Trans Adults' Experiences of Oppression and Resistance

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

The word 'transgender' has been used as a broad umbrella term to describe individuals who step outside of their assigned birth gender and the roles associated with it (Serano, 2007). Trans individuals and their families are subject to multiple forms of oppression due to the discrimination that is often directed at those who express their gender in ways that differ from United States' society's expectations (Lev, 2004). This oppression is present in all areas of society, including the political, social, economic, educational, medical, and mental health spheres.

There is limited literature that addresses the challenges that trans individuals and their families face. Biblarz and Savci (2010) stated that "academic research on trans people and their family relationships is almost nonexistent" (p. 489). Much of the literature that does exist comes from a pathologizing perspective of trying to discover the ontology of trans existence, often blaming parents and other family members, as opposed to a strengths-based perspective of trans individuals and their families (Emerson & Rosenfeld, 1996). Although there is a lack of literature that focuses on the resiliency and resistance of the trans community, this perspective is important to understand trans identity and experiences further (Mizock & Lewis, 2008).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the resistance strategies that trans individuals utilize when met with adversity and the ways that trans individuals see their trans identity as providing them with a form of strength and resiliency. Trans individuals are often analyzed from a pathologizing lens within the sociological and psychological literature (Emerson & Rosenfeld, 1996). I wish to investigate the ways that trans individuals are currently pushing back against the

oppressive forces that they encounter every day in hopes of increasing awareness of trans

individuals' resiliency and strength within the sociological and psychological fields.

Research Questions

I developed my research questions by consulting the previous literature on trans

individuals and their families, resilience, strength and resistance, and drawing on my own

experience working and volunteering within the trans community. As the purpose of this study is

to amplify the voices of trans individuals and highlight their resistance strategies, I have

developed the following research questions:

1. How do trans adults report their experiences of oppression?

2. How do trans adults report their resistance to this oppression?

3. How do trans adults see their trans identity as providing them with a source

of strength and resilience?

4. How do trans adults see their interconnecting identities, such as race and

class, as impacting their experiences as trans individuals?

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Gender has been defined by Devor (1998) as how one experiences being a woman or a man. This definition of gender showcases the binary of system of gender and sex that is widely accepted in our society- the belief that there are only two genders and that those two genders correspond to the existence of only two biological sexes (Cashore & Tuason, 2009). Biological sex can be thought of as the biological or anatomical structure of one's reproductive organs, sex chromosomes and hormones (Greenberg, 2006). Although biological sex is often seen as encompassing only a male sex or a female sex, a spectrum of biological sex that includes a wide variety of reproductive anatomical structures and sex chromosomes is more accurate (Currah, 2006).

Traditionally, gender has been thought to encompass the social, biological and psychological experiences of being male or female and is assigned to individuals at birth based on their perceived biological sex (Hausman, 2001). However, evidence of gender variance and non-conformity outside of the dichotomies of 'male' and 'female' spans throughout history and culture (Green, 1998). Gender identity has been defined as the "innate sense of being a man, woman, or other gender such as trans" by Martin and Yonkin (2006, p. 109). Gender expression is the portrayal of one's gender to the outside world and may or may not be in line with one's gender identity (Brown & Rounsley, 1996; Israel, 2004).

Trans Identity

Language

Those who identify as 'cisgender' (also sometimes referred to as 'cissexual') feel that the gender assigned to them at birth matches their gender identity and expression, whereas those who identify as 'transgender' step outside of their assigned birth gender and the roles associated

with it (Serano, 2007). 'Transgender' has been identified as a general umbrella term used to describe gender-variant people, encompassing a variety of identities of individuals who do not subscribe to culturally-defined gender identities and expressions (Gange & Tewksbury, 1999). Recently, the term 'trans' has also become a central umbrella term, chosen for its impartiality (Martin & Yonkin, 2006). Currah, Juang, and Minter (2006) point out that 'trans' also connotes a political identity as well as a social identity. The language that surrounds trans identity and the trans community is in constant flux, with little standardization of terms, possibly due to the outside influence of the medical and political systems on language (Martin & Yonkin, 2006).

Individuals who identify under the umbrella term of 'transgender' can claim this identity in a variety of ways (Currah et al., 2006). For example, some trans individuals identify within the binary system of gender (e.g., identifying as 'male' or 'female' and/or identifying as 'transsexual'), whereas some identify outside of the binary system of gender (e.g., identifying as 'gender non-conforming,' 'genderqueer,' 'gender fluid,' 'gender-variant,' 'gender-different,' 'bi-gender,' or 'multi-gendered,' among other terms) (Cashore & Tuason, 2009). Among individuals who identify within the binary system of gender, the terms 'male-to-female' (MTF), 'affirmed woman' and 'trans woman' are used for someone who was assigned the gender of male at birth, but identifies as female, whereas 'female-to-male' (FTM), 'affirmed male' and 'trans man' are terms for someone who identifies as male but was assigned the gender of female at birth. However, the terms 'FTM' and 'MTF' are decreasing in frequency of use in the trans community because of the emphasis that they place on one's assigned birth gender, as opposed to the experienced gender identity of that person.

Transitioning

The term 'transition' refers to the process of bringing one's gender identity and internal

experience of gender in line with one's expression and outside portrayal of gender (Martin &

Yonkin, 2006). Although this may include medical and/or physical interventions such as

hormone replacement therapies, sex reassignment surgeries, or cosmetic surgeries, transition

does not necessarily include medical avenues. Social avenues of transitioning include going by a

preferred name or pronoun and requesting that others call one by said pronoun, dressing in

preferred-gender clothing, and changing speech patterns and tones (Human Rights Campaign,

2010a). Despite the social avenues available for transitioning, the medical and political systems

have enacted policies that make medical transition a requirement for the ability to change gender

identity on official records and pieces of identification (Spade, 2008). These requirements have

effectively policed the trans community, creating a hierarchy of trans identities by establishing

who outsiders believe are 'trans enough' to transition (Biblarz & Savci, 2010).

The Trans Liberation Movement

The LGBT Movement and the Trans Community

Gender identity is separate from sexual orientation; therefore, trans individuals can

identity as a variety of sexualities, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, or straight (Lev,

2010). The LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) movement has been purported to be the

historical political and social force for individuals who have variant sexual orientations and/or

gender identities or expressions. However, until the 1990s, when trans rights activists began to

lobby lesbian, gay, and bisexual organizations for trans inclusion, most organizations had thus

far excluded trans issues from their mission statement. There are multiple reasons for this

exclusion, including the relatively small number of trans individuals within the LGBT movement

as compared to cisgender individuals, as well as the belief that trans individuals and issues do not

fit into the LBGT rights movement, which is often centered on gay and lesbian issues (e.g.,

marriage equality, LGBT adoption, etc.) (Feinberg, 1996).

Although the acronym of LGBT has served important and vital purposes, it also often works to conflate the very specific and distinct identities and needs of each of these populations, particularly among outsiders of the community (Lev, 2010). Weiss (2003) states that "the very creation of the 'GLBT' acronym suggests that gay and lesbian and bisexual and transgender are each clearly defined, separate, and mutually exclusive categories" (p. 29). However, as trans individuals identify across a variety of sexual orientations, they may fit into multiple communities within the LGBT movement. In addition, trans issues have been historically marginalized within the LGBT community, with many cisgender lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals doubting the importance of trans inclusion within the movement and some not understanding the specific concerns and issues of trans individuals (Stone, 2006).

In Stone's (2006) interviews of cisgender gay, lesbian, bisexual and queer activists about trans issues, many reported being skeptical of trans inclusion within the LGBT movement, stating that they were unsure if trans individuals share the same experiences as cisgender gay and lesbian individuals. This skepticism has also manifested itself in exclusion in the political sphere. For example, in 2007, the Employee Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA), a bill that banned job discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans individuals, was proposed to the U.S. House of Representatives. However, major lesbian, gay, and bisexual rights organizations allowed the protection for gender identity and expression to be dropped before the eventual passage of the bill in order to gain political leverage, while the protection for sexual orientation was left in (Human Rights Campaign, 2010b). An amended version of the bill that includes protections for gender identity and expression is currently being debated in Congress, though it is unclear if there is enough support for the bill to pass.

However, recently many organizations and political groups across the United States have "added the T" to their work and mission, although actual trans inclusion within LGBT organization varies widely (Stone, 2006). Although there has been historic marginalization and isolation of trans rights within the LGBT community, lesbian, gay, and bisexual organizations are beginning to advocate for trans rights and to include trans voices within their work. This has been achieved by reframing the issue of discrimination away from pitting sexual orientation against gender identity and drawing attention back to the sexism that both identities actively encounter. Minter (2006) points out that transphobia and homophobia often intersect and that gender expression is the focal point of many homophobic actions. Expanding on this point, one queer-identified activist in Stone's (2006) study pointed to the commonalities that both trans and cisgender lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals experience by stating, "The people who get beat up on the street are not people that look like Ellen DeGeneres…They're the people who are crossing gender boundaries. Even if they're homosexual or heterosexual" (p. 12).

Defining the Trans Liberation Movement

Given the historic exclusion of trans issues within the LGBT movement, there was a need for a trans-specific movement to be created. The trans liberation movement was formed and created in the 1990's with the mission of destigmatizing all varieties of unconventional sex and gender expression and promoting gender education in order to win social acceptance for sex and gender variations (Feinberg, 1996). The trans liberation movement aims to combat the oppression that trans people routinely face and works to change both laws pertaining to trans individuals and the cultural assumptions surrounding gender and sex (Currah et al., 2006). The International Bill of Gender Rights, developed in 1993 by the International Conference on Transgender Law and Employment Policy, has become a central text that describes the mission

of much of the trans liberation effort (Currah et al., 2006). As described in the International Bill

of Gender Rights, trans activists work for the elimination of all transphobias, particularly those

that are institutionalized and systemic in nature (Feinberg, 1998).

Oppression, Resistance, and Resilience

Young (2000**)** identified five commonalities across different systems of oppression, such

as racism, sexism, classism, and heterosexism. The five faces of oppression include exploitation,

powerlessness, systemic violence, cultural imperialism and marginalization. These five faces of

oppression can be found within the oppressive system of cisgender privilege (also known as

cissexism), which Serano (2007) described as "the idea that transsexual genders are distinct

from, and less legitimate than, cissexual genders" (p. 162).

As part of the oppressive system of cissexism, trans individuals routinely face

discrimination within many facets of society. Discrimination directed at trans individuals

because of their gender identity or gender expression has been coined as 'transphobia.' Mizock

and Lewis (2008) defined transphobia as "prejudice, discrimination, and gender-related violence

due to negative attitudes toward transgender identity" (p. 335). Transphobia is ingrained in all

facets of society, including the economic, political, and social spheres.

In order to challenge transphobic actions, the trans liberation movement has utilized the

resilience and resistance of trans individuals and communities. Ungar, Less, Callaghan and

Boothroyd (2005) point to resilience as the individual, social and communal variables that allow

individuals who experience hardship to not just to overcome it, but to thrive in it. Although the

concept of resilience often comes from an individual perspective, the literature on resiliency has

recently begun to move away from describing the psychological makeup of the individual and

has started to discuss the interplay of the context and the individual, therefore allowing for

resiliency to be applied to communities and movements, such as the trans liberation movement

(Bottrell, 2009).

As the concept of resilience is being applied to how individuals and communities respond

in the aftermath of adverse circumstances, this hindsight-based approach can often miss

important strategies that individuals and communities implemented during the course of the

adversity. Because of this, understanding the strategies of resistance that individuals and

communities employ during oppression and hardship has recently been recognized as an

important factor in the development of resilience (Anderson & Danis, 2006). Individuals and

communities that are marginalized by oppressive systems such as sexism, racism, heterosexism

and cissexism resist that oppression in a variety of ways. For the purpose of this paper,

resistance will be defined as the ways that individuals and communities push back against

oppression and adversity. McDowell (2004) found that resistance to racism comes in multiple

forms, including withdrawing from oppressive experiences, relying on the support of others who

had gone through similar experiences, yielding to oppressive forces, making meaning through

oppressive experiences and situations, and challenging oppressive experiences by speaking out,

advocating for oneself, and expressing disagreement with others.

Oppressive Systems and Resistance

Although there is a lack of literature that focuses on the resiliency and resistance of the

trans community, this perspective is important in understanding the ways that trans people are

resisting transphobia and cissexism every day (Mizock & Lewis, 2008). Much of the current

literature on the trans liberation movement and trans identity comes from a pathologizing or

negative lens by focusing on the oppressive systems that trans individuals face without

highlighting the strength, perseverance and creativity that this community and political

movement already possesses. Despite the lack of literature, the trans liberation movement and trans individuals are resisting oppression and marginalization within in the economic, social, educational, medical, mental health and familial spheres in a variety of ways, including utilizing the resiliency of trans individuals and the community. Throughout the next section, I will describe both the oppression trans individuals face and resistance that they are utilizing in each of these spheres.

It is important to note that the social location of each trans individual can have an immeasurable effect on the force of oppression that one may face. Factors such as race, social class, sexual orientation, religious identity, and body size all influence the amount of adversity that a trans individual may be exposed to, as with other gender and sexual minorities (Ma'ayan, 2011). For example, African American trans respondents reported living in more than twice the rate of poverty than trans respondents of other races in a survey of 6,456 respondents (Grant, Mottet, Tanis, Harrison, Herman, & Keisling, 2011). Although the statistics within the following sections illuminate the average experiences of transgender individuals, these numbers may be much higher for certain segments of the transgender community.

Economic Sphere

Many trans individuals experience discrimination within the economic sphere. Hill and Willoughby (2005) found that many trans individuals experience housing discrimination, which may lead to increased rates of homelessness among trans individuals. Additionally, trans individuals often face employment discrimination. In a study of 402 trans individuals, as many as 37% reported unfair treatment within the work environment including disciplinary action and firing based on their gender identity (Lombardi, Wilchins, Priesing, & Malouf, 2001). In the United States there are no federal laws that prohibit discrimination based on gender identity and

expression and few state laws exist that protect trans individuals from unfair treatment within the work environment. Currently only sixteen states and the District of Columbia prohibit discrimination in the workplace based on gender identity or expression, including California, Colorado, Connecticut, Hawaii, Illinois, Iowa, Maine, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Washington (Human Rights Campaign, 2010c). This widespread mistreatment at work often leads to difficulty finding or keeping a job, with trans individuals reporting twice the rate of unemployment of cisgender individuals (Grant et al, 2011).

Resistance. Despite the few economic protections currently afforded to trans individuals, trans rights activists continue to lobby federal and statewide organizations and legislative bodies to include gender identity in employment non-discrimination laws (Currah, 2008). The persistence of these activists has been successful with four states (Connecticut, Hawaii, Massachusetts, and Nevada) passing gender identity-inclusive employment non-discrimination laws in 2011.

Personal Violence

Trans individuals are also subject to an increased risk of being the victims of violent crimes, with statistics of self-reported experience of crime suggesting that trans individuals are subject to more than twice the national rate of violence (Mizock & Lewis, 2008). In a survey of 402 trans individuals, 21% reported that they are survivors of sexual assault or attempted rape and 60% reported that they had experienced harassment (Lombardi et al., 2001). Eighty percent of a sample of trans women in Los Angeles reported experiencing some sort of verbal abuse, with 47% experiencing physical abuse (Reback, Simon, Bernis, & Gatson, 2001). The participants in the same study also reported strangers as the most common perpetrators of

violence. Trans women, specifically those who are not read as the gender that they experience (e.g., appearing as being cisgender to society), are the most common trans victims of violent crimes (Dean et al., 2000).

Because of the difficulties associated with finding a job, some trans individuals find work within the sex industry (Clements-Noelle, Wilkinson, Kitano, & Marx, 2001). As trans individuals are marginalized among sex workers, they often experience increased rates of violence and may earn the least amount of money for the most risky working conditions (Munson, 2006). Additionally, trans sex workers may be at risk for increased rates of both Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and HIV infections (Valera, Sawyer, & Schiraldi, 2001).

Resistance. In response to the increased risk for violence that trans individuals face, the trans community created the Transgender Day of Remembrance, a day set aside to remember and memorialize those trans individuals that were killed because of transphobic violence. The event was started 1998 as the Remembering Our Dead project and gives both trans people and allies a chance to come together and reflect on the impact of losing a loved one on the entire community (Transgender Day of Remembrance, 2007). The event, held during the month of November, is an example of the resistance of the trans community to the transphobic violence that many trans individuals experience.

Educational Sphere

Violence directed at trans individuals also occurs within the educational system. Trans adolescents experience discrimination and violence in school at higher level than cisgender lesbian, gay, or bisexual students, with nearly 90% of trans students experiencing verbal harassment at school in the past year (GLSEN, 2009). Within the same GLSEN report, 53% of trans students reported being physically harassed in school in the past year. Unsafe and

discriminatory school environments impact students' performance and attendance, with more than half of trans students that experience high levels of verbal and physical harassment reporting missing school for safety reasons (GLSEN, 2009). Past experiences of harassment and violence in schools are also related to an increased rate of substance use, with 35% of trans participants who had experienced school violence or harassment because of their gender identity reporting that they used alcohol or drugs to cope with the effects of discrimination, compared to 21% of those who had not experienced harassment (Grant et al., 2010).

Students who experience harassment and bullying at school have higher rates of both depression and suicide attempts, with more than half of trans students who had been harassed or assaulted while in school reporting having attempted suicide (Grant et al., 2010). An increased risk for suicide ideation and attempts extends into adulthood for trans individuals, with as many of 64% of trans individuals reporting past suicidal ideation (Xavier et al., 2004). Clements-Nolle, Marx, Guzman, & Katz (2001) found 32% of trans individuals reporting past suicide attempts in a survey of 515 participants.

Resistance. Trans youth have resisted bullying and harassment by finding and forming community within their schools. Many trans youth report that participation in Gay Straight Alliances (GSAs) or other LGBT youth-oriented groups improves the school climate for them (McGuire, Anderson, Toomey, & Russell, 2010). Trans students attend GSAs more frequently than cisgender lesbian, gay, or bisexual students, suggesting that GSAs may offer critical support to trans youth (GLSEN, 2007). Trans youth have also resisted harassment and bullying by seeking out alternative school options that they feel offer a safer and more accepting environment (McGuire et al., 2010).

Medical System

Trans individuals often experience discrimination when attempting to access medical services. Xavier (2000) found that 47% of respondents of a survey of 252 trans individuals did not have any health insurance, both because of trans identity qualifying as a pre-existing condition and due to the economic realities that many trans individuals face where they are not able to afford health insurance. Trans individuals are susceptible to being denied medical services because of their trans status, with Grant et al. (2010) finding that 19% had been refused health care due to their gender identity. In another study, 26% of the trans participants reported being denied health care based on their gender identity (Kenagy, 2005). Another impediment to medical care is the reaction of medical staff to one's trans status with 28% of respondents reporting being harassed in medical settings and 2% reporting being the victims of violence within doctor's offices (Grant et al., 2010).

Even when overt harassment is not present, quality and educated medical care about trans issues may be difficult to locate. Fifty percent of trans respondents reported having to teach their medical providers about health care issues specific to trans individuals (Grant et al., 2010). Additional studies have documented a transphobic atmosphere within medical settings, including discriminatory intake forms and the use of offensive statements made by medical personnel (GLBT Health Access Project, 2000).

Resistance. Because of the difficulties that trans people often face when trying to access resources such as health care, the trans community has demonstrated many nuanced and creative ways to find quality medical services. The GLBT Health Access Project (2000) found that some trans individuals used techniques such as offering educational videos to their health care providers and coming together with other trans individuals to share ways to circumvent the

insurance system. "We don't have to just be experts on transsexuality; we have to be experts on the health care system," one trans male participant stated (p. 21).

Mental Health System

In addition to the discrimination that trans individuals face within the health care system, the mental health field has had a historically marginalizing relationship with the trans community. The diagnosis of Gender Identity Disorder (GID) was added to the third edition of the Diagnostic and Statistics Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-III) in 1980. Through the criteria for Gender Identity Disorder, all gender-variant people are labeled as "disordered," leaving no room for trans individuals who are satisfied with their gender identity (Lev, 2005). Because of the disorder's pathologizing nature, many trans activists advocate for its removal from future editions of the DSM (Lev, 2005; Winters, 2005).

Although the mental health system has traditionally enforced a negative view of trans identity, therapy still plays an important role for many trans individuals. Therapy is often required as part of a medical or surgical transition and many trans people seek out therapy for issues unrelated to their trans status, and thus, the removal of the diagnosis of Gender Identity Disorder is complex. In Grant et al.'s (2010) survey of 6,450 trans individuals, 75% of the respondents reported that they had received therapy specific to their gender identity, with 14% hoping to receive it someday and only 11% stating that they did not want therapy.

Although many trans individuals have found therapy useful, it is often difficult to find mental health professionals that are knowledgeable about trans-specific issues. Benson (2009) found that many trans clients felt that there were not enough informed and experienced mental health professionals in the area of gender identity and expression. Additionally, many mental health professionals do not feel that they have received adequate training on issues of gender

identity (Benson, 2009).

Resistance. Trans rights activists have continued to lobby for changes to the current diagnosis of Gender Identity Disorder as the DSM-V will be released to the mental health community in May of 2013 (Lev, 2005; Winters, 2005). Although the pathologization of trans individuals was not completely removed from the updated version of the DSM, Gender Identity Disorder is no longer a diagnosis, instead being replaced by Gender Incongruence, which will no longer imply that trans identity itself is disordered (World Professional Association for Transgender Health, 2010).

Trans Identity in the Family System

There is limited literature addressing the challenges that trans individuals and their families face. Biblarz and Savci (2010) have stated that "academic research on trans people and their family relationships is almost nonexistent" (p. 489). Additionally, Lev (2004) found that this holds even within the family studies literature, where she states that "while lesbian and gay family studies….and alternative family dynamics have been analyzed within a family systems frame, transgenderism has been virtually ignored" (p. 271-272). Additionally, much of the literature that does exist comes from a pathologizing perspective of trying to discover the "cause" of trans existence, often blaming parents and other family members (Emerson & Rosenfeld, 1996). However, some trans-affirmative literature has recently surfaced, attempting to discuss the issues and challenges that families with trans member(s) often face (Emerson and Rosenfeld, 1996; Lev, 2004; Vanderburgh, 2008).

Parents and Trans Children

Most of the non-pathologizing literature on trans individuals and their families centers on parent relationships with children who identify as trans or express their gender identity in gender

non-conforming ways (Benson, 2009; Grossman, D'Augelli, Howell, & Hubbard, 2005). Parents

of gender-variant children may experience guilt, grief, and a lack of understanding when they

become aware of a child's atypical gender identity due to the stigmatization and lack of

education and representation surrounding trans individuals (Benson, 2009). The distress that

many parents of trans individuals experience about their child's gender identity often translates

to an unsupportive environment, leading to trans children and youth not receiving adequate

support and often being subject to family rejection, abuse, and isolation (Burgess, 1999). Trans

youth may be reluctant to disclose their gender identity to their family because they fear physical

abuse, rejection, or being forced out of their home, resulting in a diminished support system

(Burgess, 1999).

 Emerson and Rosenfeld (1996) proposed an adapted model of the stages of grief for

families adjusting to a family member's gender identity that includes five stages: denial, anger,

bargaining, depression, and acceptance. In parents, the feelings of denial and anger may

manifest themselves in a negative reaction towards their child's gender identity. The majority of

trans youth initially face negative reactions from their parents regarding their gender identity and

expression (Grossman, D'Augelli, & Salter, 2006). A study of 20 trans women of color found

that 40% had experienced hostile and aggressive reactions from their family after disclosing their

trans status (Koken, Bimbi, & Parsons, 2009). As indicated by the prevalence of initial negative

reactions, many parents may try to change their child's gender expression in order to lessen any

discrimination and isolation that they fear their child may face (Lev, 2004). Grossman,

D'Augelli, and Salter (2006) found that 75% of the parents of trans girls and 65% of the parents

of trans boys told their children to stop engaging in stereotypically "cross-gendered" activities.

As part of these negative initial reactions, parents often seek out treatment for a child who is

displaying "cross-gendered" gender identity development in order to "prevent" same sex

attraction, as sexual orientation and gender identity are often conflated in society (Vanderburgh,

2008).

   Resistance. In Emerson and Rosenfeld's (1996) proposed model, the acceptance stage

serves a crucial function of support for many trans youth. Resiliency of parents, siblings, and

other family members is linked to better outcomes for trans youth. Trans children who have

supportive family members, especially parents, have a decreased risk for depression and suicide

(Nuttbrock, Rosenblum, & Blumenstein, 2002). Additionally, trans adults who had accepting

families had decreased rates of homelessness, incarceration, suicide, work in the sex industry,

and drug and alcohol addiction (Grant et al., 2011). The trans women of color in Koken, Bimbi,

and Parson's (2009) study stated that familial support was an important source of strength and

provided them with a "buffer zone" from other transphobic reactions (p. 856). Participants in the

same study stated that seemingly small gestures by their family members, such as giving gifts of

clothing or jewelry that indicated an acceptance of their gender identity, were especially

meaningful actions.

   In addition to increased positive outcomes for many trans individuals due to the

acceptance of family members, many family members also have positive feelings about raising a

trans child. Wren (2002) found that some parents of trans children admired their child's bravery

and courage for resisting transphobia from outside sources. "He's far braver, he's far stronger,

I'm just amazingly, outstandingly impressed that I managed to produce this child…," one mother

stated (p. 386). Parents in the same study expressed feeling proud that their commitment to non-

sexist parenting styles was reflected in their child's non-conforming gender identity and

expression. This is in sharp contrast to much of the literature that blames parents and their

parenting styles for having a trans child, showing that many parents resist the pathologization of a trans identity (Koken, Bimbi, & Parsons, 2009).

Sibling Subsystem

There is almost no literature addressing sibling relationships and interactions with a trans family member. Factor and Rothblum (2007) found that trans individuals perceive that they have less social support from their families than do their cisgender siblings do. However, Toomey and Richardson (2009) found that siblings, particularly sisters, were among the first family members that sexual minority youth came out to in a study that included 27% of the 56 participants identifying as trans or queer, suggesting the important role that cisgender siblings play in the coming out process.

Families of Choice

Israel (2005) identified three different familial configurations for trans individuals: isolated or cut-off families that reject the trans family member, supportive families who accept the trans family member, and families of choice (a term that refers to the non-biological community that many LGBT individuals create for themselves)**.** Families of choice can be an important source of strength for many trans individuals. Gagne and Tewksbury (1998) reported that many of the 65 trans females in their study that were not supported by their families had created families of choice. Lombardi (1999) reported that trans people who counted a higher number of trans individuals among their close friends had fewer depressive symptoms than those who counted lower proportions of trans people in their inner circle, stressing the importance of community.

Couple Subsystem

In addition to the lack of literature that addresses trans individuals in the sibling

subsystems, there are also few research studies that address the complexities of trans individuals

in couple and parental subsystems (Benson, 2009; Lev, 2004). Factor and Rothblum (2007)

found that a smaller percentage of trans individuals were in long-term relationships compared to

their cisgender siblings in a sample of 295 participants, pointing to the transphobia many trans

individuals encounter within intimate relationships. When an individual discloses trans status

within an already formed relationship and goes through the process of transitioning, many

partners initially struggle with understanding and accepting their partner's gender identity and

expression (Benson, 2009). Israel (2004) found that the disclosure of trans identity, both in the

private and public spheres, the starting of hormones, and the preparation and undergoing of

surgeries were among some of the actions that have the most destabilizing effects on partnerships

that consisted of one trans individual (as opposed to partnerships where both partners identify as

trans).

Many cisgender lesbian, gay, and bisexual partners experience initial confusion and

discomfort surrounding their sexual orientation as they move from a visible non-heterosexual

partnership to a partnership that appears heterosexual to outsiders (Joslin-Roher & Wheeler,

2009). Lesbian and bisexual partners of trans males reported encountering hostility from some

members of the lesbian community who felt that it compromised the partner's lesbian or bisexual

identity to partner with a trans man (Joslin-Roher & Wheeler, 2009). In contrast, partners who

identify as heterosexual may also begin to question their sexual orientation as they come to

understand their now gay, lesbian, or queer partnership within the context of their partner's

gender identity.

Resistance. Many couples also find that one partner's coming out and transition had

positive effects on their relationship. Joslin-Roher and Wheeler (2009) found in their sample of

nine partners that when a trans partner's transition led to increased confidence and satisfaction with their bodies, it positively impacted their partnership's sexual relationship. Participants in the same study also reported that being able to create a supportive environment for their partner and being part of the joy that their partner experienced after their transition also increased their sense of satisfaction with the relationship. Similarly, for a couple with a partner that is transitioning, Israel (2004) states that the time it takes to plan and complete a transition can provide partners with an opportunity to safeguard each other's well-being. In addition, in partnerships where one partner already identifies as trans, the transition of the other partner may lead to an increased sense of understanding and connection (Joslin-Roher & Wheeler, 2009).

Parental Subsystem

Children are also a source of potential strength and challenge for trans individuals. Parents who identity as trans face harassment and hostility from outside forces because of stereotypes and myths about trans identity and its effect on parenting (Cromwell, 1999; Israel, 2004). In addition to non-acceptance from outside forces, many trans parents worry about disclosing their gender identity to their children and fear negative reactions (Benson, 2009). However, children have been shown to be mostly supportive of a parent's transition (White & Ettner, 2004). Participants in Benson's (2009) study discussed the importance of how they disclosed their gender identity to their children, with some enlisting the help of professionals or providing their children with age-appropriate information about trans identity. Many participants expressed the positive impact of having accepting children, with one trans woman stating that her children were her "two main allies" (p. 68).

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Conclusion

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In conclusion, trans individuals, as well as the trans community, are resisting transphobia

and cissexism in a variety of resilient, creative and nuanced ways. It is essential to focus on the

resources that this community already possesses in order to prevent any further pathologizing of

trans identities by solely focusing on the struggles that many trans individuals face. With an

understanding of the literature surrounding the oppressions that trans individuals face in multiple

areas of society, including within the economic, social, educational, medical, and familial

spheres, I wish to continue to look at the ways that trans people have resisted these oppressions.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Epistemology

Queer theory.

In this study, I use critical ethnography with a queer epistemological lens in order to situate my research questions about the experiences of trans adults. Recently, the term 'queer' has moved from a pejorative to symbolize a new identity category within the LGBT community and a catch-all word for those who resist traditional ways of identifying their sexual orientation and/or gender identity within popular culture. However, 'queerness' within the academic and theoretical framework is distinct from the common meanings within society and has been operationalized by Alexander (2008) as "a collective of intellectual speculations and challenges to the social and political constructions of sexualized and gender identity" (p. 108). Queerness in the theoretical sense moves beyond describing non-heterosexuality or non-cisgenderness to capturing the resistance of those who are non-normative and understanding alternative ways of being and experiencing the world. It is considered a post-structural concept, one that decries any idea of a set or fixed Truth, and a mixture of both political and personal movements and experiences (Dilley, 1999). Queer theory is built upon Derrida's (1965) theory of deconstruction as it is applied to gender- that what society has assumed about sexual orientation, bodies and gender is not Truth transcendent, but instead is "dependent upon other small-t truths, and that it is culturally constructed" (Wilchins, 2004, p. 44).

Queer theory emerged in the 1990s as a distinct discipline rooted in political activism, feminism, and gay and lesbian studies (herising, 2005). As opposed to these previous theoretical foundations that favor identities in order to cultivate power within the political and cultural spheres, queer theory is centered on eschewing socially constructed and maintained identity

categories and binaries- including those upon which identity politics' movements were built on such as race, gender, and sexual orientation (Bulter, 1990; Wilchins, 2004). For example, the mainstream feminist movement has been critiqued by queer theorists for reifying the gender binary by essentializing the nature of women and men as separate and concrete entities. Therefore, there is a tension between the post-structualist concept of queer theory and the constructionist concepts that it was uprooted from, such as feminism and gay and lesbian studies (Lovaas, Elia, & Yep, 2006).

Queer theory is about the idea of "doing" gender, or what Butler gets at when she describes gender as performativity produced (Bulter, 1990; Wilchins, 2004). "Doing" gender puts gender into an active verb; it reminds us that gender is constructed and constituted by the ways that we act- in how we dress, walk, speak, and present ourselves. However, this post-structural concept of 'doing' gender gets at the heart of another tension within queer theory. Particularly when considering trans individuals, social constructionism has been used within the academic literature in order to deny trans experiences on the premise that if gender is socially constructed, not only can trans experiences and identity not exist, but trans individuals are actively reifying the gender binary by stating that their assigned birth sex does not match the gender identity that they experience (e.g., Millot, 1991). Therefore, it is important when taking a post-structural position to emphasize that the existence of a social construct, such as gender, does not make the presence of the construct itself any less real.

Queer research.

Since queer theory surfaced in the 1990s, it has been used as an epistemological lens for research. Due to the nature of queer/ing, boundaries around what is "true queer research/scholarship" are difficult to be placed. Some scholars point to the subject or issue

studied as the main indicator of queer research. As queerness is about a fluid concept of identity, queer research is not about pinning down the participant to a single experience or identity, but instead about how that participant describes experiences and how the dominant discourses contribute to this experience (Chang, 2005). Queer research is post-normative in its form and acts to highlight, explain, and critique items that are taken for granted as stable within the social realm, such as binaries and dichotomies (Browne & Nash, 2010).

Dilley (1999) identified three tenets of queer research including the examination of experiences of those in the LGBTQ community, a juxtaposition of those experiences with the experiences of those who are straight/cisgender (or who society deems as "normal"), and an examination of how and why those individuals and groups' experiences are considered outside of the norm, all of which fit in with the idea that the subject of the research plays a role in queering it. Some scholars argue that the researcher herself plays an important role in queering the research. Dilly (1999) stated that queer theory was defined by the "queered perspectives of the researcher and the researched" (p. 461). Still other scholars refuse to define queer research, worrying that it "could promote a particular understating that simultaneously constitutes and destabilizes conventional research considerations" (Brown & Nash, 2010, p. 12).

Although queer research is difficult to describe, queer theory is being applied to research throughout academic fields. No inherent method or methodology has been established; that is, all, or almost all, methods can be queered to address and describe queer lives and experiences. However, even given this plethora of possibilities, queer research is often employed under a non-positivist framework. Given the boundary-less nature of the queer lens, where not everyone can be counted or coded into neat boxes of identity and experience, positivist research becomes difficult and perhaps illogical (Brown & Nash, 2010). In addition, queer methodologies typically

come from post-modern or post-structuralist lenses that are able to be flexible and bend the

notions of Truth (Nash, 2010).

Methodology

In this study, I used critical ethnography with a queer epistemological lens to highlight

the resistance experiences of trans adults. Ethnographers study individuals and groups in their

natural settings with the aim of capturing the meanings behind common activities within their

social context (Chang, 2005). Conventional ethnography has traditionally favored a value-free

approach to fieldwork, wherein researchers and their results were thought to be objective, as

based on the approach to research often taken by the natural sciences (Madison, 2005; Thomas

1993). Conventional ethnographers historically are not concerned with issues of power,

oppression, privilege or marginalization and therefore retain the status quo, rather than challenge

it (Thomas, 1993).

Critical ethnography, a branch of conventional ethnography using post-modern, Marxist

and feminist tenants, began to be used in the 1970's and the 1980's (Gordon, Holland, &

Lahelma, 2001). As this study is based within an exploration of the resistance experience of a

marginalized community, I chose to use a methodology which is based on an understanding of

power and a contribution to social justice (Madison, 2005; Thomas, 1993). As compared to

conventional ethnography, critical ethnography "takes us beneath surface appearances, disrupts

the *status quo*, and light[s] underlying and obscure operations of power and control" (Madison,

2005, p. 5). The idea of using research to challenge power and control is in contrast to

conventional ethnography, for Thomas (1993) states "Conventional ethnography describes what

is; critical ethnography asks what could be" (p. 4). Moreover, critical ethnography is built on the

tradition of highlighting the resistance experiences of those who are oppressed and marginalized,

which is particularly important for my subject matter. Thomas (1993) states that "critical researchers begin from a premise that all cultural life is in constant tension between control and resistance" (p. 9).

Critical ethnographers resist the idea that research can be value-free and are aware of their own positionality, taking responsibility for how their own power and privilege play into their ideas of the subjective. Madison (2005) states that "[the critical ethnographer] will use the resources, skills, and privileges available to her to make accessible- to penetrate the borders and break through the confines in defense of- the voices and experiences of subject whose stores are otherwise restrained and out of reach" (p. 5). In other words, the critical ethnographer is not only aware of her own privilege, she is actively using that privilege in order to amplify the voices of her participants who may otherwise go unheard. This is in contrast to conventional ethnography, where ethnographers speak *for* their subjects, as opposed to *on their behalf* (Thomas, 1993).

One methodology that shows promise to be utilized with a queer perspective is critical ethnography. Rooke (2010) states that "queer ethnography does more than use ethnography to research queer lives; it also takes queer theory seriously to question the conventions of the ethnographic research" (p. 25). Queer ethnography can be used to understand the researcher's aims, beliefs, epistemology and identity from a queered perspective (Jackman, 2010). Both critical ethnography and queer theory emphasize the importance of the self in research- being aware of one's positionality (Rooke, 2010; Thomas, 1993). Nash (2010) emphasizes the importance of queering the notions of insider/outsider status within queer research, as many queer researchers are members of the community that they are explaining and describing. Queer theory and critical ethnography work together well as there is overlap in their tenets, beyond addressing the researcher's identity and positionality. Both are used to explore and critique issues

of power, oppression, and privilege (Rooke, 2010; Thomas, 1993). Additionally both underscore the importance of having a social justice aim as an ending of research- to do more than just observe and describe something in society, but to actively make changes.

Method.

Participants

Participant recruitment.

Participants were eligible to participate in the study if they were 18 or over, available to complete a semi-structured interview and self-identified as trans, genderqueer, transgender, or any other identity generally considered under the "transgender umbrella" (as described in the literature review section). Participants were drawn from the Portland metropolitan area and were recruited through both purposive and snowball sampling. First, I used purposive sampling, in which the researcher samples individuals within their target population who she believes will yield the most information (Guarte & Barrios, 2006). As part of my sampling, I advertised in email form to several LGBTQ and trans organizations, containing general information about the study and the inclusion criteria. I used snowball sampling in order to ascertain if participants could recommend others that they thought may be interested in also participating. Participants were asked to contact me through email. I attempted to consider the multiple social locations of each potential participant, including social class, race, religion, sexual orientation and nation of origin, in order to ascertain a diverse participant sample and I continued recruiting participants until the point of saturation.

Participant consent.

This project was approved by the Human Subjects Review Committee in March of 2012. Once participants contacted me via email, I replied to them via email to explain the project and

schedule a time for a semi-structured interview. Prior to the beginning of the interview, I

obtained written informed consent. This process emphasized that participants were able to

withdraw from the study through the end of the semi-structured interview. Participants read the

consent form and decided if they desired to participate in the study. Because of the nature of the

study, I anticipated that participants may experience discomfort with the topics discussed and

therefore, all participants received contact information for mental health professionals and

agencies if they felt that they needed to contact anyone after the interview.

Participant demographics.

Twelve participants responded to my emails and all elected to be interviewed. Ages

ranged from 22 to 67, with the mean age at 40.75, the median age of 43, and the mode age of 25.

Six participants identified as female and one participant identified as a male. The final five

participants described their identities in a variety of ways indicating that they viewed themselves

as falling in between or outside of the binary, including "genderqueer dyke trans woman,"

"somewhere between cross dresser and genderqueer," and "androgynous but on the feminine

side." Nine participants identified as white, with one participant identifying as African

American, one participant identifying as part Native American, and one participant identifying as

a biracial identity with a Latin background. Eight participants did not affiliate themselves with

any organized religion or spirituality and identified as either an atheist or agnostic. The other

four participants identified as members of religious communities or identified as practicing

eclectic paganism.

Three participants came from a working class background, with the rest of the nine

participants identifying themselves in the middle class or upper middle class. Five participants

currently identified themselves as being in the working class, with six participants identifying as

middle class and one participant identifying as in the upper middle class. Participants categorized their sexual orientation in a number of ways. Three participants identified as heterosexual, whereas four participants identified as queer. Four participants identified as bisexual and one participant identified as a lesbian. Participants were asked how long along ago they transitioned, emphasizing for them to use that word in whatever way felt the most comfortable to them (socially and/or medically). The years since participants had transitioned ranged from seven years ago to currently transitioning, with the average time being four years ago. Three participants did not feel that the term "transition" was applicable to them since they had a more fluid gender identity.

Participant profiles.

Joel is a 22 year-old genderqueer individual who states that he "used to identify as female-to-male in the past." Joel is white and identifies as having a working class background. He currently identifies as working class and transitioned in 2011. Joel identifies his sexual orientation as queer.

Lindsay is a 45 year-old trans woman. She is white and comes from a working class background. Lindsay currently identifies as working class and transitioned in 2009. Lindsay identifies her sexual orientation as "falling along a heterosexual paradigm."

Sophia is a 67 year-old trans woman. She identifies as white and Native American and comes from a middle class background. She currently identifies as working class and transitioned in 2008. Sophia states that she believes she would be attracted to men, but is not interested in pursuing romantic or sexual relationships until she is comfortable with her body.

Margot is a 25-year old "genderqueer dyke trans woman…with essences of butch sometimes." She identifies as white and comes from an upper middle class background. She

currently identifies as lower middle class. Margot transitioned in 2007. She classifies her sexual orientation as "queer, dyke, lesbian."

Stacy is a forty-eight year old trans individual. She classifies her gender identity as, "somewhere between cross-dresser and genderqueer with a little of TS [transsexual] thrown in." Stacy uses different pronouns depending on how she is presenting, and was presenting "en femme" when we met. She identifies as white and bisexual. She both came from and currently identifies as middle class. Stacy does not find the concept of transitioning relevant to her situation, stating that she transitions all the time when she changes her gender presentation.

Elliott is a twenty-four year old white trans man. He identifies as both coming from and currently falling into a middle class background. Elliott identifies his sexual orientation as queer. He transitioned in 2007.

Stephanie is a forty-nine year old African American trans woman. She identifies as both coming from and currently falling into a working class background. Stephanie classifies her sexual orientation as bisexual. She transitioned in 2006.

Toni is a forty-two year old trans woman. She identifies as white with Latin ancestry. Toni identifies as coming from a middle class background and states that she currently falls within the working class. She classifies her sexual orientation as bisexual and transitioned in 2010.

Alexandria is a thirty-five year old trans woman. She identifies as white. Alexandria comes from a middle class background and also currently identifies as middle class. She was adopted. Alexandria began transitioning in 2010 and mostly presents as female during non-work hours. She identifies her sexual orientation as bisexual.

Sam is a twenty-two year old "XY individual who has an androgynous body as a result of

extra-genital stuff," and thinks of herself "as a more femme-ish person, or androgynous but on the femme-ish side a little bit." She identifies as white and classifies her sexual orientation as queer. Sam came from a working class background and now identifies as "lower, lower class." She does not find the word "transition" applicable to her situation as she is a more gender fluid individual.

Judith is a forty-four year old trans woman. She is white and identifies both her class background and current status as middle class. Judith classifies her sexual orientation as lesbian. She began transitioning in 2010 and considers herself still in the middle of transitioning.

Aaron/Erin is a sixty-three year old genderqueer individual. Erin spends about half her time in female presentation and half her time in male presentation. She uses male, female, or gender neutral pronouns, as well as using her name to reflect her current gender identity. Erin was presenting as female when we met, and will be referred to by she and her. She identifies as white and upper class. She came from a middle class background. She classifies her sexual orientation according to how she is presenting that day; as a lesbian when she presents as a female and as straight when she presents as male. The word transition does not apply to her situation.

Data Collection

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews have been pointed to as a preferable method of data collection when using critical ethnography as a methodology (Carspecken, 1996). Thomas (1993) suggests that critical ethnographers consider three concepts in the data collection and analysis process, including understanding one's own biases and challenging them, looking for covert questions and gaps in the information in order to probe deeper in the interview, and "deframiliarization,"

the process of interpreting the data through a lens that deconstructs power and inequality.

Keeping these three aspects of interviews in mind, I developed questions to guide me throughout

my interview process by utilizing primary literature, especially literature that considered the

concepts of resistance and resilience, literature on being an ally to trans individuals, and critical

ethnography and queer theory literature. Although I developed questions prior to the interviews,

each interview was shaped by the participants and the questions were only a general guide for

gathering the information, as Thomas (1993) suggested. The interviews were conducted in

English and lasted approximately 60 to 90 minutes. All interviews were audio-taped, allowing

me to completely focus on the participant and also to review the interviews for any information I

might have missed the first time.

Interview schedule.

 I developed nine questions to ask participants in a semi-structured interview. Questions

one and two were general questions directed as building rapport and understanding the individual

identity of the participant. Question three was aimed at gathering information about the positive

experiences of the individual. Questions four through eight were designed to get at the resistance

that the participants have showcased when dealing with difficult experiences relating to their

gender identity. Question nine was aimed at understanding how the participant's gender identity

provides them with a source of strength and/or resilience. The questions were as follows:

 1. Tell me a little bit about your gender identity.

 2. What has your experience as a trans identified person been like?

 3. What are some of the most important positive experiences related to your gender

 identity that you have had?

4. What are some of the difficult experiences related to your identity that you have had?

5. How did you deal with that experience? What got you through that? What was helpful for you? What are ways that you "fought" back?

6. What kind of support did you have during this time? Who did you turn to?

7. What do you think about the ways that trans individuals are treated in society families? In various communities? In the media?

8. What advice would you give to a trans individual experiencing something difficult?

9. How has your gender identity provided you with strength and/or resilience? How has your community?

10. How have your interconnecting identities, such as race and class, influenced your experiences as a trans individual?

Data Analysis

Trustworthiness and Credibility

Trustworthiness has been established as a qualitative concept akin to validity as a way to establish confidence in one's findings (Creswell and Miller, 2000). Guba (1981) has identified four constructs that qualitative researchers may adhere to in order to ensure the trustworthiness of their study, including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The first of these, credibility, is similar to the quantitative research concept of internal validity and asks the question "How congruent are the findings with reality?" (Merriam, 1998). In order to establish credibility, the qualitative researcher should begin a prolonged engagement with the culture of the participants prior to the start of the study. In order to achieve this early familiarity, I have

participated in various aspects of the Portland trans community, including volunteering for advocacy organizations, attending awareness and remembrance events, and interning at an organization providing therapy to trans youth and their families.

In addition, credibility can also be obtained by utilizing triangulation. Triangulation involves the use of many methods, allowing a broadening of data that compensates for the limitations of using only individual perspectives (Shenton, 2004). In this study, I will utilize semi-structured interviews, observation via field notes, and will engage with a variety of previously printed data. In order to consider the unique context of Portland and the effect of social policy on the lives of trans individuals who reside here, I examined existing laws, analyses, and recommendations regarding gender identity and healthcare policy. I obtained these documents from trans advocacy organizations and public records (e.g., Basic Rights Oregon, 2011).

Another method of achieving credibility is to ensure that the data is as accurate as possible by utilizing member checks. Member checks allow for participants to be active participants in the study and make certain that its final results are truthful and capture the participant's experience. Each participant had a chance to review the data after the initial transcription of the data, grouping the data into themes, and writing the results section using verbatim quotes.

Transferability.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) discounted the applicability of the concept of generalizability in qualitative research due to its false assumption that truths can be context-free and have instead pointed to transferability as the way that the qualitative researcher's project can have broader applicability throughout different contexts. Transferability is established by providing the reader

with a "thick description" of not only the behavior observed, but also the context in which the research took place (Geertz, 1973). To achieve transferability, I utilized field notes in order to accurately capture the nuances of my project's context. I made notes after each interview and also whenever I further considered the interview after this point.

Dependability and Data Analysis Steps

Dependability addresses the issue of reliability and provides a strong description of the process of the research, allowing the research to be repeated by readers (Shenton, 2004). Dependability can be achieved by the researcher documenting the details of the research design, data collection methods and data analysis steps. Interviews were audio-taped and then transcribed in order to provide rich data. Following the completion of the transcription, I invited participants to review their transcript and make changes, consistent with Carspecken's (1996) procedures to ensure trustworthiness. I then read the data for "feel" and grouped the data into themes. I also used a line-by-line analysis in the initial coding process to uncover themes. The themes were given to participants, who were again invited to review them and make changes. Following this, I reviewed participant comments and utilized concept mapping to consider the relationships between themes (Lofland, Snow, Anderson, & Lofland, 2006). I then wrote the results section, using verbatim quotes, and provided this section to participants, welcoming them to review and edit them. After making any final changes, I provided participants with a copy of the entire project. Please see Appendix A for a chart of these steps.

Confirmability

The final construction, confirmability, describes the objectivity of the researcher. As non-positivist researchers do not believe in true objectivity, emphasis is placed on the disclosure of the researcher's own predispositions (Shenton, 2004). The disclosure of one's values and biases

in ethnography has been termed reflexivity, and is essential as it allows readers to understand and analyze the researcher's positions. In order to understand my own positionality in regards to my study, I kept notes of my impressions while completing this research. I made notes of anytime that I considered my own privileges, such as my education, social class, race, and my status as a cisgender woman and the ways that these identities impact my study. At the end of my study, I used these notes to further reflect upon my positionality as a researcher within the study.

Chapter 4: Results

In this section, I will review each of the four themes that participants identified: emerging from a cisgender narrative, claiming a trans identity, arriving at own trans narrative, and living at the borderlands. I will use the participants' quotes from my interviews with them to show how cissexism and transphobia create a narrative that influences trans individuals' decisions to disclose their trans status and transition, the ways that trans individuals arrive at and solidify a trans identity, the positive outcomes of resisting the cisgender narrative and creating a trans narrative of one's own, and the ongoing struggles of interconnected identities, oppression and privilege. Thirteen subthemes were identified through the interviews. Please see Appendix B for a table of subthemes. I've decided to include themes that at least 25% of participants identified, in order to showcase the diversity of experiences that trans individuals categorize, especially given the wide array of trans identities and experiences within my study and my desire to amplify the voices of trans individuals, as opposed to speaking for them.

In relation to the first theme, emerging from a cisgender narrative, participants described how society's dominant beliefs about gender identity manifested in their disclosing and transitioning process. Participants discussed their stereotypes of trans individuals, their questions of if their identity was authentic, and the losses and negative reactions of family, friends, and strangers that they had endured. In relation to the second theme, claiming a trans identity, participants revealed how they were able to emerge from the dominant cisgender narrative to develop a trans identity. Participants identified community involvement, supportive partners, family members, peers, and therapists, and finding role models in the community as important elements to developing a trans identity.

The third theme, arriving at one's own trans narrative, participants identified outcomes of

resisting a cisgender narrative and experiencing their trans identity in their own way. Participants described pushing back against transnormativity, having increased confidence, being content with their selves, engaging in activism, and understanding privilege and oppression. Finally, in the last theme, living at the borderlands, participants described interconnected identities and how they shape their experiences as trans individuals. Participants discussed race and class, as well as discussing the in-group and out-group marginalization that they have experienced in the LGBT community and the trans community, including privileging of trans-masculine identities, an exclusion of trans issues within the LGBT rights movement, and a privileging of the standard trans narrative.

Theme I: Emerging from a Cisgender Narrative

Eleven of the 12 participants (91.6%) reported experiencing some way that the narrative of cissexism and transphobia had influenced their decisions to disclose their trans status or resulted in negative reactions from loved ones. Subthemes included their own stereotypes of trans experiences, questions of if their identity was authentic, and losses and negative reactions of family, friends and strangers.

Stereotypes of Trans Individuals

Four of the 12 participants (33%) discussed their own stereotypes of what trans individuals' lives are like and the impact that these beliefs had on their disclosure or transition process. Participants discussed the lack of representations of trans identity available to them, and how the influence of lacking role models and positive portrayals of trans identities, particularly in the media, caused them to delay disclosing their trans identity. Additionally, many participants discussed their belief that disclosing their trans identity would result in them losing many elements of their current life, including their family, friends and job. Speaking about what she

felt it would mean to be trans when she was growing up, Margot said,

> My only idea was if you transition as a trans woman, this is very indicative, your life is going to be fucked here because you'll be living on the streets as a sex worker. I was pretty sure that that was the only possible path that someone could have.

Although some trans individuals do find work in the sex industry as discussed in the literature review, Margot found it indicative of her beliefs about trans individuals that she thought that was the only possible path to take as a trans woman. Three of the participants (25%) also discussed their fears that, by transitioning or disclosing their trans identity, they would lose everything. Alexandria described going online while she was first considering transitioning.

> I go online and start looking what's online, and at that time, pretty much all that I could find was pretty much dominated by the experiences of baby boomers and their stories of transition, so people who waited until late after midlife and typically it involved some crazy meltdown on their part. And the stories I saw again and again and again were 'Expect to lose everything and start your life over' and I was like 'I'm not putting myself through this.'

Relatedly, 25% of participants, even those that had endured hardship and losses because of their trans identity, stated that they felt lucky that they didn't lose more. Elliot, while describing his experience as a trans man overall, said, "I did have some negative experiences with medical professionals and gate-keeping and a little bit with my father, but it's so minor compared to what most people [go through] that it's almost negligible." Judith also said that her experience was "Surprisingly good. Really good. I feel like I got really lucky because I see all these people talking about having these horrible stories."

Questions of Authenticity

One fourth of the participants (3 of 12 [25%]) described the doubt that they felt prior to disclosing their trans identity, including wondering if they were "really trans" or if their feelings of gender identity and expression could be attributed to something else. Participants stated that these questions came from themselves and also from others in their lives when they confided in them about their gender identity. Lindsay, discussing this process, stated, "The question, 'Are you trans?' You know, because being trans doesn't exist. It's this authenticity issue that we're fed, that we're faking people." She went on to say, "And I've had people tell me that 'you are just gay,' 'you are having a mid-life crisis,' 'you are mentally unstable,' 'you are just a cross-dresser,' there are a million different things."

Margot discussed how she questioned her identity as a trans individual during the beginning stages of her transition and disclosure, as she didn't feel like she fit into the trans community or what she perceived as a common trans narrative. Describing why she founded a support group for trans women, she said,

> I use it as my way of really solidly identifying at trans because if I'm doing this group, I don't feel like anyone can question if I'm trans enough to fit in. That was an issue that I felt when I was at the very, very beginning, 'Am I trans enough?' Because in a lot of ways, I don't fit the standard trans narrative.

Negative Reactions

Eighty-three percent of participants (10 out of 12) revealed that they received negative reactions from others when they disclosed their trans identity. The sources of these reactions were broken down into three categories; family members, friends, and strangers.

Family.

Fifty percent of participants (6 out of 12) discussed negative reactions from family members when they disclosed their trans identity. These reactions ranged from family members asking for some time to process the news to negative comments to brief amounts of cut-off communication to fully severing ties with that family member. Joel described his relationship with his mother when he first disclosed his trans identity as,

> She started processing [it] and she was like, 'Wait, what about me?' And it all became about her and she wanted me to wait on my transition because she wanted to be an active part and she wanted to be able to support me in that. And that is fine but at the same time she was asking me to do something which I wasn't willing to do which was hold off on hormones.

Judith stated, "Like with my family, I came out to my brothers and sisters and they haven't talked to me for a year." Participants also discussed negative reactions from partners, with a range of reactions including mutual understanding that their relationship was over to negative comments to abusive actions because of the disclosure. Stacy, talking about her former partner, said, "And actually there were lots of things that caused it to be clear that we need to go our own separate ways and she told her entire family about my [cross-]dressing after we split. And like, 'Aha! This is why it had nothing to do with me. He's just a freak.'"

Friends.

Twenty-five percent of participants (3 out of 12) described losing friends when they disclosed their trans status. Many of the participants identified those friendships as extremely important to them prior to the transition and that the loss of these relationships was particularly devastating at the time. All three participants stated that these friendships have not been repaired

since, with Stephanie saying, "I don't even talk to that person anymore." Margot described

losing all of her close friends at the time, stating

> So coming out to [my friends], I was living with them at the time and coming out, I just
>
> had a terrible semester of coming out to them and being systemically rejected by my
>
> whole social group. My whole social life fell apart my last semester of college.

Strangers.

Almost half of participants (5 out of 12 [42%]) identified negative experiences with

strangers since disclosing their trans status, ranging to hostile interactions with strangers in

public, including be spit at, asked about their genitalia, and being called slurs, to stares when

walking down the street, to being misgendered or referred to by the wrong pronoun in a friendly

conversation. For four participants, these experiences challenged their identity in that they

indicated they were not being read as their true gender identity. Margot stated,

> When I was like in the very beginning stages of my transition, not very secure about my
>
> identity, whenever I'd have negative experiences of people using the wrong pronoun or
>
> calling me out on the street or like friends no longer acknowledging me, those were
>
> experiences that I deeply internalized.

Toni stated that she did not become accustomed to these hostile experiences from

strangers saying, "No, I wouldn't say I expect it. It's always a little uncomfortable. I don't know

how I respond to it. It hurts my feelings. Nobody likes to get stared at."

Theme II: Claiming a Trans Identity

Eleven of the 12 participants (91.6%) described finding ways to emerge from a cisgender

narrative to claim a trans identity. Participants broke away from the cisgender narrative in a

variety of ways. Subthemes included having supportive individuals in their lives, getting

involved in the trans community, and finding role models to challenge their preconceived notions

of what trans identity looks like.

Supportive Individuals

Eighty-three percent of the participants (10 out of 12) identified having supportive

individuals in their lives as an important factor in emerging from a cisgender narrative to claim a

trans identity. These supportive forces included four categories in the participant's lives: family

members, partners, friends, and therapists.

Family.

Thirty-three percent of participants (4 out of 12) identified supportive family members as

an important factor in becoming comfortable with their gender identity. These family members

included parents, siblings, cousins, and children. Participants identified different ways that their

family members offered support, from joining the local PFLAG chapter, to offering emotional

support when things were difficult, to simply acknowledging their gender identity and using the

correct pronouns. Sophia, discussing her relationship with her sons, said,

> And [my son] is getting married… and there has never been a question from him that I
>
> am fully participating in the wedding and working at getting a floor length gown, as it's
>
> going to be a formal wedding and all. Anyway, I'm fully included and anyway, there just
>
> hasn't been a question. So from that point of view, given that it's their father figure doing
>
> this, [my sons] are, to me, they are my heroes.

Three participants stated that their relationships had shifted and improved due to their

transition and disclosure of their gender identity. Joel, discussing his relationship with his

mother, stated,

> The dynamic of our relationship is completely different. We used to have a mother-

daughter relationship and now we have a mother-child relationship. The way that we used

to operate was on a peer level…Now it's she is being a parent and I'm the child

regardless of what my gender identity is. So I think that coming out as trans has improved

our relationship in a way but has also completely shifted our relationship and what it's

based on.

Partners.

Twenty-five percent of participants, (3 out of 12) described having a supportive partner

as helpful in them forming a positive trans identity. Two of the partners had been in relationships

with the participants prior to their transition and disclosure of their trans identity, often causing

an initial conflict and negotiation of the roles and identities of those in the relationship. However,

these participants described that going through this process with their partner increased their

connectivity. Judith stated,

How is it stronger? Well with my wife it's that we're closer. We've kind of gone through

a difficult time and we've made it through this thing, or at least made it this far. Oh yeah.

I'm not hiding. Absolutely, I've always been as honest as I can with her, but now I'm

being honest with myself too.

Stacy expressed the positives she felt her trans identity had brought to her relationship by

saying,

We have some really cool things together that come from that too. You know, whether

it's being able to talk clothes or fashion or whatever at a simple surface level or if its

talking about gender and the binary and privilege and politics and whatever that goes

along with that. It makes our interactions and our relationship richer.

 Margot had met her partner who also identified as trans during her transition, and stated,

There is something really nice about dating other trans people because there is that story

that you don't have to talk about if you don't want to. Like there is no like, night before,

when writing your emails and setting up your first date, like 'I need to tell you I'm trans

so you don't beat the shit out of me when I meet you at the restaurant.'

Peers.

Eighty-three percent of participants (10 out of 12) identified peer support as being an

important factor in claiming a trans identity, making it the most wide-spread form of support that

the participants turned to. Participants identified many different kinds of peer support to be

important, including support groups with other trans individuals, friendships with other trans

individuals, friendships with cisgender individuals, and positive interactions with strangers. Nine

participants participated in informal support groups or meet-up groups hosted at local community

centers and all who attended them stated that they found them extremely helpful. Participants

said that the support groups provided them a place to express fears and doubts to people who

understood their experiences and a place to get information and resources. Lindsey described the

support groups as "…definitely helpful, just to find some friendly non-judgmental people that

you could just sit with and just feel normal."

Support from both trans and cisgender friends was also extremely important to the

participants, especially friendships that had developed prior to their transition and disclosure of

their trans identity. Stephanie described an especially influential friendship by stating "My very

best friend, she knew me prior to my transition and she knew me since my transition and she's

stayed by my side the entire time…she's helped me with so much. Just so, so much. She's like a

sister."

Additionally, five participants described how important it was to have supportive

comments directed at them from strangers, ranging from individuals using the correct pronouns for them to complementing their outfit or make-up. Judith noted a recent dining experience by saying, "The other day, my wife and I had dinner and when we were leaving, one of the staff said, 'Have a good evening ladies!' And that was the first time I've ever been 'ma'amed.' And that was one of the huge victories for me!"

Therapy.

Although all of the participants had some sort of therapy previously, thirty-three percent of participants (4 out of 12) identified therapy as an important avenue of support for them to claim a trans identity. These participants described therapy as a neutral space where they could concentrate on any issues that they may be dealing with because of their gender identity, as well as any unrelated issues they appreciated having time to work on. Lindsay stated that she found therapy helpful as it's a space to "[Have] a person there who is not your friend, who is not your relative, who isn't there to judge you but is just there to listen to you and help you work through things." Stephanie discussed the very real consequences of not seeking out therapy for many trans individuals by identifying the advice she would give a trans person just transitioning,

> Have a therapist. Without her I would have committed suicide a long time ago, there's no doubt about it….You have someone to talk to and someone to give you an outside opinion. Without her, I'm listening to me…I'm spending all my time in my own head, listening to me, and that's the worst place for me to be. So it's always good to have some outside feedback to get you through to the next situation.

Role Models

Twenty-five percent of the participants (3 out of 12) identified finding role models in the trans community as an influential way to break away from both cisgender narratives and standard

trans narratives. All three of these participants stated that these role models helped them see that they could claim a trans identity in their own way. Lindsey stated, about first going to support groups, "I was just like, 'Oh my God, these young women are just out and proud and they care.' They're not, maybe this is some inner transphobia coming out of me, but they're not falling into a stereotype, they are being themselves, they are owning their gender." Margot discussed how important seeing the trans activist and writer Kate Bornstein was for her to develop her own identity as a trans woman by stating, "So having that opportunity [to see Kate Bornstein speak]…is what was like, oh transitioning, perusing this, I can do this and I don't have to- I can look like Kate Bornstein!"

Community Involvement

Thirty-three percent of participants (4 out of 12) described claiming their trans identity by being involved in the trans community, as well as the LGBTQ community. Participants stated that getting acquainted with the trans community was helpful to them in multiple ways, including being around other individuals who have similar experiences, understanding the resources available to them, and seeing other trans individuals who are having successful and happy lives. Lindsay stated,

> I think that doing this work and hearing the stories and seeing how vibrant the community is, nationally and internationally, you feel a lot less isolated, and you feel like 'Wow, I'm a part of something.' And it just confirms, it shuts down those horrible voices and it's like 'Hey! These people love themselves and they've had successful wonderful lives!' And so that's another reason why it's so empowering and it gives you a sense that 'I'm okay, I'm authentic, I'm not just a one off or whatever.'

Two participants discussed getting involved with community organizations outside of the

LGBTQ and trans communities. For participants who had been involved in organizations before transitioning or disclosing their trans identity, it was particularly important for them to remain involved or find another organization to become a part of. Sophia, discussing her church, stated, "It's just like seamless, because I was already a member there before I transitioned and not only has nobody ever raised a question but I'm very accepted there."

Theme III: Arriving at Own Trans Narrative

All of the participants (12 out of 12 [100%]) identified positive outcomes of resisting a cisgender narrative and experiencing their trans identity in their own way. Subthemes included pushing back against transnormativity, increased confidence, feeling content with one's self, involvement in activism, and increased understanding of oppression.

Pushing Back Against Transnormativity

Sixty-six percent of participants (8 out of 10) discussed pushing back against 'transnormativity,' also called 'the standard trans narrative.' The standard trans narrative includes a strict binary view of gender (identifying as either male or female), the idea that all trans individuals want desire medical means of transition, and that trans individuals' gender expression should be archetypical of that of their gender identity (e.g., trans women should desire heels and lipstick). The remaining four participants who did not discuss the importance of pushing back against transnormativity discussed their strong identification with the gender that they identified with, as well as their strong desire to fit into or blend into society.   Five participants wished to push back against these notions of what identifying as trans looks like by identifying in a more fluid manner, with Joel expressing that he likes to educate people about the diversity of trans identity, "By being a question mark. I want people to do a double take and I want people to question. I want to exist in that middle ground so that people don't know, so that

people question themselves."

Six participants pushed back against transnormativity by refusing to attempt to "pass" to outsiders. Lindsay said that her advice to other trans individuals would be

…to recommend people push back harder against the necessity of 'passing.' There's so much pressure and judgment around this concept in the world and in our community and I don't feel there is enough resistance to it. I think it keeps many people from ever coming out and contributes to low self-worth and depression and plays into a sexist ideal of what a woman 'should' be in our society.

Margot also discussed purposefully not trying to "pass" by saying, "So part of how I react to negative experiences now is, you know, when you choose not to pass as strongly, it's a very empowering position. Like, yeah I don't care if you called me out, I'm not fucking trying."

Seven participants also pushed back against the standard transgender narrative by strongly identifying as trans, as opposed to male or female. Participants felt like it was important to identify as trans, both for political reasons and because 'trans' felt like it fit more. Toni said, "I mean, there's different kinds of trans [people]. Most trans people, their goal is just to blend in, not be noticed. I'm not like that. I'm sort of, I'm a trans person who feels like being transgender is really an identity within itself." Margot, discussing the issue of many trans individuals identifying as a binary gender stated,

Which comes to the issue of why aren't we proud to be trans? Why aren't we proud of our identities? I mean, yeah we aren't cis[gender], and for some people that's a bigger issue than others, but that doesn't change who you are and right now you are trans. Sam discussed how she didn't feel that the word "transition" fit into her story, saying, I don't really get what that means. Transition to what, from what? I mean, I've gone

through personal development. That's how I'll describe that. I've come to know myself

more as a person but I guess most people do that, just in a different area.

Confidence

Almost half the participants (5 out of 12 [42%]) noticed an increase in their confidence

since arriving at their own trans narrative and identity. Participants felt like the process of

transitioning and disclosing their trans identity had allowed them to become more confident and

that this transferred over to other areas of their life. As Joel stated, "The confidence carries over.

If you know who you are, you can be self-assured and confident and carry that through and it's

very beneficial with jobs and or whatever. I find that I am a lot more true to myself in all areas,

not just identifying as trans."

Margot stated that she believes in her abilities much more after her disclosure of her

trans identity, saying,

> I wouldn't have done as much as I've done in my life so far if I had not decided to
>
> transition, if I had not realized that I had that much personal agency to like so directly to
>
> change my life and my body and my person. That sense of agency has just carried into
>
> the rest of my life. So I'm like, oh I want to do this really weird thing, I know I can do it
>
> now, I've already done the fricking hardest thing you can do.

Four participants also felt like they had a deeper understanding of themselves and who

they truly are due to understanding their trans identity, especially as compared to cisgender

individuals. Stacy stated,

> But having walked through that fire and come out the other end, I think I have examined
>
> myself and my life, to a point, and a strength that I think some people don't even
>
> question. They don't have to question those things and come out with an answer of 'Who

am I' in this context? Who am I? How important is this thing in my life?'

Sam stated,

> There are some days when I'm like, 'I wish I was born this way' because it would have
> been easier but at the same time I also feel that this ,being able to think in these ways,
> allows me, makes me more intelligent or something because it's like how knowing a
> different language lets you to be able to conceptualize the world in another way. This
> allows me to conceptualize something that other people can't.

Content with Self

Half of the participants (6 out of 12 [50%]) identified feeling much more content with themselves since transitioning and disclosing their trans identity. This took many forms, including feeling happier with their body and outward appearance, with Sophia stating,

> Then to just wear the clothes I want to wear just because they suit me. You know, do I
> feel like make up or not? What earrings do I feel like wearing? It's just a delight. You
> know, there's a side to the archetypal feminine that has to do with beauty and gentleness
> and to just be able to express those things freely in a way that suits me, it's just pure joy.

Lindsay discussed how she feels about her body by saying, "I look at my body and I'm like, 'Oh my God, I'm finally me!' For the first time in my life, you're not some stranger in the mirror. It feels great, it really does."

Five participants described finally feeling normal and experiencing joy and happiness after declaring their own trans narrative. Lindsay stated,

> I felt like, prior to transitioning, my life was getting rougher and rougher, you know, and
> I knew that something was happening, that there was something boiling underneath me
> and it was coming to loggerheads or whatever and after transitioning, things have gotten

smoother and smoother and smoother and it feels like a pearl, I feel like my soul is a

pearl, whereas before it was a pearl but it had years of barnacles and erosion and I had

covered it up with all of these lies.

Toni stated,

When I started on HRT [Hormone Replacement Therapy], it was the first time in my life

that I ever really felt normal. I felt calm, I felt happy, I felt content, and I felt right. And it

was the first time in my life that I have ever really felt that way and that was definitely

the most positive change for me.

Activism

Half of the participants (6 out of 12 [50%]) described activism and getting involved with

activist communities as an important part of defining their own trans narrative. These activist

actions took several different forms, including seeing oneself as part of the larger trans

community. Lindsay described advice she would give to other trans individuals as, "Just that be a

fighter. You are not just fighting for yourself, you are fighting for your community and you are

fighting for future generations of trans people and never apologize for who you are, that's who

you are."

Four participants discussed the importance of giving back to the community so that other

trans individuals had more opportunities and resources than they did. Margot stated,

I would like to think that people will always, at least politically, identify as trans. You'll

at least keep in the back of your mind that things are pretty rocking for you now, but even

with all of the stuff that's happening now with pre-pubescent hormone blockers and

[local youth organizations], there are still kids and adults who are really struggling right

now because resources don't exist….Here you are, just hanging out and chilling as a

post-transition trans person and not giving back to your community. Do you know why it

sucked for you? Because the people before you did the same thing.

Five participants identified the importance of volunteering at organizations such as drop-

in centers for LGBTQ youth, LGBTQ community centers, and LGBTQ advocacy organizations

as a way to give back to the community, act as a role model, and to learn from younger trans

individuals. Joel, who volunteered at a youth drop-in center, stated,

Being able to identify to people who also identify as trans as well is a really unique

experience because I feel like I'm still so new in my transition and I look at these people

who are younger than I am, [that] are "farther along" in their transition and they're more

sure of themselves than I am and that is just an awesome experience.

Understanding Oppression

Twenty-five percent of participants (3 out of 12) discussed that they felt that they

understood oppression and privilege as a result of transitioning and disclosing their trans identity.

All of these participants felt that experiencing marginalization as a trans individual helped them

realize the marginalization and oppression that other groups experience. Stacy stated,

So I think that it kind of goes back to that having been oppressed, you know, I imagine,

you either end up being oppressed and crushed by the oppression or you find ways to

resist it, and recognize when it's happening to others outside of one's identity.

Other participants discussed that while engaging in activism and getting involved in the

trans community, they began to realize how interconnected many of the struggles of

marginalized people were. Lindsay said,

One of the biggest lessons I've learned here too is how intertwined these struggles are…

You know, the people who have issues with our community, have issues with gays and

lesbians, they have issues with African Americans, they have issues with so many other groups. The issues are so intertwined that you really see the intersections once you are doing this work day to day and it's empowering too when you see and you hear these stories of people doing this amazing work and fighting these bigger struggles than I'm fighting and winning.

Theme IV: Living at the Borderlands

Ninety-two percent of participants (11 out of 12) identified the issues surrounding interconnected identities, oppression, privilege, and hierarchies within communities as shaping their experiences as trans individuals. This theme was broken into two areas: struggles surrounding interconnected identities and the impact that they have on one's trans identity, with subthemes as race and social class, and in-group and out-group marginalization within communities, with subthemes of privileging of trans-masculine identities, exclusion of trans issues within the LGBT rights movement, and privileging of the standard trans narrative.

Interconnected Identities

Eighty-three percent of participants (10 out of 12) discussed themes surrounding interconnected identities, specifically race and social class. Fifty-eight percent of the participants (7 out of 12) discussed the implications of race and the impact race has on their own trans identities. The other five participants who did not discuss the impact their race had had on their experience as trans individuals stated that they had not previously considered how their race had influenced their trans identity.

Participants who identified as white pointed to their race as providing them with benefits and privilege, lessening the negative experiences that they may have encountered if they were a

trans person of color. Four participants pointed to the benefit of being able to "pass" easier or not receive hostile reactions if one does not pass. Margot, who is white, said,

> It's just like the basic issue that being white in this culture is significantly huge. If I was a Black trans woman I would face a lot more, a significant amount more discrimination because I can walk into a store and people might think I'm weird, but I'm white. I'm white and weird. That's more acceptable in this day and age, unfortunately.

> Stacy, who is also white, stated, "I think that at least in this part of the U.S. and in general, that's been a privilege for me that if I am passing, I am a white female, wherever I am going. Being a white person in predominantly white areas, there was some privilege there in not getting a hard second look."

 Participants who identified as people of color also found that their race impacted their experience as a trans individual, albeit in different ways. These participants discussed a lack of community within their race, an absence of role models or media representation for them, and difficulty finding support amongst individuals who didn't share common experiences (e.g., those of a different race). Stephanie, who is African American, stated,

> I found it really, really hard to talk to other trans [people], and not because they were trans, but because most of the time the issues I was dealing with was being African American and trans. And if you look around, especially in Portland, you won't find a lot of African American trans [people].

 Stephanie also discussed a recent daytime talk show that featured trans individuals who transitioned at a later point at life and said, "There was not a Black person on that panel, which is totally different. And unfortunately when they panned out to the audience, one hundred percent of the audience happened to be Caucasian. That does not cover everyone!"

Forty-two percent of participants (5 out of 12) discussed the impact that class had on their experiences as a trans individual. All of these participants discussed the advantages that they felt they received due to their social class background, including access to therapy, health care, as well as the ability to pay to change documents and official forms. Judith, who is middle-class, discussed interacting with individuals at the local LGBTQ community center and realizing the issues that many trans individuals face, saying,

> I have met more people [at the LGBTQ community center] and being involved with things, that I get the impression are on the hairy edge of surviving in this society. And that's an economic thing- it's not because of who they are, it's about the challenges that they face in finding employment to be who they are.

Margot also identified that being raised in an upper middle class household afforded her an ideology as well,

> And things like growing up in an upper middle class. It means I left college without having any debt. It means I was raised with a certain, and this is a dumb thing to say, but folks with an upper middle class education, we are the millennial generation, we are taught we can do all the shit we want to do, and that's a very privileged white upper middle class perspective to have and that is something I was raised with. So feeling like I have personal power to act itself derives from that class privilege.

In-group and Out-group Marginalization

Seventy-five percent (8 out of 12) participants discussed in-group and out-group marginalization within both the LGBT community and the trans community. This marginalization took many forms, including a privileging of trans-masculine identities, an exclusion of trans issues within the LGBT rights movement, and a privileging of the standard

trans narrative.

Privileging of trans-masculine identities.

Twenty-five percent of participants (4 out of 12) discussed that they felt that trans-masculine identities were privileged over trans-feminine identities. All of the participants identified this privilege manifested through the ways that the LGBT community views trans-masculine individuals as compared to trans-feminine identities. Sam said,

> But I would say that XY or genderqueer folks aren't thought as highly of as the XX
>
> folks…Like if you go to a bunch of queer events, the people who are that way are the
>
> popular kids, let's say, and they are always XX folks. So they get a lot of acceptance
>
> from queer women and they don't have much problems with gay men, it seems like and
>
> trans men seemed to be accepted by gay men in my experience. However if you are XY,
>
> you are like superficially accepted by queer women. Just as friends only and they'll
>
> placate you in regards to your pronouns and all that but if you ask one out, you'll
>
> probably get an 'Oh I'm just not into that.'

Margot agreed, stating,

> I feel like it's more of this weird co-opting where people will actively identify themselves
>
> as queer, and as a trans woman, the way that I see that operating is 'I'll sleep with
>
> woman, I'll sleep with butches, I'll sleep with trans-masculine identified folks, but I
>
> won't sleep with trans women.'

Margot also thought that misogyny was at the root of this privileging of male identities over female ones, saying,

> Trans women are traditionally isolated, they don't tend to seek one another out. There's
>
> a lot to that, because masculinity is so highly prized in our culture that if you aren't

masculine and you don't want to be masculine, it's such a shaming issue that the idea that talking to another person, even another person who feels the exact same way, is so terrifying that it's impossible to make community for trans women.

Exclusion of trans issues within the LGBT rights movement.

Half of the participants interviewed (6 out of 12 [50%]) discussed the exclusion of trans issues within the LGBT rights movement. The remaining six participants stated that they either felt accepted within the LGBT community or they had not spent enough time within the LGBT community to judge trans inclusion. Of participants who noted exclusion, all of the participants identified tension between the trans community and the LGBT community. Aaron/Erin said,

When HRC basically threw trans [individuals] under the bus, for political reasons, that caused a lot of heartache and to this day I know a lot of people who won't have anything to do with HRC, they just won't. So there's some history that we need to live down and feelings we need to try to move beyond but it's difficult sometimes because people feel that they have been used. A lot of people worked really hard to get the passage of bills or get candidates elected and then feel like they've been turned on.

Participants also discussed issues of current exclusion of trans identities, stating that they don't feel they fit into the LGBT community and that their needs are not often represented. Toni said,

And we got a booth this year at the pride festival, so I started thinking about the pride festival- I usually just go to the festival- I'll show up for the parade, and that's about it. But this year I've been thinking about it more because I registered a booth [for a political party]. So I started thinking, 'Oh, is there a trans march? Is there a trans contingent to the pride parade?' And I'm thinking sure, there must be because we're the 'T.' So of course

we're in there, but then I was wondering, are we?

Toni also noted that although there is tension between the LGBT and the trans communities, the two groups do share experiences of oppression, stating

[The trans community] is with the LGBTQQ community and sometimes it's an uncomfortable alliance with them, because sexual orientation is not the same as gender identity. But you know, we get treated the same way. I mean, I can't tell you how many times I've been called a fag in my life, at least a thousand times, I'm sure many more…I cannot tell you, and it's just you know overlapping and intersecting experiences.

Privileging of the standard trans narrative.

Seventy-five percent of participants (8 out of 12) indicated a privileging of what they perceived as a standard trans narrative (discussed in Theme III). Participants who did not relate with this them often fit into the standard trans narrative and therefore may not have noticed the privilege that they receive. Participants who did not fit this narrative felt isolated from the trans community. Sam said, "I don't fit into the transsexual community because they are all 'I was born wanting to wear lipstick and high heels because it's just in my genes.' It's that kind of logic and I'm more of social constructionist kind of person. I don't identify a lot with what they say." Other participants said that the differences between how they identified as trans and the standard trans narrative made them question their own authenticity as trans person, as Joel discussed,

 I know that a lot of people that I've spoken to in the trans-masculine community feel the same. And every person that I've talked to about it has all expressed as the same question, 'am I trans enough?' Even those who are very like 'I was born female but this is completely wrong, I've known forever. I am now very masculine and I identify that way

and that's fine' but they still question themselves because of this external pressure of do I

fit in? What is trans enough?

Summary of Results

In this chapter, I presented four themes revealed through the analysis of interviews with

twelve trans individuals living in the Portland, Oregon area. Please see Appendix C for a

concept map of the results. Through these interviews, I identified the themes of emerging from a

cisgender narrative, claiming a trans identity, arriving at own trans narrative and living at the

borderlands, with thirteen subthemes being revealed from these four main themes. In the next

chapter, I will analyze these themes to attempt to answer the research questions regarding trans

individuals' experiences of oppression, resistance, resilience, and strength.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Although interest and scholarship surrounding trans identity and issues has increased in recent years, there still remains almost no literature that addresses the themes of resistance, resilience and strength within trans individuals' experiences (Emerson & Rosenfeld, 1996). Mizock and Lewis (2008) discussed the importance of understanding the resistance and resiliency that trans individuals and the trans community exemplify in order to increase knowledge around trans identity within the current sociological and psychological communities. By focusing on the ways that trans individuals resist oppression, a better understanding of both the types of oppression that trans individuals face and the paths to liberation from these oppressions is possible. The purpose of this study was to contribute to the literature by highlighting the resistance strategies that trans individuals utilize when pushing back against transphobic oppression and portraying the varieties of ways that individuals claim a trans identity.

The findings of this study will be discussed in this chapter. Using both critical and queer theory, I will analyze the results and themes that emerged from the four questions of this study. Four themes surfaced after interviewing twelve trans identified adults: emerging from a cisgender narrative, claiming a trans identity, arriving at own trans narrative and living at the borderlands.

Research Question 1: How do trans adults report their experiences of oppression?

The first research question explored the experiences of oppression of trans adults, in order to situate the experiences of resilience and resistance discussed in later questions. These experiences arose by having them discuss their disclosure of their trans identity and transition, if

applicable, and the impact that these had on their lives. The results indicate that trans adults

experience multiple types of oppression during their disclosure of their trans identity and/or

transition, pointing to the beginning of the process that trans individuals move through when

they decide to emerge from a cisgender narrative.

Emerging from a Cisgender Narrative

In this study, discussions of disclosure of trans identity and/or deciding to transition in

some form were accompanied by both external forces, such as negative reactions from family,

friends, and strangers, and internal forces, such as stereotypes of trans individuals and questions

of authenticity. The negative reactions that participants received upon their disclosure of their

trans identity, including from their family, friends and strangers is congruent with the literature

on trans identity disclosure and the effect it has on relationships. Koken, Bimbi, and Parsons

(2009) found that 40% of trans women of color in their sample had received initial negative

reactions from their family when their identity as a trans individual came to light. Additionally,

Factor and Rothblum (2007) found that trans individuals perceive less support from their

families than their cisgender siblings do. Participants in this study discussed many of the same

original negative reactions, including hostile remarks from family members, refusal to

acknowledge their identity, name, or gender, and in some cases, cutting off ties from family

members who maintained hostile reactions.

Relatedly, participants in this study reported negative reactions to their trans identity

from friends. In this study, all of the participants who discussed difficulties with their friends'

reactions had severed ties with these friends since. No previous literature has investigated the

prevalence of loss of friends or social circle when individuals transition, therefore it is difficult to

gauge how common these experiences may be. However, participants' experiences with negative

reactions to their trans identity from strangers, including verbal and physical harassment, are congruent with the literature regarding trans individuals' increased risk of being the victim of a crime (Lombardi et al., 2001; Reback, Simon, Bernis, & Gatson, 2001). Many participants discussed that these negative reactions from strangers caused them to feel unsafe and fearful when they were out in public and, in some cases, played a part in them delaying their transition or questioning their gender identity.

Relatedly, these negative reactions contributed to other themes when trans individuals emerge from a cisgender narrative: questioning the authenticity of one's trans identity and holding stereotypes of trans individuals. Participants in this study described the doubt that they felt when they disclosed their trans identity, including wondering if they were "really trans" or if their feelings of gender identity and expression could be attributed to something else. Participants stated that these questions came from themselves and also from others in their lives when they confided in them about their gender identity. Biblarz and Savci (2010) discuss how policies set on how to qualify to change one's gender marker on a driver's license or social security card have effectively policed trans identities, decrying who is- or isn't- "trans enough" to transition, be identified as trans, or live their life as the gender they desire and setting up an idea of what it takes to be "truly trans."

Participants in this study also discussed the stereotypes that they held about trans individuals prior to disclosing and/or when they were first negotiating their trans identity. They described a variety of stereotypes including that trans individuals could only be prostitutes, that trans individuals would have to cut ties with everyone they knew and start over again, and that they should be expect to lose their job when they transitioned. Although little to no research discussing internalized transphobia exists, research on the internalized homophobia that

cisgender gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals experience helps to contextualize the stereotypes

that the participants in this study held. Peterson and Gerrity's (2006) found a negative

relationship between the stage of gay identity development and the amount of internalized

homophobia that lesbian-identified women had, suggesting that the earlier one is in their stage of

identity development, the more internalized homophobia one may have. Although sexual

orientation development differs from gender identity development, the same may hold true for

trans participants in this study, explaining why participants who were later in their transition

were able to reflect upon their previous negative views of trans individuals.

The negative reactions that participants experienced, in addition to questioning their

authenticity and the stereotypes of trans individuals and experiences that they held, are examples

of the multiples forms of oppression that trans individuals encounter when they disclose their

trans identity. As in this study, this oppression comes from multiples directions, including from

friends, family, strangers and from oneself. The strategies that trans individuals utilize to resist

these forms of oppression will be discussed below.

Research Question 2: How do trans adults report their resistance this oppression?

The second research question explored the resistance strategies that trans adults utilize

when enduring oppression. These strategies were recounted by participants' reflection on the

tactics that they used to get through difficult times when their gender identity and/or expression

were called into question or they felt threatened. The results indicate that trans adults utilize

multiple types of resistance strategies, pointing to the ways in which trans adults move through

the process of claiming a trans identity.

Claiming a Trans Identity

In this study, when participants revealed how they were able to emerge from the

dominant cisgender narrative to develop a trans identity, participants identified supportive

partners, family members, peers, and therapists, community involvement and finding role models

as important elements. The importance of having supportive individuals in trans adults' lives has

been well-documented in the literature. In particular, supportive family members have been

indicated to be especially helpful, with a decreased risk for homelessness, incarceration, suicide,

and drug and alcohol addiction occurring amongst trans adults who had accepting families

(Grant et al., 2011). Participants in this study reflected this, stating that having accepting family

members, including parents, siblings, and children, was extremely important to them in being

able to make it through difficult times. Subsequently, participants stated that having supportive

family members had made their transition easier and had aided them in feeling more content with

themselves and increasing their happiness.

Additionally, participants in this study also discussed the role that affirming partners have

in the process of claiming a trans identity. The support that a partner can offer is important in

both relationships that were established prior to an individual claiming a trans identity and in

relationships that formed during or after one's trans identity was disclosed. In the already

established partnerships, increased satisfaction in the quality of the relationship has been

demonstrated for both members of the couple, with increased fulfillment, especially in terms of

being able to provide support for each other and more confidence within the sexual relationship

between the two (Israel, 2004; Joslin-Roher & Wheeler, 2009). Participants in this study

reflected these findings by discussing that the support that they received from their partner

helped them to cope with difficulties, as well as increase connectivity and strength in their

relationship.

Because of the complex relationship between trans individuals and the mental health

industry, trans individuals often seek out therapy as part of the requirements for changing legal

and official documents or receiving medical procedures and services. Grant et al., (2011) found

that 75% of trans respondents stated that they had received therapy specifically to discuss their

gender identity, with 14% hoping to receive it someday. Therefore, therapists play an important

role within the trans community, and all of the participants in this study reported undergoing

therapy previously or currently. However, some participants in this study discussed that having a

supportive therapist in their life was helpful in specifically claiming a trans identity. Participants

discussed the importance of being able to have someone to talk to who was non-judgmental, who

could reassure them that their feelings about their gender identity were valid, and someone to

help them cope with difficult times that their gender identity disclosure and/or transition may

have brought about. Although participants reflected positive relationships with therapists, some

also expressed disappointment with the way trans identity was addressed overall in the mental

health industry, particularly in terms of the diagnosis of Gender Identity Disorder and the

requirements that they had to meet to change official documents or undergo desired procedures.

Lombardi (1999) found that trans individuals who had close friends who also identified

as trans had fewer depressive symptoms than those trans individuals who had less trans friends

amongst their innermost circle. Participants in this study reflected the importance of community

in several ways, including identifying supportive friends as helpful to them in order to claim a

positive trans identity. The majority of participants who identified supportive friends as an

important factor in their process of disclosing and claiming a positive trans identity discussed

relationships with other trans people, as opposed to cisgender individuals. Many of these

relationships were cultivated through community support groups or meet-up groups. Little

research exists discussing how effective these groups are at offering support to trans individuals,

but participants in this study reflected previous research that has shown support groups to be

helpful in forming a positive self-concept and building connections among individuals with

similar identities (McGuire & Conover-Williams, 2010).

Participants in this study also discussed the importance of community involvement and

role models in helping them to claim a positive trans identity, congruent with Singh and

McKleroy's (2011) findings that trans individuals of color found connecting to the trans

community an important part of their resilience to transphobia. Additionally, Singh, Hays and

Watson (2011) found that trans individuals describe connection with any supportive community

to be beneficial as a resilience strategy, particularly trans communities. In this study, participants

found that being in touch with the LGBT and/or the trans community allowed them to receive

information and education about resources in the area, provided them with a safe place where

they felt like they belonged, and allowed them to see other trans individuals who had positive life

outcomes, as opposed to the outcomes that many participants previously mentioned they

believed trans people experienced. This last point is especially important, as participants in this

study also identified seeking out trans role models as a key factor to helping them claim a

positive identity. Previous research has indicated the trans individuals describe being a positive

role model for other trans people as a helpful resilience strategy (Singh, Hays, & Watson, 2011).

Participants in the same study discussed the importance of being surrounded by other trans

individuals who have gone through similar experiences and understand their identity. However,

virtually no research exists that specifically identifies the importance of role models for trans

individuals.

Therefore, participants in this study found connecting with supportive family, partners,

friends and therapists, as well as involving themselves in the LGBT and/or trans community and

finding trans role models as helpful resistance strategies in order to counter the oppression that they discussed in the previous section. Surrounding themselves with supportive individuals helped to counter society's dominant beliefs about trans identity. Connecting to community and role models allowed participants to develop a positive trans identity and let go of stereotypes of trans experiences and what "authentic" trans identity looks like. Participants built upon this resistance by finding strength and resilience within their positive trans identity, which is discussed below.

Research Question 3: How do trans adults see their trans identity as providing them with strength and resilience?

The third question explored trans adults' perceptions of how their trans identity has offered them a source of strength and resilience. Participants were asked about what positive things have come from identifying as trans. The results indicate that trans individuals find strength and resiliency within their gender identity in multiple ways surrounding the themes of pushing back against transnormativity, indicating that this strength and resilience is found within rejecting the prescribed behaviors and identities that come with being trans and instead developing an identity as a trans individual in one's own way.

Arriving at Own Trans Narrative

In this study, when participants discussed the outcomes of developing a positive trans identity, they identified pushing back against transnormativity, increased confidence and increased sense of being content with one's self, engaging in activism, and understanding oppression as important factors. Singh and McKleroy (2011) found that trans individuals of color identified pride in one's gender and ethnic/racial identity as a primary form of resilience to traumatic life events that they have endured. Similarly, in this study, participants discussed their

pride in their gender identity and strong trans identity as a way to push back to what they

perceived to be society's idea of trans identity and experiences. This view, described as 'the

standard trans narrative' or 'transnormativity,' privileges certain trans experiences and identities

(commonly, those that most resemble cisgender experiences) over others and occurs both within

the trans community (internalized transphobia) and in society at large (McDonald, 2006).

Participants in this study also discussed rejecting the notion of passing and/or the desire to pass

as a way to push back against the standard trans narrative, congruent with Singh, Hays, and

Watson's (2011) study that found that trans individuals found developing and defining their own

gender identity as an important aspect of their resilience as trans people.

Participants also identified an increased sense of confidence and being content with

themselves as an outcome of developing their own trans narrative. Participants discussed feeling

positive about their gender expression and identity after to disclosing their trans identity, and

participants who chose to access surgical or other procedures in relation to their gender identity

noted an increased satisfaction with their bodies. Little research addresses the positive outcomes

of disclosure of trans identity and/or transition as they relate to confidence-building or increased

happiness. However, Joslin-Roher and Wheeler (2009) described the experiences of queer-

identified partners of trans men in relation to their partner's bodies, stating that many of the trans

men experienced an increase sense of confidence with their body and gender expression that

enhanced the couples' sex lives. Additionally, mothers in Pearlman's (2006) article discussing

their relationships with their trans sons stated that their children's increased sense of happiness

was amongst the biggest rewards of being supportive of their transition.

Participants in this study also discussed that deciding to disclose their trans identity and

taking the time and steps to transition (socially and/or medically) had allowed them to become

more aware of their abilities to endure difficult experiences and to value and act on their needs and desires. Singh, Hays, and Watson (2011) found similar results in their study of trans individuals and their resilience strategies, with participants discussing the power of embracing their own self-worth.

Singh, Hays, and Watson (2011) found in their study of trans individuals' resilience strategies that a majority of participants identified engaging in social activism as a resilience strategy. Similarly, participants in this study discussed the importance of engaging in activism, with most participating in activism relating to the trans community and stating it was important to have their voice heard and to advocate for their community. This is congruent with Singh and McKleroy's (2011) finding that trans individuals of color identified participating in an activist community of trans people of color as enhancing their resilience and helping them make things better for their community.

Relatedly, participants in this study also identified their heightened understanding of oppression and privilege as an positive outcome of developing their own trans narrative- with many recognizing the activist trans communities as contributing to these increased understandings. Previous research has found that trans individuals identify an awareness of oppression as a resilience strategy, most commonly centered on oppression directed at trans individuals (Singh, Hays, & Watson, 2011; Singh & McKleroy, 2011). However, participants in this study found that their awareness of oppression also expanded to understand forms of oppression not directed at them, such as racism for white participants, and increased their empathy with other marginalized populations.

Participants in this study developed resilience and strength within their trans identity by finding their own trans narrative through pushing back against transnormativity, having more

confidence, being more content with one's self, engaging in activism, and understanding

oppression. By developing their own trans narrative, participants were able to explore their own

gender identity and move beyond the cisgender narrative that society is centered around,

allowing them to see their trans identities as providing them with a source of strength and

resilience.

Research Question 4: How do trans adults see their interconnecting identities, such as race and class, as impacting their experiences as trans individuals?

The fourth question investigated trans adults' insights into how their interconnecting

identities have impacted their experiences as trans individuals. Participants were asked about

their experiences of oppression and privilege as a trans individual, as well as their views about

how these identities play out within the trans community. Results indicate that experiences of

interconnecting identities and privilege and oppression contribute to the understanding of trans

individuals, their identities, and the trans community as a whole.

Living at the Borderlands

There is almost no literature documenting trans individuals' reflections of their

interconnecting identities and the ways that they factor into their experiences as a trans

individual. This study attempts to begin this conversation by discussing the experiences of

privilege and oppression that trans individuals recount both because of their interconnecting

identities, including race and social class, as well as their experiences of privilege and oppression

due to their gender identity and/or expression within the trans community and the LGBT

community as a whole, including the privileging of trans-masculine identities, the exclusion of

trans issues within the LGBT rights movement, and privileging of the standard trans narrative.

Identities and social locations such as race, social class, sexual orientation, religious

identity, and body size all influence the experiences of oppression that trans individuals face, as with other gender and sexual minorities (Ma'ayan, 2011). Many studies have shown that certain segments of the trans population experience greater adversity than others, for example with African American trans respondents reported living in more than twice the rate of poverty than trans respondents of other races (Grant et al., 2011). However, few studies have had participants reflect upon their interconnecting identities and how they feel that their experiences as a trans individual have been impacted. In this study, some participants had difficulty reflecting on the ways that their race and/or social class had impacted their experiences as trans individuals, particularly participants who experienced privilege because of their identities. Participants who were able to reflect on their interconnecting identities tended to be participants who were either marginalized in another identity apart from their gender identity or who had an understanding of privilege and oppression prior to my interview with them.

Lombardi (2009) found that African American trans individuals reported the highest level of transphobic events in a year, with white trans individuals reporting the lowest, showing the impact that a trans individual's race can have on transphobic experiences. This is congruent with the findings in this study, with participants of color identifying oppressive experiences that related to their race, whereas white participants recognized that their race served only in beneficial ways to them by helping them build community and avoid harassment. This finding is consistent with the literature surrounding white privilege (McIntosh, 1988), finding that white individuals receive benefits within society due to their race that individuals of color do not. Although the participants of color in this study reported oppressive experiences related to their race, they were also more likely to discuss the importance of a trans community that includes individuals from their racial background, as also found in Singh and McKleroy's (2011) study of

trans individuals of color who stated that connecting to community was an important part of their resilience to transphobia.

Participants also identified social class as an important factor in shaping their experiences as trans individuals, with participants self-identifying as lower class more likely to discuss the ways that their social class had negatively impacted them and those participants in middle or upper social class categories more likely to discuss the ways that their social class had helped them as a trans individual. This is consistent with Lombardi's (2009) finding that trans individuals in the lowest social class category experienced the most transphobic events in the past year**.** Due to systemic oppression within the employment and housing spheres, trans individuals are more likely to have difficulty securing employment or finding housing (Lombardi, Wilchins, Priesing, & Malouf, 2001; Willoughby, 2005). Additionally, many trans individuals struggle securing health insurance, and those with insurance often have to pay for all of the expenses for any procedures and health services related to their trans identity that they would like to pursue (Grant et al., 2010; Kenagy, 2005; Xavier, 2000). Participants in this study who had employment, housing and medical coverage expressed appreciation that they had the opportunities that the presence of these factors brought them. Participants understood that many individuals within the trans community did not have the access to not only medical procedures that they desired, but also the basic necessities, and felt that because of their class status, their experience as a trans individual had been easier in some ways.

Participants in this study also discussed their experiences of marginalization both within the LGBT community, as well as within the trans community. Trans issues have been historically marginalized within the LGBT community, with many cisgender lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals questioning the importance of trans inclusion within the movement and some not

understanding the specific concerns and issues of trans individuals (Stone, 2006). Participants in

this study reflected these findings by identifying exclusion in the LGBT community as a constant

struggle they faced as trans individuals. Participants discussed the tension between the trans

community and the LGBT rights movement, with many reporting feeling unsafe and

misunderstood in LGBT spaces. Although literature exists exploring cisgender lesbian, gay and

bisexual individuals' perceptions of trans individuals and communities (e.g., Stone, 2006),

almost no research exists that explores trans individuals perceptions of cisgender lesbian, gay

and bisexual individuals and working with the LGBT rights movement.

The privileging of trans-masculine identities also was identified as a marginalization that

is experienced both within the LGBT community and within the trans community. Both trans

women and trans men discussed this marginalization and both felt that their identities were

compromised because of it. Almost no literature discusses the different ways that trans men and

trans women are treated within the LGBT and trans communities. However, Serano (2007)

points out that the scapegoating of trans-femininity within queer spaces- including allowing trans

men to enter women-only spaces, while denying entry to trans women- is tied back to society's

ingrained misogyny and the culture fear of femininity.

Participants in this study also discussed the marginalization that they felt within the trans

community regarding deviating from what they perceived to be the standard trans narrative.

LeBlanc (2010) stated that these expectations fall under the concept of 'transnormativity,' a

system that forces a normative view of what trans identity looks like and creates new binaries for

trans people. This was reflected in this study by participants' experiences within the trans

community, with participants feeling isolated within the trans community and questioning if they

were truly trans because their own trans narrative diverged from what they perceived as the only

acceptable path for trans individuals. Almost no literature exists discussing the concept of

transnormativity and/or the standard trans narrative and how these expectations affect trans

individuals. However, the dynamics may be similar to the experiences of marginalized bisexual

women within the lesbian community, based on their perceived deviance from narratives about

sexual identity and attraction (Ault, 1994).

Conclusion

In this chapter I answered the four research questions of the study, which revealed the

extent of oppression that trans individuals experience, as well as the ways that they resist this

oppression, find strength in their trans identities, and negotiate their interconnecting identities

with the trans and LGBT community. Although this study found similar results as previous

studies that have looked at the ways that trans individuals experience oppression and

marginalization, research on the ways that trans individuals resist this oppression and what they

identify as positive outcomes of claiming a trans identity is lacking. Therefore, these areas

require further investigation. Additionally, this study highlights trans individuals' perceptions of

how their interconnecting identities have shaped their experiences as trans individuals. Further

research allowing trans individuals to reflect on their multiple identities is needed in order to

contribute to the academic understanding of how social locations such as race, social class, and

religious identity impact trans individuals' experiences. Although some research investigating

marginalization of trans issues within the LGBT community exists, more research highlighting

the perspectives of trans individuals is needed to fully conceptualize the issues and problems of

in-group and out-group marginalization within the LGBT community. Relatedly, research

exploring the hierarchies within the trans identity regarding gender identity and transnormativity

is needed in order to further the academic conversation about the wide array of gender identities and experiences within the trans community.

Implications.

The results of this study have implications within professional training programs for educators, therapists, and social workers by deconstructing the ideas that both cisgender and trans individuals in positions of power may have that classify trans identities as non-normative or deviant and impose expectations of how trans individuals should identify and/or the desires that trans individuals may have. The conversations in this study surrounding transnormativity highlight the diverse array of trans identities and experiences and allow individuals to deconstruct their own beliefs about trans identity. Additionally, the reflections of trans individuals' on their interconnecting identities and the ways that they have shaped their experiences has the power to begin conversations both within professional programs as well as with the sociological and psychological communities, about the importance of having trans individuals reflect upon their experiences of power, privilege, oppression and marginalization. Finally, participants' conversations of the determents of negative reactions from those close to them, as well as their recounting of the importance of having supportive individuals around them, could help family members, partners and friends of trans individuals understand the crucial role that they play in helping to support their loved one.

Limitations of the Study

One factor that might have limited this study are a lack of diverse backgrounds from the participants. Of the 12 participants, only three identified as African American, biracial, or Native American. The reason for the lack of racially-diverse participation in the study is likely related to the lack of representation of individuals of color within the trans community in Portland, making

the organizations and agencies where participants were recruited from less likely to serve trans individuals of color, as well as the race and lack of insider status of the researcher (discussed more in the Reflexivity section) and the make-up of the city in which the study took place (Portland is the whitest major city in the U.S.(The Oregonian, 2011)). As discussed previously, trans individuals of color have significantly different experiences of oppression than white trans individuals do and because of this, the lack of participants of color may have limited the variety of experiences highlighted, especially regarding oppression, interconnecting identities, and in-group and out group marginalization.

Another limitation relating to the diversity of the participants' background is the lack of perspective from trans men. Only one participant identified solely as male, although several identified on the masculine-spectrum of gender identity or as more androgynous, which may have limited trans-masculine perspectives, particularly on the subject of the privileging of trans-masculinity in trans and LGBT communities. The setting of the study in Portland, Oregon may also be a limitation. Because Portland has a large trans community and multiple organizations and agencies that serve trans populations, trans individuals living in Portland may have significantly different experiences of being trans or receiving resources than individuals who live in less trans-affirming and/or rural settings may have.

Chapter 6: Fieldwork and Reflexivity

This chapter will be divided into two parts: fieldwork and reflexivity. In the fieldwork section, I will describe my research into Oregon and Portland specific policies toward trans individuals. In the reflexivity section, I will describe my own experiences conducting this research study.

Fieldwork

Consistent with ethnography methodology, interviews with participants were my primary source of information about trans individuals' experiences. For my second sources, I investigated legal and official policies regarding trans individuals in the Portland area and in the state of Oregon in order to have a better understanding of the context that the trans individuals I interviewed lived in. I used several materials provided by Basic Rights Oregon, the Oregon state LGBTQ rights advocacy organization, which has a specific trans rights program. Basic Rights Oregon's *Know Your Rights Guide* was published in 2011 and discusses trans Oregonians' rights in terms of gender identity and expression (Basic Rights Oregon, 2011). The guide contains information that applies to federal laws, such as information to help trans individuals change identification and documents, including passports and social security cards, as well as information to change identification markers at the state level, such as driver's licenses and birth certificates. Through this guide and further investigation into individuals' experiences seeking out these changes, I learned that Oregon is a state that makes changing identification markers on official documents fairly easy, especially in more liberal counties like Multnomah County (where Portland is located). However, the process can still be expensive, limiting the availability of these services to all trans individuals.

Additionally, the guide explained the protections that Oregon state laws provide for trans

individuals who are fired because of their gender identity or expression. Oregon has a statewide law (the Oregon Equality Act, which became law in 2008) that prohibits discrimination in the workplace based on gender identity or expression, of which only a handful of states has. It is still incredibly difficult to successfully prove discrimination and the Oregon Equality Act provides a religious exemption for employers connected to churches, synagogues, mosques, or other religious intuitions, meaning that organizations with loose religious affiliations are still able to discriminate against trans individuals in hiring and firing practices.

The guide also explains the difficulties that many trans individuals find when trying to find healthcare coverage for transition-related care in Oregon. Employers in Oregon are allowed to follow the Employee Retirement Income Security Act, which allows group health plans to exclude transition-related care. Health coverage not provided through employers fall under the state jurisdiction, which decry that insurance agencies must provide coverage to trans individuals if they provide the same medical treatment for cisgender people. Although insurance that covers transition-related care is difficult to find, Oregon has individual businesses, municipalities, governments, and universities that have recently changed policies and are explicating providing transition-related care to trans individuals, including Nike, the city of Portland, Multnomah County, and Portland State University.

Reflexivity

In order to ensure confirmability in this study, I set out on this research project intending to disclose my predispositions and biases as a researcher, a process coined 'reflexivity.' Shenton (2004) emphasized the importance of non-positive researchers understanding their perspectives as one of many truths and disclosing their perspectives in order for readers to understand where their research comes from. In order to achieve this goal, I wish to discuss my personal background and my experiences in the interviews. Koro-Ljunberg & Greackhamer (2005) discussed the importance of the researcher disclosing their social locations, including race, social class, and gender, as these identities affect the ways that the participants' experiences and data is presented. I am a white woman who was born and raised in the United States. My social class background is associated with the upper class, and I graduated from a private university and attend a private graduate school. I do not identify with any religion or spiritual belief systems.

I identify my sexual orientation as 'queer,' a label I choose because of the political beliefs attached to it, as well as the room to describe both sexual orientation and gender expression under the term. I identify as cisgender and as a trans ally. In graduate school, I have focused my research and practical experiences within the LGBTQ and trans communities, serving as both a client services and community education intern with a non-profit organization that works with transgender and gender non-conforming youth and their families. Although these experiences allowed me qualification to undertake this research project, my cisgender identity still classified me as an "outsider" researcher.

My "outsider" status was extremely important for me to consider throughout my undertaking of this project. Before conducting these interviews, I read literature about trans identity, the trans liberation movement, oppression and resistance. I also asked several trans

individuals, as well as cisgender individuals who worked within the trans community, for their feedback surrounding my conceptualizing of the literature, my research questions, and my call for participants. I was also conscious during my interviews to be forthcoming about both my relationships within the trans community and my identity as someone who identifies as queer and cisgender. I believe that this helped me to negotiate my "outsider" status in a way that was both truthful to my identity and the experiences of my participants.

Additionally, my race and class also impacted my relationships with my participants. In order to attempt to recruit a diverse group of participants, I sent my call for participants to a variety of trans individuals of color-specific organizations and agencies. Prior to my interviews, I reviewed the literature surrounding white privilege, classism, trans individuals of color, trans individuals and social class, and interconnecting identities. I was also conscious during my interviews to be forthcoming about my status as a white and upper class woman and to use examples of the white privilege and classism that I have experienced to make room for other white participants and those who identified as middle or upper class to discuss their racial and class identities and how they have impacted their experiences. With participants of color and individuals who identified as working class, I attempted to be honest about the white privilege, classism and lack of trans individuals of color that I had seen within the LGBT community, in order to create a safe space to discuss racism, classism and white supremacy.

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Appendix A

Stages of Data Analysis

↓

Researcher transcribed audotaped interviews

↓

Participants reviewed own transcript and made changes

↓

Researcher read transcripts for a "feel" of the data

↓

Researcher wrote notes in the margins of the transcripts

↓

Researcher grouped content of transcripts into themes

↓

Participants reviewed and commented on themes and made changes

↓

Researcher reviewed themes, participant comments, and transcripts

↓

Researcher write results using verbatim excerpts

↓

Participants reviewed and commented on results and made changes

↓

Researcher completed thesis

↓

Participants were given a copy of overall project

Appendix B

Themes Identified by Participants	**%/(n) of Participants Identifying**
Stereotypes about trans individuals	33% (4)
Questions of authenticity	25% (3)
Negative reactions	83% (10)
From family	50% (6)
From friends	25% (3)
From strangers	42% (5)
Supportive individuals	83% (10)
From family	33% (4)
From partners	25% (3)
From peers	83% (10)
From therapists	33% (4)
Role models	25% (3)
Community involvement	33% (4)
Pushing back against transnormativity	66% (8)
Confidence	42% (5)
Content with Self	50% (6)
Activism	50% (6)
Understanding oppression	25% (3)
Interconnected identities	83% (10)
Race	58% (7)
Social class	42% (5)
In-group and out-group marginalization	75% (9)
Privileging of transmasculinity	25% (3)
Exclusion of trans issues	50% (6)
Privileging transnormativity	75% (9)

Appendix C

| Stereotypes of trans individuals | Questions of authenticity | Negative reactions from others |

Emerging from a Cisgender Narrative

| Supportive individuals | Role models | Community involvement |

Claiming a Trans Identity

Trans Individuals' Experiences of Oppression, Resistance and Resilience

Living at the Borderlands

Arriving at Own Trans Narrative

| Understanding oppression |

| Interconnecting identities | In-group/ out group marginalization |

| Confidence |

| Activism |

| Pushing back against transnormativity | Sense of being content |