research. These emotional reactions stem from an innate fear of the unknown. As a result, cruel and ultimately harmful opinions are formed about those different from us or unknown to us in anyway. This is particularly evident within the Trans community, a population that challenges society's gender norms. *Fear of the Unknown* worked to raise awareness about how fear of the unknown impacts opinions and began conversation about how to develop opinions critically and engage in controversy with civility.

***Situation Statement***

In November of 2018, President Trump proposed a change in the definition of “gender” to be understood as strictly man or woman and congruent with sex assigned at birth. This public assault on the Trans community, should it become reality, will effectively erase Transgender individuals in the United States. Months later, in April of 2019, Trump’s Transgender Military Ban took effect, reimplementing “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” for Transgender troops. Restrictions like these as well as countless other acts of violence against Transgender people, are deeply rooted in a fear of the unknown, specifically the unknown that comes with societal changes such as the recent push for understanding gender as fluid and a spectrum, rather than binary.

***Defined Goals***

By the end of the panel, attendees will better understand how fear of the unknown plays a role in opinion formation and prejudice, particularly toward the Transgender community. Considering the preference for familiarity associated with fear of the unknown will help people to develop opinions based on fact rather than emotion. This understanding will contribute to more informed opinion formation by way of rejecting stereotypes and seeking out legitimate information for oneself, rather than accepting what they have been socialized to believe.

***Target Audience and Stakeholders***

My target audience was primarily young adults who are in the midst of forming opinions about a number of things, both consciously and subconsciously. Additionally, my target audience was the general public because the idea of the fear of the unknown can be applied to so many corners of the social justice world and so many parts of the human experience. In our current political climate, changes based largely on fear of the unknown are impacting a variety of issues. Therefore, I am hoping that anyone looking to broaden their way of thinking will be in

attendance. Stakeholders included Reverend Katrina Wuensch of West Parish United Church of Christ as well as the panelists, Renee Manning, Ev Evnen, Minh Nguyen, and Colby Patrie.

### ***Craft a Clear Message***

The fear of the unknown is a powerful and fascinating emotion. While it can be used to keep us safe, it can quickly become harmful when fear of the unknown becomes fear of the “other”. Ultimately, this can lead to prejudice and intolerance to those different from us.

Through education and discussion, *Fear of the Unknown* will reveal this emotion’s insidious influence on how we form opinions, specifically around the Transgender community.

### ***Incentives for Engagement***

*Target Audience:* College Students

*Incentive:* more clarity in a time of crucial opinion formation//better understanding of emotional influence on opinions

*Target Audience:* General Public

*Incentive:* better understanding of the impact of something as human as a fear of the unknown, especially with regard to opinion formation

*Stakeholder:* Reverend Katrina Wuensch

*Incentive:* parish visibility//advocacy//forwarding parish mission

*Stakeholders:* Renee Manning, Ev Evnen, Minh Nguyen, Colby Patrie

*Incentive:* visibility//advocacy//control over outcome//experience sharing

### ***Outreach Methods***

Outreach was done across a number of platforms and mediums. First, there was a flyer. This was shared on campus both physically and digitally among students, faculty, and administrators at both the graduate and undergraduate levels. Additionally, the flyer was shared

digitally with professors and student groups on campuses in nearby communities. Second, outreach was done on social media platforms. I created a Facebook event that people were able to share a total of twenty-four times and an Eventbrite page that received a total of ninety-two views. Additionally, in the week before the event, I left mystery flavored candy with flyers in common spaces on campus as a way to play with the unknown to promote the event.

***Responsibilities Chart***

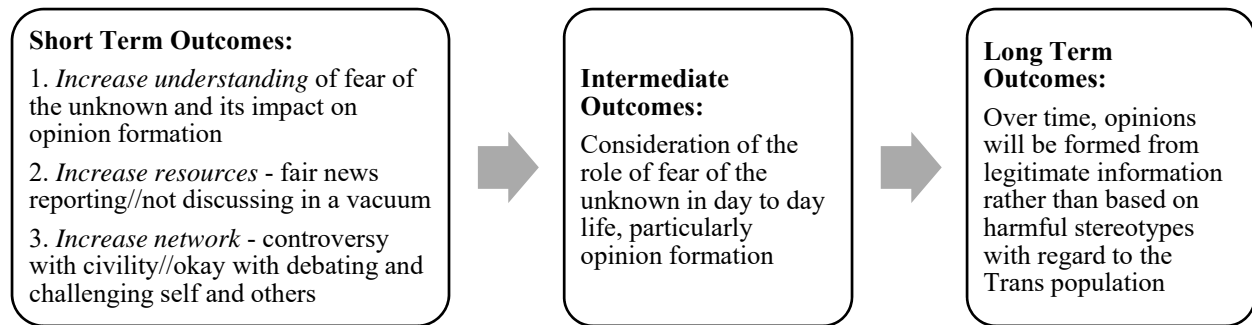
<b>NAME</b>	<b>DELIVERABLES</b>	<b>CONTACT INFORMATION</b>
Elizabeth Bedortha Project Lead Merrimack College	Planner//Facilitator - Identify panelist options and select panelists - Identify and secure location for panel - Plan and implement marketing - Plan agenda - Create survey - Secure food - Prepare day of materials (panelist intros., panelist questions, etc.)	ebedortha@gmail.com
Volunteers//Fellows Support Merrimack College	Volunteers//Supporters - Day of (setup//cleanup) - Floaters - Sign in table	GroupMe//Facebook page
Melissa Nemon Guidance/Support Merrimack College	Capstone Prof. - Help create survey - Support with technicalities - General support and guidance throughout process	nemonm@merrimack.edu
Renee Manning, Ev Evnen, Minh Nguyen, Colby Patrie Panelists	Serve as Panelists	

***Tools and Measures to Assess***

<b>What is Being Measured</b>	<b>How it is Being Measured</b>
Willingness to engage with unknown	Attendance Submitted questions Survey responses Follow ups Poster responses
Shifts in opinion based on new information	Survey responses Poster responses
Understanding of connection between fear of the unknown and the Trans community	Survey responses Poster responses Follow ups

*Implementation Timeline*

	<b>Jan. 1-19</b>	<b>Jan. 20-31</b>	<b>Feb. 1-16</b>	<b>Feb. 17-28</b>	<b>March 1-16 (break 11-15)</b>	<b>March 17-31</b>	<b>April 1-13</b>	<b>April 14-30</b>
<b>1:1s</b>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Potential location meetings			X					
<b>Reach out to potential panelists</b>		X	X					
Location decided//secured			X					
<b>Secured 1<sup>st</sup> panelist</b>				X				
Secured 2 <sup>nd</sup> panelist				X				
<b>Secured 3<sup>rd</sup> panelist</b>					X			
Training on LGBTQ+ inclusive spaces				X				
<b>Secured 4<sup>th</sup> panelist</b>					X			
Lost 2 <sup>nd</sup> panelist					X			
<b>Marketing//Outreach</b>						X	X	
Finalize marketing materials					X	X		
<b>Order food</b>						X		
Questions finalized and sent to panelists						X		
<b>Event (4/2/2019)</b>							X	
Agenda finalized						X		
<b>Survey finalized</b>					X			
Secured replacement panelist					X			
<b>Data analysis complete</b>							X	
“Thank you” sent to stakeholders							X	
<b>Follow up sent to panelists</b>							X	
Final meeting with Katrina								X
	<b>Jan. 1-19</b>	<b>Jan. 20-31</b>	<b>Feb. 1-16</b>	<b>Feb. 17-28</b>	<b>March 1-16 (break 11-15)</b>	<b>March 17-31</b>	<b>April 1-13</b>	<b>April 14-30</b>

***Logical Framework//Logic Model*****Methodology**

This project utilized a mixed methods approach to determine participant reactions and response to the *Fear of the Unknown* workshop.

***Participants***

Prior to the event, outreach was targeted to the surrounding community at large, Merrimack College students, and congregants of surrounding United Church of Christ (UCC) parishes. UCCs pride themselves on being “Open and affirming congregations”, welcoming to all. The West Parish UCC was chosen to host the event due to their open support of Proposition 3 in Massachusetts, regarding Transgender rights. While many community members and UCC congregants attended, few college students were present.

***Materials***

As a means of measurement, three tools were used. The first were posters with prompts for participants to answer as they signed in and ate dinner. The prompts were “Gender is//isn’t...” and “How do you form opinions?” Participants wrote and drew answers on each of the poster. These were to gauge how participants were entering the space as well as begin the reflective thought process. The second means of measurement used was the post event survey.



Following the panel discussion, participants completed a survey regarding their thoughts on the event and topic as well as their demographics. The final form of measurement are the panelist questions submitted anonymously by participants. These show what people are curious about but perhaps to hesitant to ask out loud.

### *Procedure*

Prior to the event, panelists who identify as Transgender and are experts in the field of defending and promoting the rights of Transgender individuals were recruited through a number of avenues. I became connected to Renee Manning and Ev Evnen both through mutual connections. Minh Nguyen, I met while attending one of their trainings on creating LGBTQ+ inclusive spaces. After reaching out to Northern Essex Community College's Gender Sexuality Alliance as part of event outreach, I was put into contact with Colby Patrie who gladly agreed to serve as a panelist.

Much of the marketing, both to the public and specifically to college students, was done via Facebook, namely creating and sharing an event page. Additionally, numerous emails were sent to local nonprofits, local open and affirming congregations, LGBTQ+ serving organizations, and neighboring colleges and universities including campus clubs and professors.

The event began at 6:00pm on a Tuesday evening at the West Parish United Church of Christ in Andover, MA. Upon arrival, participants were greeted, signed in, and given the post event survey and a brief explanation of its purpose. Sandwiches, snacks, and water were available for participants to help themselves and tables were set up to allow for comfortable eating. On the tables were the interactive posters with prompts "Gender is//isn't..." and "How do you form opinions?" so that participants could begin to reflect on the topic as they ate and transitioned into the space. In addition to the posters, there were notecards and a bag for

participants to submit questions for the panelists. Lastly, there were tent cards explaining the interactive posters and alerting participants that the panel itself will begin at 6:30pm.

Five minutes prior to the panel's start, submitted questions were collected from the tables and added to the list of planned questions. At this time, participants were encouraged to move from the tables and sit in rows of chairs facing the table of panelists.

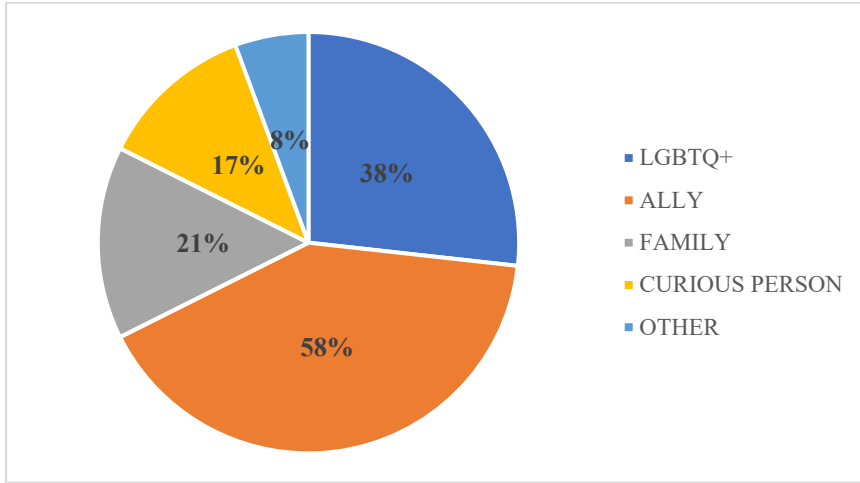
Following panelist introductions, from 6:30pm until 7:00pm, planned questions more around the fear of the unknown and transphobia were asked and responded to by the panelists. From 7:00pm until 7:30pm, questions submitted by participants were asked and responded to by the panelists. After the last question was answered, cookies were set out with the food and participants were reminded to fill out their surveys and return them on the sign in table.

As participants filled out and returned surveys, some lingered to speak to the panelists. The event ended at 8:00pm. Following the event, data gathered from the interactive posters, post event surveys, and participant questions were analyzed.

### **Findings**

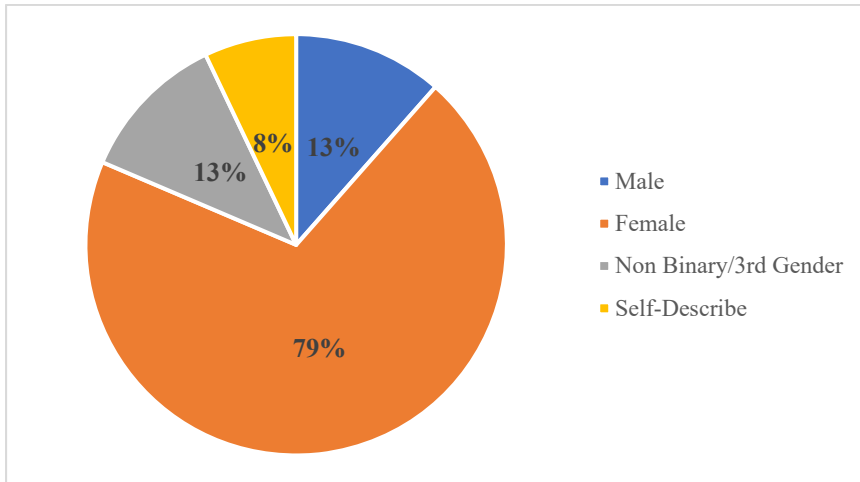
Of the 30 people who attended the panel discussion, 26 signed in and 24 completed and returned surveys. Of the 24 who completed the survey, 9 identified themselves as LGBTQ+, 14 as an ally to that community, 5 as being a family member of an LGBTQ+ identifying person, 4 simply as curious people, and 2 as other, identifying themselves as "Trans" and "advocate".

Figure 1: Participant Identity



Of the 24 participants who completed a survey, 3 identified themselves as male, 19 as female, 3 as non-binary/third gender, and 2 selected to self-describe, one as “Trans” and the other as “genderfluid”.

Figure 2: Participant Gender

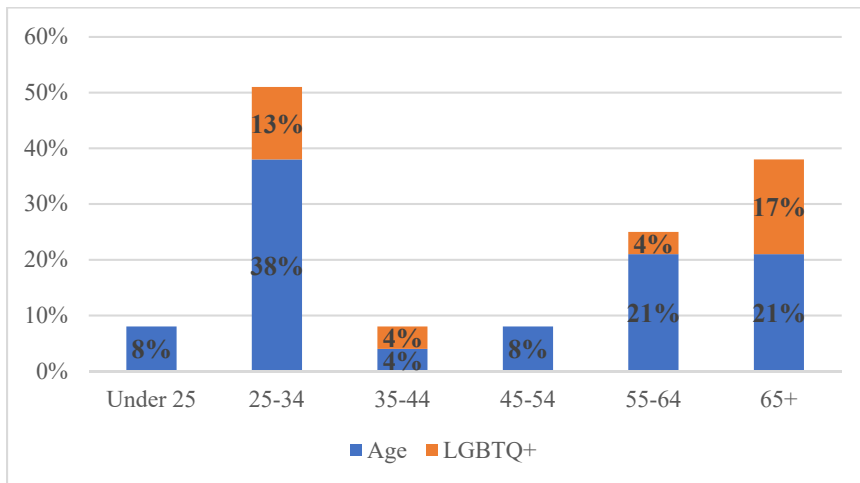


Twenty participants identified themselves as Caucasian/White, 2 as Hispanic/Latino/Latina/Spanish Origin, 1 as Black/African American, 1 as Asian, and 1 as not listed – “Jewish”.

Of those who completed the survey, 2 were under the age of 25, 9 were between 25-34, 1 was between 35-44, 2 were between 45-54, 5 were between 55-64, and 5 were 65 or older.

Of those who identified themselves as members of the LGBTQ+ community, 3 were between the ages of 25-34, 1 was between 35-44, 1 was between 55-64, and 4 were 65 years of age or older.

Figure 3: LGBTQ+ Participants by Age



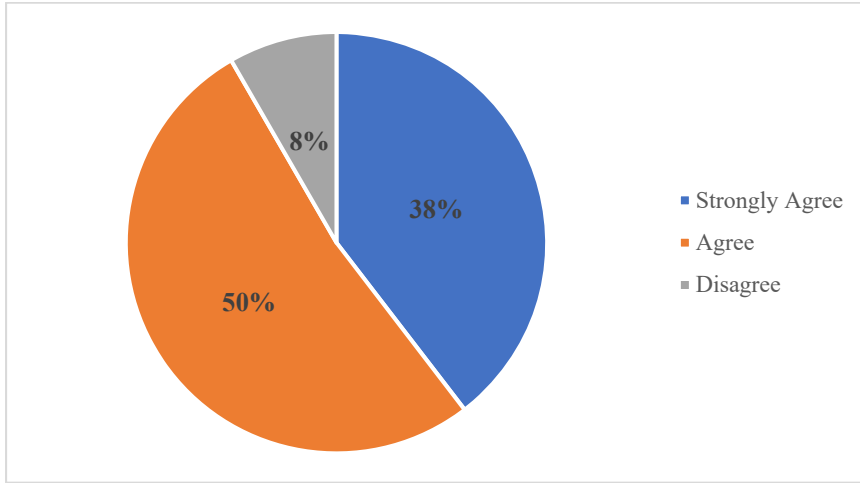
Of the 24 surveys completed, 21 rated the event “excellent” and 3 rated it “good”.

In response to the statement “I have a better understanding of the impact of fear of the unknown on forming opinions”, 9 people strongly agreed, 13 agreed, and 1 disagreed.

In response to the statement “I will consider how to be more thoughtful in forming my opinions”, 8 people strongly agreed, 13 agreed, and 2 disagreed.

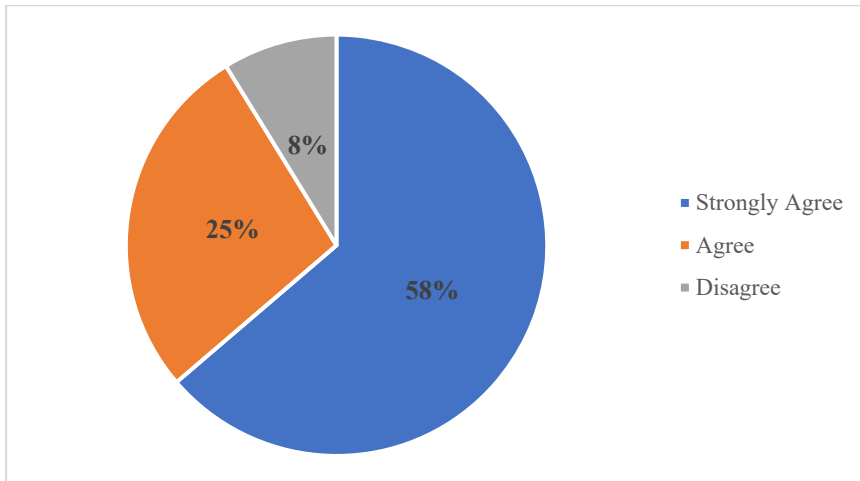
In response to the statement “I have thought more critically about how I might interact with Transgendered individuals”, 9 strongly agreed, 12 agreed, and 2 disagreed.

*Figure 4: Thought Critically About How I Might Interact with Transgendered Individuals*



In response to the statement “I will seek more information on Transgender issues”, 14 people strongly agreed, 6 agreed, and 2 disagreed.

*Figure 5: Will Seek More Information on Transgender Issues*



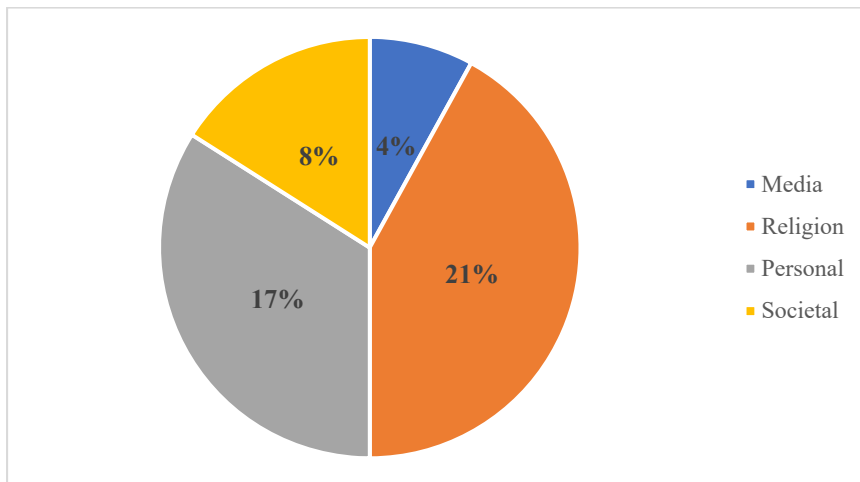
In response to the statement “I will engage in other, similar Transgender (or LGBTQ+) awareness/educational events”, 16 people strongly agreed, 4 agreed, and 2 disagreed.

When asked what learnings from the event were most valuable to them, participant responses fell into the main categories of “Ah-ha!” moments and humanization. There were 14 “Ah-ha!” moments and 13 instances of humanization. “Ah-ha!” moments focused largely

around responses to the unknown and important roles for allies to play. The instances of humanization focused on the lived experiences shared by the Transgender panelists.

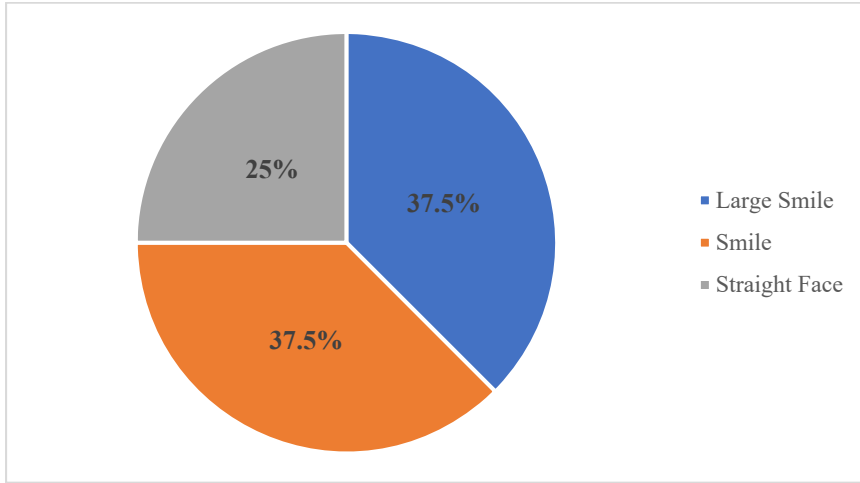
When asked what challenged them or challenged their previously held beliefs, the responses were broken into the categories of media, religion, personal, and societal. Of the 24 people who complete surveys, 1 responded with media, 5 with religion, 4 with personal, and 2 with societal. The media response addressed negative representation of the Transgender community. The responses around religion focused on the intersection between the LGBTQ+ and religious communities. Most personal responses expressed that this event was a first step in the participant’s learnings around the LGBTQ+ or Transgender community. The societal responses were with regard to how humans perceive things.

*Figure 6: Challenged You or Previously Held Opinions*



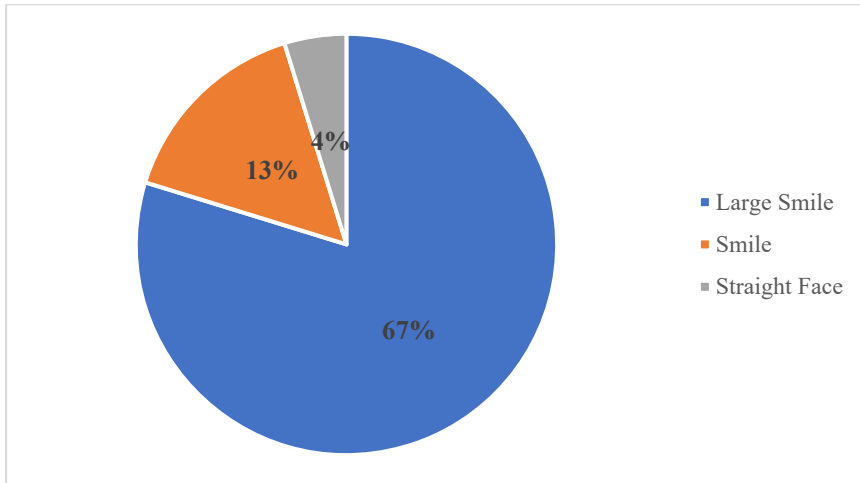
Participants were asked “How were you feeling about this topic before you came in?” and asked to circle an emoticon – Large Smile, Smile, Straight Face, Frown, Large Frown. Before the event, 9 people responded with a Large Smile, 9 with a Smile, and 6 with a Straight Face.

Figure 7: Feelings Before Event



Participants were then asked “How are you feeling about this topic now that it’s over?” and asked to circle one of five emoticons – Large Smile, Smile, Straight Face, Frown, Large Frown. After the event, 16 people responded with a Large Smile, 3 with a Smile, and 1 with a Straight Face.

Figure 8: Feelings After Event



When asked how the workshop could be improved, there were three main categories of responses – defining of terms, more time for questions, and a greater diversity in attendees and

experiences shared. Responses from the interactive posters and participant questions can be found in Appendix D: Panelist Questions and Appendix F: Poster Responses.

### **Discussion**

Based on the event evaluation and feedback, the results were overall positive. While a defining of key terms and additional time for questions could have enhanced the experience, participants were able to engage with the Transgender population in a space supportive of curiosity. Following the hour-long panel, participants had “appreciated the range of experiences” shared by the panelists and had “gained greater understanding and empathy for daily, lived experience of Trans “folkx”. One participant reported learning “new, powerful ways that I can be an ally and seek more education” and another mentioned a specific resource they will be exploring.

In the current political climate, it seems that opinions are often stated as facts and fear is being used as a tool to maintain a hierarchy, revisiting conflict theory. When discussing critical opinion formation, one participant said, “It is imperative that people realize that we all live and have lived in a diverse world and that many of our opinions are politically distilled for us and not for our own good”. This participant’s recognition of the world’s complexity combined with an understanding of how opinions can be influenced is exactly the kind of thought process this event was striving to provoke. One particularly moving response embodied the desired “ah-ha!” moments and humanization of the Transgender community. The participant wrote, “People don’t go into this lightly. I know that’s a silly statement, but because I ‘didn’t want to think’ about the topic, I truly didn’t give it much thought – it was easier to think that this was a



choice...my eyes have been opened as well as my heart and mind". An impact was made on this participant, simply in the hour that the panel occurred.

Reviewing participants' feelings about the topic upon entering and exiting, it is clear that exposure theory was effective within the framework of this panel. Of the responses before and after, none circled frown or large frown. Upon entering the space, 25% of participants circled the straight face emoticon and 37.5% circled the large smile. Following the event, only 4.1% circled the straight face emoticon and 66.6% circled the large smile. Applying exposure theory on a broader scale, consider the amount of positive impact that could be made if the Transgender community were given fair representation within the media.

With regard to demographics, the age groups and the distribution of LGBTQ+ identifying people among those groups, was surprising. The 25-34 age group accounts for 37.5% of participants and the 55-64 and 65+ combined account for 41.6% of participants. In my experience within social justice conversations, particularly around LGBTQ+ topics, those who engage tend to be from younger generations, so the large participation from those 55 and older was notable. Additionally, of the 5 seniors, 4 identified themselves as members of the LGBTQ+ community. This is notable because the LGBTQ+ population is largely represented in the media and popular culture as a young community and queer seniors often become invisible. Additionally, there is a clear age gap between LGBTQ+ identifying participants (see *Figure 3: LGBTQ+ Participants by Age*).

When asked what about the panel discussion challenged them, 20.8% of participant responses were about the relevance of religion in the conversation. In addition to the event being held in a United Church of Christ, Renee Manning, one of the panelists, is soon to be ordained and was wearing a collar at the event. One of the questions submitted by a participant asked the

panelists, “How has religion affected your view of the LGBTQ+ community?”. Each of the panelists responded with a personal connection to religion in a variety of ways and among the four of them, three religions were represented. Upon further review of the 20.8% mentioned above, none of them are LGBTQ+ identifying and most identified themselves as allies to the LGBTQ+ community.

Based on the panelist responses compared with the survey responses, there is a disconnect between the queer community and their allies around the intersection with religious communities. Of those in attendance, panelists and participants, those who identified as LGBTQ+ were not surprised by the overlapping within communities. One participant even wrote, “Loved hearing from so many people, especially from people of faith as I am also a Trans person of faith”. Because the norm has become animosity between religious and queer communities, intersections like those shared by the panelists can come as a surprise to some. Those who may have been lacking in personal narratives within the queer community or those who are unfamiliar with one or both communities may not know of such intersections, and therefore, will be challenged by them. This raises the question of how to normalize the intersection between queer and religious communities.

### *Limitations*

While the results of the event are overall positive, there were a few limitations to be considered. First is the nature of the topic. Events around social justice topics, particularly the LGBTQ+ community, tend to be attended largely by likeminded people who already ascribe to the ideas being discussed. Knowing that thoughts on Transgender rights have unfortunately become a polarized, a discussion like this may be daunting for someone even mildly unfamiliar with the topic. Additionally, because the event was not held on a college campus, it was difficult

to recruit students. Despite marketing with flyers, candy, newsletter postings, and across multiple student organizations, there were no undergraduate participants.

### ***Implications***

In the weeks leading up to the event, the event page received a lot of traffic, and many people responded as “interested” on Facebook, however, the number of RSVPs did not reflect this alleged interest. As mentioned above, thirty people attended the event total, so there appears to be a gap between interest and a willingness to commit and also between a willingness to commit and a willingness to attend. How can we as a society work to make conversations like this seem less daunting and more digestible?

Returning to a previous point, if exposure to a new community for a one-hour panel can provoke such clear and positive shifts in participant mindset, what could be done on a larger scale? The Transgender population is barely beginning to see representation in the media; however, it largely tokenizes the Trans experience. What steps could be taken, personally and within communities, to normalize the Trans experience? How can we increase visibility and awareness without putting those who identify as Transgender in greater danger? This workshop is a step and my hope is that in coming years, these and other questions will be approached with curiosity rather than fear and that because of that, the world will become a more accepting place for Transgender individuals.

### **Conclusion**

It is clear that if unchecked, fear, particularly of the unknown, can lead to bias, prejudice, and discrimination. For the Transgender community, this can mean being met with hatred and violence simply for challenging societal norms, namely the rigid gender binary. Because this

preference is a natural one and because emotions cannot be controlled, we mustn't attempt to fight it. Instead, we must challenge, examine, and question the emotion.

In the same way that we can shake off a sadness stemming from a rainy day but should acknowledge the sadness that comes with losing a loved one, we must examine our fears. If they are stemming from a simple and natural preference for the familiar, they can be broken down and tackled, however, if the fear is alerting us to a true danger, we must acknowledge this emotion.

Society continues to change around us and with it the norms and unspoken rules of day to day life. It is crucial that we as humans become aware of our emotions and because of this awareness, become more comfortable with the idea of difference and change and learn to engage with curiosity rather than fear.

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Appendix A: Marketing Materials



# FEAR OF THE UNKNOWN

## ...AND HOW IT FUELS TRANSPHOBIA

**JOIN US FOR A PANEL DISCUSSION ON THE HISTORY OF OUR FEAR OF THE UNKNOWN AND ITS CURRENT IMPACT ON THE TRANSGENDER COMMUNITY.**

**DINNER WILL BE PROVIDED  
ALL ARE WELCOME - QUESTIONS ENCOURAGED**

**TUESDAY APRIL 2ND 2019  
6:00 - 8:00P  
WEST PARISH UCC  
129 RESERVATION RD., ANDOVER MA**

**Please RSVP - [fear-of-the-unknown.eventbrite.com](https://fear-of-the-unknown.eventbrite.com)**  
For more information, please contact:  
Elizabeth Bedortha  
[embraceunknown2019@gmail.com](mailto:embraceunknown2019@gmail.com)



Hosted by West Parish UCC  
An Open & Affirming  
Congregation

**Appendix B: Event Agenda****“Fear of the Unknown...& How it Fuels Transphobia” Agenda  
Tuesday 2 April 2019 – 129 Reservation Rd., Andover MA****4:30-5:45p**

4:30-4:45p – Arrival // check-in with Katrina // unload

4:45-5:15p – Unpacking // room layout // food organized and prepped

5:15-5:30p – Table set up (posters, question) // final touches // food set out

5:30-5:45p – Panelist arrival // check-in // review bio. and procedures

**6:00-8:00p**

6:00-6:30p – Arrival // check-in // eating // interactive art

- For the first half hour, folks will be arriving, getting a chance to eat and participate in the interactive art at their dining tables. These will be posters posing questions around gender and fear with markers, stickers, and other materials for folks to answer the questions. This will also serve as time for folks to submit questions for panelists.

6:30-7:30p – Panel discussion

- The panel discussion will last for one hour. The first 30 mins. will be the questions that I created. The second 30 mins. will be questions from the audience.

7:30-8:00p – Survey completion // dessert // engagement

- Folks will have the opportunity to enjoy some sweets while they complete the post event survey. This time will also serve as a space to reflect on the discussion and connect with folks from the community.

**8:00-8:45p**

8:00-8:15p – Wrap up // see off panelists and final participants

8:15-8:45p – Clean up supplies // pack up

**Appendix C: Panelist Introductions****Panelist Introductions****Renee Manning** – She/Her/Hers

Renee is on her way to becoming a Pastor after studying at the Andover Newton Theological School. She has spoken all around Massachusetts and soon will be embarking on a journey to the south where she will educate around Transgender issues. Pleasure to have you here, Renee.

**Ev Evnen** – They/Them/Theirs

Ev, current director of MaeBright Group as well as the Interim Director at the Massachusetts Transgender Political Coalition, congratulations, Ev. They have two Masters, one in Public Policy and one in Business Administration, both from Brandeis University and were named the Boston Spirit Young Trailblazer in 2017. Thanks for being here today, Ev.

**Minh Nguyen** – All pronouns

In 2016, Minh cofounded kyriQ, an organization that offer trainings and coaching with a focus on LGBTQ/T+ inclusivity. Minh holds a BA in Psychology and an MS in Nonprofit Management. They also work as a Consultant for the Massachusetts Commission on LGBTQ Youth. Happy to have you here, Minh.

**Colby Patrie** – He/Him/His

Colby Patrie is currently studying art at Northern Essex Community College and serves as President of the campus's Gender and Sexuality Alliance. He is a Public Speaker for Greater Boston PFLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) and plans to practice art therapy in the future. Excited to have you here, Colby.

**Appendix D: Panelist Questions****Planned Questions (Asked)**

1. *In November, Massachusetts voted "Yes" on 3 - what does it mean for the Trans community and for you personally?*
2. *I'm sure there are infinite examples of this, but, what is one thing history got wrong about the Trans community?*
3. *People often talk about "Trans erasure" and a "lack of visibility" in the community. Can you speak to what that means for you?*
4. *Society ascribes to the gender binary, this idea that there are two fixed genders. How can we challenge ourselves to move beyond this known so that Trans acceptance becomes what is known?*
5. *Even within the LGBTQ+ community, transphobia is present. Why is this and how can other members of the queer community act as allies?*
6. *How do you see fear feeding transphobia in your day to day life?*
7. *Part of the unknown is in the language, the Trans pronouns that are just now becoming part of mainstream discussions around gender. Can you speak a little bit on pronouns, how to approach them and how to get comfortable using them?*
8. *It has become an increasingly dangerous time for many marginalized groups in the US, including Trans folks. How is Massachusetts doing in comparison to the rest of the country? Is any one state setting a great example?*
9. *If Trans representation in the media were accurate, I would see...*
10. *In your own words, what is gender?*
11. *Given the opportunity to have a transphobic person understand one thing, what would it be?*
12. *What is one fact or statistic about Trans folks that you wish more people knew?*

**Participant Questions (Asked)**

1. *How has religion affected your view of the LGBTQ+ community?*
2. *How would you explain the Trans experience to young children?*
3. *For those who are not well versed in this topic, how can I/we be allies to you?*

4. What do y'all think are the biggest challenges facing the LGBTQ+ community?
5. *Have you found it harder to transition since the 2016 election? Do you think your support base has understood it's more important now?*
6. *What is the best portrayal of Transgender persons in the movies or documentaries?*

Any unasked questions were unasked only due to time shortage.

**Appendix E: Post Event Survey**

Thank you for participating in the Fear of the Unknown Workshop. This post-event evaluation is being conducted as part of a student research capstone. The purpose of this evaluation is to gain your thoughts and opinions on the workshop. This evaluation should take no more than 5 minutes to complete. Please **DO NOT** write your name on the evaluation and all answers provided will be kept confidential.

**First, please tell us your thoughts about the workshop:**

1. Overall, how would you rate this workshop?  
 Excellent                       Good                       Fair                       Poor

<i>As a result of this workshop...</i>	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
2. I have changed how I think about how opinions are formed.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. I have a better understanding of the impact of fear of the unknown on forming opinions.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4. I have considered how I have formed some of my own opinions.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5. I will consider how to be more thoughtful in forming my opinions.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6. I have thought more critically about how I might interact with transgendered individuals.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7. I will seek more information on transgender issues.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
8. I will engage in other, similar transgender (or LGBTQ+) awareness/educational events.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

9. What were the most valuable things you learned from today's event?

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10. What from today's event challenged you or challenged your previously held opinions?

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11. How could the workshop be improved?

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12. How were you feeling about this topic before you came in (before it started)? *Circle or mark one.*



13. How are you feeling about this topic now that it's over? *Circle or mark one.*



**Finally, please tell us a little bit about yourself:**

14. How do you identify? *Check all that apply.*

- LGBTQ+
- Ally
- Family member of LGBTQ+
- Curious person
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

15. How do you define your gender? *Check all that apply.*

- Male
- Female
- Non-binary / Third gender
- Prefer to self-describe: \_\_\_\_\_
- Prefer not to say

16. What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_



17. Which categories describe you? *Check all that apply.*

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Caucasian / White                           | <input type="checkbox"/> American Indian / Alaskan Native   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hispanic / Latino / Latina / Spanish Origin | <input type="checkbox"/> Middle Eastern / North African     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Black / African American                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Native Hawaiian / Pacific Islander |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Asian                                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Not listed:                        |
- 

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this post-event evaluation. Your responses will help our research and give us insight into developing and promoting future workshops.

**Appendix F: Poster Responses**

**Poster Prompt Responses** (! indicates # of identical responses)

*How do you form your opinions? Social media? Family/friends? News sources? Others?*

- Personal experience
- All of the above except social media
- Friends
- Family
- Media
- Friends, family, and my church
- My faith, family, and friends
- My community
- Social media and educational resources
- Family and friends but it's important to have your own opinions!
- Podcasts

*Gender...*

<i>Is...</i>	<i>Isn't...</i>
Freedom of expression	Only two things
Your choice//self-determined	A checkmark
Expression!	Identified by others
Socially constructed	Black and white
Fluid!	The same for everyone
How you feel	Controlled
Ever-changing	Your business
Cultural	Biological
Easy to change for clams	Always easy to identify with clothes on
A continuum	Always assigned at birth