

Research Process and Scholarly Growth Essay

Last year I met a boy at an art show. He was funny, liked all the same things I did, and most importantly, he didn't care that I'm trans. In fact, he said he had dated a trans guy before me. As time went on I realized he had preconceptions about my body that made me feel objectified and that my mere being was inferior to cis people. My experience dating him has stuck with me.

This term I took Intro to Queer Studies – my introduction to queer scholarly work. Hearing from those who have had similar experiences was eye opening. “My Words to Victor Frankenstein” by Susan Stryker was a particularly enlightening essay and beneficial to developing my own ideas. In it she describes the hurtful misinterpretations of the trans body that seem to be embedded in our culture. For the first time I felt like my own experiences were being reflected in the topics I was learning about. For my final research project, I took my personal experience and expanded on it. Specifically, I decided to focus on representations of sex and consent in relationships between cis and trans people. This was a difficult topic to research that changed drastically from start to finish. There is a huge gap in research on trans men. Often, when something is written about trans men, it is about why we are bad or somehow wrong. For example, while I was analyzing a case study on gender fraud, I was having to piece the case together. The sources I had were written from a deeply transphobic perspective, forcing me to try to write about the situation in a different light. I was able to refine my question naturally as I continued to develop my research.

I used the library catalog to find the majority of my sources. I started with the book *Stone Butch Blues* by Leslie Feinberg, as I wanted to focus on a particular controversial sex scene that matched well with my theme. I then met with my queer studies professor to get

recommendations for texts that could expand upon the scene. During our initial meeting, they showed me how to search the catalog in a way that produced topical sources. My primary method was using keywords and then putting them in quotation marks. For example, after researching a bit on the trans panic defense, I wanted to find more sources on legal strategies that work against trans men, but I was having a difficult time. I used various keywords, but they weren't yielding anything beneficial. Finally I searched "consent" + "trans man stealth," which yielded valuable resources and I was able to citation chase from there. I primarily used the databases Wiley Online Library and Sage Journals. In the end selecting the appropriate library resources made all the difference in my research.

After I gathered my sources, I realized the traditional mode of evaluating academic research was not often applicable to queer scholarship. A lot of queer scholars are not considered scholars throughout academia, but this does not diminish their credibility. Many queer scholars are considered activists first and academics second. That is, when you experience intense oppression – as many queer people do – it is impossible to not be an activist. For a lot of queer people, simply existing and navigating everyday life is an act of resistance. Additionally, a lot of queer scholarship is based on personal narratives, it is not objective like many other fields of study. While evaluating sources in class, we would take people at their word and try to understand what their specific situation could teach us about queerness and transness. This new metric of ethos helped me determine if sources were trustworthy. For example, I wanted to use *Stone Butch Blues* because Leslie Feinberg had an enormous impact on the queer community and queer history. Afterall, they are often cited for coining the term transgender. *Stone Butch Blues* specifically has a highly debated sex scene that was very relevant to my thesis. Even though it was a fictionalized story, it was rooted in Feinberg's life. Additionally, while it was written in

first person, there was a large cast of characters that encompassed a time period and a specific group of people, allowing Feinberg to explore many prevalent queer issues. For sources that did take a more academic approach, I used a more traditional metric of verifying trustworthiness. For example, I used “Deceptive Sex” by Alex Sharpe to back up quite a few of my arguments. I had never heard of Sharpe before, but upon looking into their background, I found they are a professor of law and have published books and essays on sex and consent as it pertains to the law. This fit perfectly with my own research project as I viewed controversial representations of consent using a legal analytical framework. Overall, I had to evaluate and analyze my sources in different ways, allowing me to properly incorporate them in my research.

Figuring these things out was a very new process for me. I transferred to UO this past fall term, so everything still feels very new. As I started to explore what the library had to offer, the tutorials were very helpful. During the beginning of my project, I watched online tutorials that my professor had linked in the overview of the research assignment. Specifically, the tutorial *Using Your LibrarySearch Account and WorldCat!* was helpful for getting started, as even the very basics of searching the library catalog was new to me. While I wasn’t able to attend an event like a library workshop, nor did any librarian present to our class, my professor provided ample help with navigating the library catalog. Originally, I resorted to just checking out books, but my professor showed me databases that I had access to through the library that provided far more relevant information than any book I could’ve checked out. Consulting the proper library research tools was a crucial step in my process.

However, I still thought there would have been far more adequate research, as a lot of the readings we did in class were about masculine presenting lesbians and trans women, two groups who have faced a lot of discrimination based on gender presentation. The prevalence of literature

like this led me to believe it would be far easier finding research pertaining to the trans masculine experience. I found some resources that mentioned cases of gender fraud in passing, but did not go in depth into the cultural circumstances these cases arose from or the actual narrative of the trans person they affected. I knew I wanted to analyze case studies using a combination of various theoretical frameworks, but there were no case studies of gender fraud. As a result, I compiled news reports on the case of Carlos Delecruz, the name I saw most frequently in conjunction with gender fraud. However, the news reports were written from a deeply transphobic standpoint. In particular, the report “Ruined My Life” from the *Scottish Sun* incorporated interviews from the complainant, consistently demeaning the trans defendant. At surface level, it was easy to see Delecruz as the villain. With my own analytical framework, I was able to piece together the case of Delecruz in a way that explained his experience from a trans perspective. Not only did gaps in research create challenges, but the experiences that were being documented were extremely dehumanizing and demeaning.

After doing this research project, I realized how frustrating it is to get in depth literature about the trans experience, not only as a student and academic, but also as a trans person myself. My academic goal is to try to fill in these gaps and correct misinformation about the trans experience. I know how lonely and isolating it is a trans person, especially as a young trans person coming out into an unwelcoming community. Correcting the rhetoric spread about transness might make the next generation of young trans people feel a little less lonely. As for my professional goals, I want to get my Master’s of Library and Information Science and eventually become a librarian, so the spread of correct, accessible information is extremely important to me. With that being said, I think that it is nearly impossible to separate my academic, professional, and personal life. The common feminist slogan “the personal is the

political” comes to mind. As a student of Anthropology and Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, politics is a key part of all my courses. My transness is an inherently political piece of my identity, so it will always be a part of my academic and professional growth and will always make itself known in my goals. If anything, this research project has shown me how my goals are necessary.