Trans Youth of ATCI
An Exploration of Community Disempowerment

Trans Youth

[Affluent Town in Central Illinois](#)

11/25/2019

1. Community Narrative

The Trans Youth of ATCI are a small, but growing, community who came together based on their shared experiences of being trans-. Many have unsupportive parents and attend High School, which doesn't have student-centered policies in place. The formal and informal services in the local area are tailored for older populations, further disenfranchising this community. Primary community needs include school policies, education and development for High School teachers and administrators, and better access to medical services (which has the two-fold problem of requiring parental consent and having limited facilities). Further community needs include help with information seeking for trans- specific needs and better ways of sharing that information with the community.

2. Ethical Framework & Research Aims

I started this project with an ethical framework informed by feminist ethics and an ethic of care. I was particularly concerned with empathizing and being compassionate of the members of the Trans Youth community, and of being responsible to them, rather than familial or administrative structures in their lives.

This project is grounded in challenging problematic discourses related to gender identities, patriarchy, and youth disempowerment. Over the course of the project I included an empowerment framework, as described by social workers with LGBTQ+ youth[1].

My role in the project was to ask questions, gather data, learn, and propose actions, but not necessarily to enact or enable said actions. I made deliberate choices to center the Trans Youth community, which included *not* seeking the perspectives of school administrators, community leaders, or health care officials. My intention was to mimic information seeking and outreach behavior of youth I marginalized positions, who may or may not seek information directly from adults in positions of power.

3. Methods

- Data Collection
  - Interview with Community Member
  - Website, Document Scraping
- Data Analysis
  - Community Components
    - Diversity of the local and larger communities
    - Communication tools of administrative forces
    - Capacity for organizing
  - Community Sector
    - Regulatory Environment of High School
    - Regulatory Environment of ATCI
    - Regulatory Environment of Tazewell County

4. Preliminary Findings

HARASSMENT

Harassment includes, but is not limited to race, color, nationality, sex, sexual orientation, ancestry, age, religion, creed, physical or mental disability, gender identity, order of protection status, status of being homeless, or actual or potential marital or parental status, including pregnancy, or other protected group status. All students, employees, and other members of the school community are expected to avoid any behavior or conduct toward any person who could be interpreted as harassment. Any student who feels that harassment has occurred should notify a Dean, nurse, counselor, Administrator, teacher, or school employee, and it will be handled in a confidential manner.

Figure 1. Screenshot of harassment section from ATCI High School Student Handbook, 2017-2018

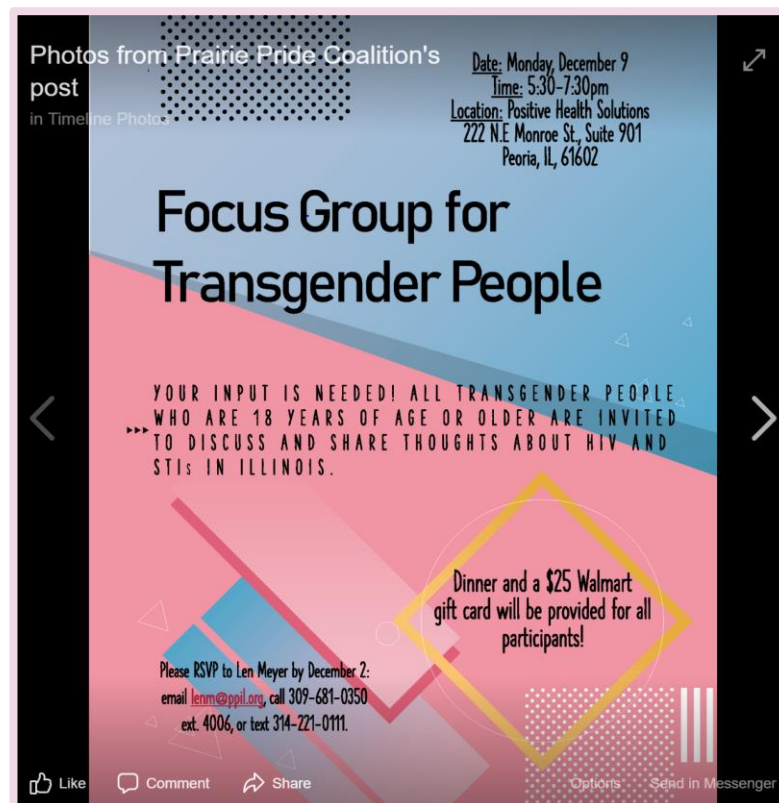**Figure 2. Screenshot of local health department website results for <transgender>**

Figure 3. Screenshot of local support group event, restricted to peoples 18+ years of age
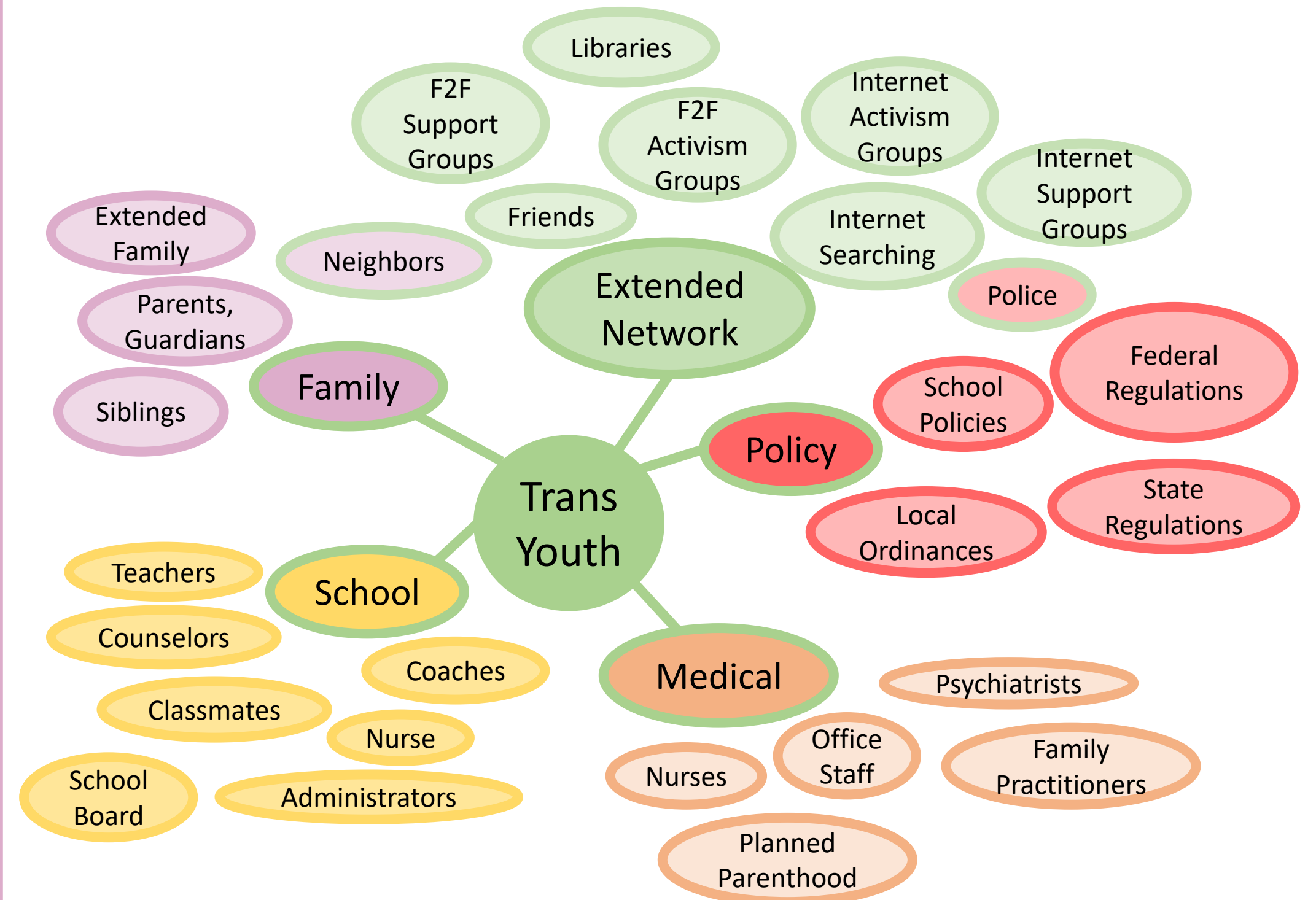
5. Stakeholder Network

Figure 4. Social, Regulatory, and Structural Network of ATCI Trans Youth

6. Concluding Thoughts

The Trans Youth of ATCI community suffers from an agency and permanence problem. Most community members are minors and legally beholden to parents and other administrative structures. Upon receipt of legal agency, many leave the area. This presents a community memory problem as knowledge of allies and workarounds goes with them when they leave. The expected severance of relationships upon High School graduation further cuts off community members from each other. Finally, the ephemeral potential of the Trans Youth community organized by my interviewee is very real – should another community member not 'step into his shoes,' as it were, when he graduates, then those he leaves behind may have to start over. This transitional nature of student communities based in schools coupled with a societal disenfranchisement of minors is highly problematic for marginalized communities. The policy and regulatory environments in which High School, ATCI, and Tazewell County operate are equally disempowering to Trans Youth.

Limits: This report grew out of a conversation with one member of the Trans Youth of ATCI community. Though Zach is a key stakeholder in the community, I did not seek to corroborate his observations with adult stakeholders. This was an intentional choice, to center Youth narratives above those of teachers, parents, administrators, counselors, and other adults who might support or block community efforts. As such, it represents a limitation of the study. Further, the study is limited in terms of access to the community, as Zach was the only legal adult available.

7. References & Further Reading

1. Dentato, Michael P., Shelley L. Craig, and Mark S. Smith. "The vital role of social workers in community partnerships: The Alliance for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning Youth." *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal, 27*(2010): 323-334.
2. http://www.dph.illinois.gov/sites/default/files/publications/2-15-17-OHP-HIV-factsheet-Transgender.pdf
3. Descriptors such as LGBT, trans-, and queer hold different meanings to different groups and have historical significance. In this project, I use the terms proffered by the community. Detailed definitions of the politicization and history of terms are beyond the scope of this project. See Susan Stryker's *Transgender History* for more information.

❤ ~49,750 transgender adults in Illinois[2]

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#trans #transpride #youthrights #pronounsmatter #wontbeerased
#transgenderdayofrememberance #transgenderawareness

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