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## Lesbian/Queer/Same-Gender-Loving Women Graduate Students in Mental Health Related Fields: A Grounded Theory of Attitudes Toward Transgender Individuals

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LESBIAN/QUEER/SAME-GENDER-LOVING WOMEN GRADUATE  
STUDENTS IN MENTAL HEALTH RELATED FIELDS:  
A GROUNDED THEORY OF ATTITUDES TOWARD  
TRANSGENDER INDIVIDUALS

by

Bonnie M. Benson

A Dissertation  
Submitted to the  
Faculty of The Graduate College  
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Degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
Department of Counselor Education and Counseling Psychology  
Advisor: Patrick H. Munley, Ph.D.

Western Michigan University  
Kalamazoo, Michigan  
June 2012

THE GRADUATE COLLEGE  
WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY  
KALAMAZOO, MICHIGAN

Date May 16, 2012

WE HEREBY APPROVE THE DISSERTATION SUBMITTED BY

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STUDENTS IN MENTAL HEALTH RELATED FIELDS: A GROUNDED THEORY OF  
ATTITUDES TOWARD TRANSGENDER INDIVIDUALS

AS PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE

DEGREE OF Doctor of Philosophy

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A GROUNDED THEORY OF ATTITUDES TOWARD  
TRANSGENDER INDIVIDUALS

Bonnie M. Benson, Ph.D.

Western Michigan University, 2012

Transgender (trans) issues are an emerging area of research within counseling psychology. As such, little is known about how individuals form their attitudes toward trans people. Despite evidence that lesbian women are one group that has held biased views of the trans population, the literature has not addressed the perceptions that lesbian women have of trans individuals. Furthermore, the campus climate literature has attended to how LGBT students experience campus discrimination, but this literature has not addressed within-group differences, that is, attitudes and interactions among LGBT members of a university community, such as those between lesbians and trans people. The purpose of this exploratory study is to construct a theory that describes how lesbian women students view trans people and the processes underlying the formation of their perceptions.

Initial and follow-up phone interviews were conducted with eight graduate students who identified as lesbian/queer/same-gender-loving (LQSG) women and who had interacted with trans people and/or had knowledge of trans identity. The participants were enrolled in master's and doctoral programs primarily in mental

health fields. Interview questions were designed to address the women's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors in reaction to their contact with trans people and/or trans information. Rennie's (1992; 2006; Rennie, Phillips, & Quartaro, 1988) grounded theory method was used to analyze interview transcripts and construct a theory to describe how this sample of LQSGl women perceives trans individuals.

A process model was constructed to reflect the finding that participants came to understand and develop a stance of advocacy toward trans people. This core category was influenced by the following categories and their properties: personal characteristics (personality, values, gender expression, and attraction), sociocultural context (religion, family, coming out, regional context, and safety), campus climate (affirming, non-affirming, and neutral), learning about trans (modes of learning and content of learning), and LQSGl experiences. Understanding and developing a stance of advocacy was conceptualized as resulting in expressions of advocacy (attitudes and behaviors). Findings are discussed in terms of their relation to relevant literature, strengths and limitations of the study, and implications for future research.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	ii
LIST OF FIGURES.....	xi
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Statement of the Problem .....	1
History of the Problem .....	4
The Need .....	5
Significance of the Study.....	6
Definition of Terms .....	7
Overview of the Study.....	12
II. LITERATURE REVIEW.....	14
Campus Climate for LGBT Students .....	14
Counseling and Psychotherapy with Transgender Clients .....	20
Standards of Care for the Health of Transsexual, Transgender, and Gender Nonconforming People.....	21
DSM-IV-TR Diagnostic Criteria for Cross-Gender Identification .....	24
Stances of Professional Organizations .....	29
Empirical Studies on Counseling and Psychotherapy with Transgender Clients .....	31
Non-Empirical Literature on Counseling and Psychotherapy with Transgender Clients .....	56
Presenting concerns .....	57

## Table of Contents—continued

### CHAPTER

Goals of therapy.....	60
Therapeutic interventions .....	61
Cultural competencies .....	68
Transgender Identity Development .....	72
Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation .....	82
Lesbian Identity Development.....	83
Nonlinear Accounts of Lesbian Identity Formation.....	84
Typology of Lesbian Women.....	87
Developmental Stage Models of Lesbian Identity .....	89
Limitations of Developmental Stage Models.....	96
Gender in the Context of Gay and Lesbian Identity Development .....	97
The Socially Gendered Body.....	98
Butch and Femme Identities .....	103
Historical Context .....	106
Review of Butch and Femme Research .....	111
Butch identity .....	112
Femme identity .....	127
Butch and femme identities .....	136
Discussion of butch and femme literature.....	145
The Intersections of Transgender Theory, Queer Theory, Feminist Theory, and Gay and Lesbian Studies .....	149

## Table of Contents—continued

CHAPTER		
	Conclusion.....	157
III. METHODS .....		159
	Overview .....	159
	Research Question .....	159
	Qualitative Research and Grounded Theory.....	160
	Qualitative Research .....	160
	Grounded Theory .....	161
	Participant Recruitment and Selection Procedures.....	163
	Participant Eligibility .....	163
	Participant Recruitment .....	165
	Sample Selection.....	169
	Interviewing.....	173
	Phone Interviewing .....	173
	The Interview Guide .....	176
	Interview Procedure .....	178
	Data Analysis.....	179
	Researcher Reflexivity .....	183
	Rigor of the Study .....	184
	Researcher’s Background, Experience, and Assumptions .....	186
IV. RESULTS .....		192
	Participants .....	193

## Table of Contents—continued

### CHAPTER

Alice.....	193
Jaime .....	194
Bridget.....	194
Samantha.....	195
Jesse .....	195
Cass .....	196
Jean .....	197
Isabelle .....	197
The Category System.....	198
The Core Category: Understanding and Developing a Stance of Advocacy .....	198
Personal Characteristics .....	201
Personality.....	201
Values .....	204
Gender expression.....	206
Attraction .....	208
Sociocultural Context .....	210
Religion.....	210
Family .....	212
Coming out.....	214
Regional context .....	217
Safety .....	219

## Table of Contents—continued

CHAPTER		
	Campus Climate.....	220
	Affirming .....	220
	Non-affirming .....	222
	Neutral.....	225
	Learning About Trans .....	225
	Modes of learning .....	226
	Content of learning .....	231
	LQSGLE Experiences .....	236
	Expressions of Advocacy.....	239
	Attitudes.....	239
	Behaviors .....	245
	The Process Model .....	247
V.	DISCUSSION .....	253
	Summary of the Process Model.....	254
	Current Findings in the Context of Psychology and Sexual Minority Research Literature.....	256
	Stances of Professional Organizations Toward Practice with Trans Clients .....	257
	Campus Climate for LGBT Students .....	258
	Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation.....	259
	Models of Lesbian Identity Formation.....	261
	The Socially Gendered Body .....	263

## Table of Contents—continued

### CHAPTER

The Intersections of Trans Theory, Queer Theory, Feminist Theory, and Gay and Lesbian Studies.....	264
Development of Sexual Minority Allies .....	267
Implications for Counseling Professionals and Professionals in Higher Education.....	275
Study Strengths and Limitations.....	277
Strengths .....	277
Limitations .....	278
Recommendations for Future Research.....	279
REFERENCES .....	283

### APPENDICES

A. Recruitment Materials: Email to Consortium Listserv .....	303
B. Recruitment Materials: Email to University Women’s Centers .....	305
C. Recruitment Materials: Email to Referred Participants .....	307
D. Recruitment Materials: Phone Script for Referred Participants.....	309
E. Recruitment Materials: Invitation to Participate in a Research Study .....	311
F. Recruitment Materials: Email Response to Inquiries Regarding Participation .....	314
G. Recruitment Materials: Phone Script for Inquiries Regarding Participation .....	316
H. Recruitment Materials: Cover Letter for Potential Participant Information Packet.....	318
I. Informed Consent Form .....	320
J. Participant Background Questionnaire .....	324

## Table of Contents—continued

### APPENDICES

K. Participant Contact Information.....	328
L. Phone Script for Scheduling the First Interview and Participant Check Interview .....	330
M. Phone Script for Potential Participants Not Yet Selected .....	332
N. Interview Confirmation Email .....	335
O. Interview Guide.....	337
P. First Interview Thank-you Email .....	341
Q. Second Interview Thank-you Email.....	343
R. Participant Check Letter.....	345
S. Participant Check Interview Guide .....	347
T. Participant Check Interview Thank-you Email .....	350
U. HSIRB Approval Letter .....	352

## LIST OF FIGURES

1. Hierarchy of Categories .....	200
2. Schematic Representation of the Process Model .....	252

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Two gender identities, male and female, are such a given in life that most people never question them. Yet, some people find that their assigned gender does not describe them accurately. It can be difficult for those who feel comfortable with their assigned gender to imagine that for other people, gender can be fluid, flexible, redefined, or undefined. Transgender individuals are people who do not meet social expectations of gender. Expectations concerning how girls and boys or women and men should behave, dress, and interact with others are strong, if sometimes implicit. For this reason, how others interpret a person's gender expression may influence how that person is treated, what organizations that person may join, and even which restroom that person may use. Transgender individuals must therefore navigate how to live as differently gendered people, to whom to disclose their gender identity or gender history, and what changes, if any, they will make to their bodies to bring the physical self into harmony with their internal sense of gender.

#### Statement of the Problem

Transgender individuals “remain disproportionately vulnerable to discrimination because of widespread misunderstanding and misconceptions about them” (Lambda Legal, 2009, ¶ 2). In terms of legal protection in the U.S., no federal law explicitly protects individuals from discrimination based on gender identity and/or expression (Lambda Legal). Among state laws, only 11 states and the District of Columbia protect

gender identity in their hate crimes laws (Human Rights Campaign, n.d.a) and 21 states and D.C. protect gender identity in their employment laws (Human Rights Campaign, n.d.b). Transgender people may also face

challenges to their parental relationships and struggle with difficulties in obtaining appropriate sex and name designations on their identity documents. Transgender people also face significant hurdles in obtaining appropriate medical coverage, often due to insurance policies' exclusion of coverage for sex reassignment surgery and related treatments. Transgender youth struggle against harassment in schools and institutional barriers to gender expression. (Lambda Legal, 2009, ¶ 1)

Despite the many social and legal barriers to living as a transgender person, there is a notable lack of research devoted to understanding bias against transgender people.

While national transgender organizations work to improve the social and legal climate for transgender people, local transgender groups can be difficult to access or even non-existent, particularly outside of major metropolitan areas. Some transgender people find company among lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) or queer communities where there is some history of shared struggle for rights and some degree of acceptance for gender nonconformity. It would be inaccurate, however, to suggest that tensions do not exist between transgender and LGB communities or that all LGB people share the same perspectives about transgender people and their involvement. For example, as recently as 2007, the U.S. House of Representatives voted in favor of a version of the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA) that included protections for sexual orientation but not gender identity and/or expression. One major LGB lobbying organization supported this version of ENDA, reasoning that because support could not be gained for gender identity

protection at the time, at least sexual orientation could be covered. Other LGB and transgender organizations strongly opposed moving forward with any version of ENDA that did not protect both classes of people. At the time of this writing, the language of ENDA included both classes and had support from numerous LGBT organizations but a vote had not yet been scheduled in the Senate (see <http://lezbelib.com/life/exploring-gender-employment-non-discrimination-act-2012>). With the exception of some theoretical publications from transgender studies, there is limited research concerning LGB bias against transgender people.

Relations between transgender individuals and lesbian women are no less complex. For example, the issue of how to define women's-only space is at the heart of a long controversy concerning the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival. The nationally attended event brings the women's community and lesbian community (which often overlap) together under an admissions policy restricted to "womyn-born-womyn." This effectively bars entrance for woman-identified transgender people who have not lived their entire lives as female. Many attendees view the policy as an issue of physical and emotional safety. That is, the festival provides a unique community in which women rely on one another for all aspects of daily living, creating a respite from the presence of men, male bodies, and the violence and patriarchy often associated with them. Attendees who disagree with the admissions policy may wear armbands to signify solidarity with transgender women or spend time outside the grounds at "Camp Trans," a nearby center for protest and organizing by the transgender community and its allies. This localized example highlights an undercurrent of complicated relations that take place between lesbians and transgender people in communities across the country. Transgender studies,

gay and lesbian studies, queer theory, and feminist theory have all speculated about the reasons for such problematic lesbian-transgender relations, yet the topic has not been investigated empirically.

One potential setting for studying lesbian-transgender relations is that of higher education. Educational programming about sexual orientation and gender identity has increased on college and university campuses with the burgeoning of LGBT campus resource centers and the adoption of protections for sexual orientation and for gender identity and/or expression in university non-discrimination and Equal Employment Opportunity policies. Research on the campus climate for LGBT students, faculty, and staff indicates a desperate need for such educational efforts (Brown, Clarke, Gortmaker, & Robinson-Keilig, 2004; Hamilton, 2007; Herek, 1993; Rankin, 2005). This body of research has shed light on LGBT student, faculty, and staff experiences of harassment and discrimination, LGBT perceptions of the campus climate and institutional response, and LGBT and heterosexuals' knowledge of and interest in learning about LGBT issues. The campus climate literature has, therefore, attended to how LGBT people (and others) perceive they are treated by the sexual majority on campus. The literature has not addressed within-group differences, that is, attitudes and interactions among LGBT members of a university community, such as those between lesbian women and transgender people.

### History of the Problem

Transgender people have been, and arguably still are, pathologized by decades of classifications in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) involving gender identity.

Thus, publications that reach beyond etiology and psychopathology are sorely needed (Sanchez & Vilain, 2009). Lesbian women also have been historically pathologized in the DSM and have taken a back seat to gay men in the LGB literature. While several steps ahead of transgender research, affirmative literature about lesbian women is lacking within counseling psychology. An additional issue related to research with sexual minorities is that of access to LGBT samples. As Meyer and Wilson (2009) observed, the LGB(T) population may be difficult to define conceptually and may not readily disclose their identity to researchers.

### The Need

Little is known about how individuals form their attitudes toward transgender people. According to Hill (2005), studying who discriminates against transgender people and why they discriminate is a priority for transgender research, as this knowledge could help with the design of interventions to combat transgender bias. Lesbians are among those who have demonstrated intolerance toward transgender individuals (Carter, 2000; Rubin, 1992), though no empirical studies have investigated the reasons for such intolerance. The present qualitative study was designed to fill a gap in the existing literature by exploring lesbian students' perceptions of transgender individuals.

Transgender issues are an emerging area of research within counseling psychology. In 2009, the first empirical study about transgender people was published by a major counseling psychology journal. In a special issue of the *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, Sanchez and Vilain (2009) reported on their survey of 53 self-identified male-to-female transsexuals regarding their use of collective self-esteem as a resource for

coping with psychological distress. The literature reviewed for the present study, therefore, includes publications from transgender studies, women's studies, gay and lesbian studies, and queer theory, in addition to insight from the literature about lesbian identity development and transgender identity development. Some of the areas explored by these bodies of literature that may inform our understanding of lesbians' perceptions of transgender individuals include: (a) ways transgender people come to understand their gender in comparison with how lesbians come to understand their gender; (b) factors that are believed to influence lesbian identity formation, including identification as a woman and not as a man; (c) how lesbians view the physical body and how demographic factors influence lesbians' body image; (d) the history of lesbian gender roles; and (e) the complex ways people view gender and power. The above fields have boldly laid the groundwork for counseling psychologists to build research that focuses on cultural competency, therapeutic intervention, and community education concerning gender identity.

### Significance of the Study

The aim of the present study was to explore lesbian students' perceptions of transgender people by developing a grounded theory to explain how a sample of lesbian students views transgender individuals. An increased understanding of this topic may help university personnel more effectively educate their campus communities about gender identity. It was also hoped that exploring lesbian students' perceptions of transgender individuals would clarify how lesbian women view gender more generally, which could assist psychologists in their work with lesbian students concerning gender-

related issues. Finally, empirical exploration of this topic may help in the identification of further questions to ask about lesbian-transgender relations for future investigations.

### Definition of Terms

Defining transgender terminology is challenging, as considerable variation exists among the terms individuals use to describe their transgender-related identity and experience. Thus, the terms defined below are presented with the caveats that language is constantly evolving and that the terms used here are not meant to replace respectful inquiry of individuals or groups concerning how they identify or how they prefer to be addressed.

1. Transgender (Trans) - generally considered an umbrella term that attempts to include all people who are gender variant, or whose gender expression is not congruent with what is expected based on their biological sex (Green & Peterson, 2006). Many specific identities (e.g., transsexual, transgenderist, cross-dresser, genderqueer) can be captured by the term transgender. Some terms, however, have become outdated in favor of more politically correct language. For example, transvestite is now considered a derogatory term, and has been replaced with cross-dresser. Yet, some individuals continue to identify as transvestites, while others engage in the behavior of cross-dressing without identifying as cross-dressers. Furthermore, some transgender people prefer to identify as trans, a term that indicates gender nonconformity without revealing one's hormonal or surgical status or intentions (Green & Peterson, 2006). Because of its increasing use and inclusive scope, trans will be the primary term used throughout this writing to refer to gender nonconforming, transgender, and transsexual people when

individual identities are unknown or when the speaker refers to the greater community of people under the umbrella of transgender. At times, the terms transgender and trans may be used interchangeably.

2. Sex – in the present study, the terms sex and biological sex will refer to the combination of “chromosomes, [internal and] external gender organs, secondary sex characteristics and hormonal balances” (Green & Peterson, 2006, p. 8) that lead to the assignment of a person’s sex as male or female. The author also recognizes the existence of biological sex categories that fall outside of male and female, such as intersex, or people with disorders of sex development (DSDs). People with DSDs are “born with an anatomy and/or physiology that differs from the cultural and medical ‘ideals’ of male and female” (National Transgender Education Project [NTEP], 2007b); however because some advocates of people with DSDs separate their concerns from those of transgender people (see Intersex Society of North America, [www.isna.org](http://www.isna.org)), this study will not focus specifically on individuals with DSDs except as one of the many identities that may be captured under the umbrella term transgender.

3. Legal sex - a person’s sex according to local, state, and federal governments (NTEP, 2007a). The “M” or “F” marker on documents such as a birth certificate, driver’s license, or social security card refers to a person’s legal sex. Note that a person’s legal sex at birth may be different from the person’s legal sex later in life. For this reason, the designation of legal sex on various documents may not match (NTEP, 2007a).

4. Gender - one’s appearance of masculinity, femininity, or androgyny. Gender is often referred to as “the social concept that is attached to a person’s sex” (NTEP, 2007a).

5. Gender identity - a person's self-perception as or internal sense of being masculine, feminine, both, neither, or other gendered (Green & Peterson; NTEP, 2007a).

6. Gender expression and gender presentation - how one "wears and performs one's gender, through clothing, language, physical movement, [and] body modification" (NTEP, 2007a).

7. Gender roles - social roles that people play regarding gender. The gender roles in mainstream U.S. culture include that of a man – typically a person who is dominant in relationships with others, assertive, non-emotional, and enjoys activities such as sports – and that of a woman – typically non-dominant in relationships with others, passive, emotional, and enjoys activities such as cooking (NTEP, 2007a). Because these gender roles are based on stereotypes of appropriate behavior and appearance, they are often considered "sexist and very offensive and restricting" (NTEP).

8. Binary gender system - privileges individuals whose sex and gender match. The two gender roles, man and woman, match the dichotomous sex categories of male and female, which go hand-in-hand with the binary gender system that is the hallmark of mainstream U.S. culture. The system discriminates against those whose sex and gender do not match and those who change their sex or gender expression to match their gender identity.

9. Transgenderist – a person who transgresses gender in some way, such as a male who identifies as a woman, a person who doesn't seem to be a man or a woman, or a person who looks both like a man and a woman (Girshick, 2005). The emphasis here is on those who transgress traditional gender norms, but who do not consider themselves to be transsexual. Transgenderists may transgress gender norms in order to make a

statement about the limitations of traditional gender roles. Or, transgenderists may have other motivations for their gender presentation, such as expressing gender in a way that is more congruent with their gender identity.

10. Transsexual - describes a person who transgresses gender, but typically refers to “individuals assigned one gender at birth, who now identify and live as what most people would consider the ‘opposite’ gender” (NTEP, 2007b).

11. Cross-dresser - a person who wears clothing considered inappropriate by society, that is, the clothing of another sex/gender (Green & Peterson, 2006; NTEP, 2007b). Individuals may cross-dress to be comfortable in their gender identity, to be regarded in their identity-congruent gender role, to attain sexual gratification, or for other reasons (NTEP, 2007b).

12. Gender transition - a change in gender expression undergone by transsexuals and transgenderists that results in other people regarding them as their identity-congruent gender. For transsexuals, the gender transition may or may not involve hormone replacement therapy, sex reassignment surgery, electrolysis, or some other type of body modification (Girshick, 2005) to bring their bodies more in line with their gender identities.

Some transsexuals describe their transition status as pre-operative (pre-op) or post-operative (post-op) depending on when their sex reassignment surgery or surgeries are planned. Because many people cannot afford sex reassignment surgery or they have physical limitations that prevent medical procedures, some transsexuals identify as non-operative (non-op), or they choose not to reveal their operative status as a matter of privacy. 13. Sex Reassignment Surgery – a “term used by some medical professionals to

refer to a group of surgical options that alter a person's 'sex'. In most states, one or multiple surgeries are required to achieve legal recognition of gender variance" (Green & Peterson, 2006, p. 8). When people talk about sex reassignment surgery, they typically refer to genital surgery, or bottom surgery. Top surgery, then, is "surgery for the construction of a male-type chest" (Green & Peterson, p. 9), though it may also refer to breast augmentation. The phrase gender confirming surgery has begun to replace sex reassignment surgery within the transgender community. This is the result of an effort to replace the notion of assigning a person's gender based on their biological sex with the notion of bringing a person's body into harmony with their gender identity. Both terms will be used throughout this study.

14. FTM and MTF - Female-to-Male (FTM) and Male-to-Female (MTF). A person whose biological sex is female and who identifies as a man will be referred to as FTM, meaning female-to-male. Likewise, a person whose biological sex is male and who identifies as a woman will be referred to as MTF, meaning male-to-female (Green & Peterson; NTEP, 2007b). Note that other terms, such as Female-to-Different Gender and Male-to-Different Gender, have been coined in order to avoid language that supports the binary gender system. In addition, the terms CAMAB (coercively assigned male at birth, pronounced /kay-mab/) and CAFAB (coercively assigned female at birth, pronounced /kay-fab/) are sometimes used to denote the unwanted assignment of sex based on one's appearance at birth. Because MTF and FTM are still widely used and are the most commonly recognized terms, they will be used for this study.

15. Genderqueer – "A gender variant person whose gender identity is neither male nor female, is between or beyond genders, or is some combination of genders." People

who identify as genderqueer often wish to express “a political agenda to challenge gender stereotypes and the gender binary system” (Green & Peterson, p. 4).

16. Transphobia - the “irrational fear of those who are gender diverse and/or the inability to deal with gender ambiguity” (Green & Peterson, p. 10).

17. Cisgender or Cis - a person who does not identify as transgender, gender nonconforming, or gender questioning. The prefix cis (pronounced /sĭs/) is derived from the Latin for “on the same side,” meaning that the person’s gender role and gender expression are congruent with the person’s biological sex and the person is comfortable identifying and expressing as the gender assigned at birth (NTEP, 2007b). By referring to people as cisgender rather than traditionally gendered or non-transgender, language that refers to one group as normal or deviant is avoided.

18. Queer - an umbrella term to refer to “a matrix of sexual preferences, orientations, and habits of the not-exclusively-heterosexual-and-monogamous majority” (Green & Peterson, 2006, p. 7). Queer may include lesbians, gay men, bisexual men and women, transgender people, and other sexually transgressive people. In some areas of literature, queer is used as “a sexual orientation label...as a way of acknowledging that there are more than two genders to be attracted to, or as a way of stating a nonheterosexual orientation without having to state who [one is] attracted to” (Green & Peterson, p. 7).

### Overview of the Study

Despite evidence that tensions exist between lesbian women and transgender people, no empirical studies to date have investigated how lesbians form their attitudes

toward transgender people. This qualitative research study was designed to investigate the perceptions that a sample of lesbian/queer/same-gender-loving women students have of trans individuals and what underlying processes have influenced those perceptions. A grounded theory method of qualitative inquiry was used in order to develop a theory that closely reflects participants' lived experiences in relation to trans issues and trans people, as described through telephone interviews with the researcher. The literature relevant to conceptualizing the research question is reviewed in Chapter II. The methodology and methods employed to investigate the research question are explicated in Chapter III. The findings and resulting process model are presented in Chapter IV. Discussion of the core category and its connection to the literature appear in Chapter V, along with strengths and limitations of the study as well as implications for future research.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of the present study is to develop a grounded theory that describes how a sample of lesbian students views transgender individuals. Because little is known about how individuals form their attitudes toward transgender people and because no empirical studies have investigated lesbian perceptions of transgender individuals, this study is exploratory in nature. As such, the literature reviewed in this chapter covers a range of topics that set a context for conceptualizing the research question. The chapter is organized into eight sections. These include (a) campus climate for LGBT students, (b) counseling and psychotherapy with transgender clients, (c) models of transgender identity formation, (d) gender identity and sexual orientation, (e) models of lesbian identity formation, (f) the socially gendered body, (g) butch and femme identities, and (h) the intersections of transgender theory, queer theory, feminist theory, and gay and lesbian studies.

#### Campus Climate for LGBT Students

Rankin (2005) defined campus climate as “the cumulative attitudes, behaviors, and standards of employees and students concerning access for, inclusion of, and level of respect for individual and group needs, abilities, and potential” (p. 17). LGBT students who attend colleges or universities where the campus climate is homophobic or transphobic may not achieve their full academic potential and may be prevented from fully participating in campus activities (Rankin). Several authors (Brown et al., 2004;

Hamilton, 2007; Herek, 1993; Rankin) have documented the frequency and forms of harassment and violence that LGBT students, faculty, and staff reported experiencing at U.S. colleges and universities.

A survey of Yale University lesbian and gay (n = 24), bisexual (n = 42), and heterosexual (n = 43) students, faculty, and staff revealed that 65% of respondents had been verbally assaulted and 25% of respondents had been threatened with physical violence based on actual or perceived sexual orientation (Herek, 1993). Verbal assaults most often took the form of disparaging remarks about LGB people that were directed at individuals or overheard by them. Interestingly, peers were most frequently the source of such remarks. For example, 49% of verbal assaults reported by undergraduate students were made by other undergraduates, 55% of those reported by faculty were made by other faculty or department heads, and 60% of verbal incidents reported by staff members were perpetrated by another staff member or supervisor. LGB individuals responded to the verbal assaults by hiding their sexual orientation from others. They also reported fearing unfair treatment or discrimination more than they feared physical attacks (Herek).

Respondents to the Yale survey reported that physical violence consisted of being chased, beaten, spat upon, assaulted with a weapon, sexually harassed, sexually assaulted, and having objects thrown at them as well as having personal property damaged or destroyed (Herek, 1993). Even those who did not directly experience such attacks reported knowing at least one person who had experienced them. Consequently, some individuals feared violence enough to modify their behavior in order to avoid harassment. Thirty-nine percent of respondents reported avoiding parties or social events where harassment seemed likely, avoiding displays of affection with a same-sex partner, or

hiding their sexual orientation through monitoring behavior, speech, or appearance (Herek).

In a survey conducted over a decade later, Rankin (2005) asked 1,669 self-identified LGBT students, faculty, and staff from four private and ten public colleges and universities across the U.S. about “their perceptions of campus climate for LGBT people, and their perceptions of institutional responses to LGBT issues and concerns” (p. 18). Rankin found that over one-third of LGBT undergraduate students had experienced harassment during the past year. Harassment most commonly took the form of derogatory remarks (89%). Students also heard spoken threats (48%), witnessed anti-LGBT graffiti (39%), experienced pressure to conceal their sexual orientation or gender identity (38%), received written comments (33%), and were victims of physical assaults (<1%). Not unlike participants in Herek’s (1993) survey, over half of the respondents concealed their sexual orientation or gender identity in order to avoid intimidation. In addition, LGBT people of color were more likely than White LGBT people to conceal their identity, as LGBT people of color felt uncomfortable in the company of primarily heterosexual people of color as well as among primarily White LGBT groups (Rankin).

Transgender respondents to Rankin’s (2005) survey reported experiencing significantly higher rates of harassment compared to LGB men and women. Despite the fact that transgender students enter college and graduate school at varying levels of awareness and openness about their gender identity, most colleges and universities offer little or no support to transgender students (Beemyn, Curtis, Davis, & Tubbs, 2005).

In terms of overall campus climate for LGBT people, Rankin’s (2005) survey revealed that the overwhelming majority of students, faculty, and staff described their

campuses as homophobic. The same individuals depicted the campus climate for non-LGBT people as friendly, concerned, and respectful. Furthermore, 41% of respondents felt their college or university did not adequately address concerns related to sexual orientation and gender identity, with LGB people, transgender people, and administrators feeling this most strongly (Rankin).

At a Midwestern state university, Brown et al. (2004) surveyed LGBT students (n = 80), heterosexual students (n = 253), resident assistants (RAs; n = 105), faculty (n = 126), and student affairs staff (n = 41) to learn about their knowledge of and interest in LGBT concerns, involvement in LGBT programs and events, and perceptions of anti-LGBT attitudes on campus. The authors found that different groups had different perceptions about the campus climate for LGBT students and varying levels of knowledge, interest, and attitudes about LGBT people. Not surprisingly, LGBT students “perceived the campus climate more negatively, indicated they had more knowledge and interest in [LGBT] topics and participated more in [LGBT]-related activities than did [heterosexual] students, RAs, faculty, and student affairs staff” (p. 20). Among remaining groups, student affairs staff reported being most receptive to LGBT awareness efforts, followed by faculty in the soft sciences, who reported more interest in LGBT workshops, higher relevance of LGBT topics to their field, and more positive attitudes toward LGBT issues than faculty in the hard sciences. Compared to a general sample of heterosexual students, RAs reported learning more about LGBT concerns over the course of the academic year and experiencing more attitude change concerning LGBT people. Among all groups, females were more aware than males of anti-LGBT attitudes on campus and reported greater interest than males in learning about LGBT issues. Among heterosexual

students, first-years reported less involvement in LGBT programs and events, demonstrated less awareness of anti-LGBT attitudes on campus, and reported less positive attitudes toward LGBT people than did upperclass students. Based on these findings, the authors recommended that LGBT-affirmative programming target specific campus groups (Brown et al.).

Hamilton (2007) uncovered homophobia among a sample of 43 White female residents of a university “party dorm” engaged in the Greek letter organization party scene. Participants in Hamilton’s ethnographic interviews were primarily heterosexual, middle- to upper-middle-class, and had traditionally feminine gender presentations. The women’s homophobia took the form of social distancing from lesbian students and performing same-sex erotic acts such as kissing other women for the pleasure of men. Social distancing and the performance of same-sex eroticism for a heterosexual male audience served to bolster participants’ attractiveness to men. These behaviors also made it difficult for lesbians to define their same-sex erotic behaviors as non-heterosexual. The author observed that homophobia and sexism were linked in this situation, for, when disadvantaged relative to men, “women may rely on gender strategies that access compensatory benefits through their relationships with men” (p. 168). These practices forced lesbians to choose one of two paths: make their lesbian identity known while experiencing social invisibility or join heterosexual social networks while struggling to make their lesbian identity known (Hamilton).

Gortmaker and Brown (2006) demonstrated that the perceptions of campus climate may differ for out versus closeted lesbian and gay students. In their study of 36 highly out (i.e., out) and 44 low out (i.e., closeted) lesbian and gay students at a

Midwestern college, the authors found differences in students' perceptions of the overall campus climate and in their reported needs as LG college students. Closeted students perceived a friendlier campus climate than out students and participated less in social and political activities within the LG community. Out students were more involved in LG activities and reported desiring inclusive institutional policies for LG people. Closeted students, on the other hand, focused on their needs for LG library books, LG-related courses, and LG student organizations. Both groups reported experiencing unfair treatment and the subsequent need to hide their identity from others. Much like participants in Herek's (1993) survey, the respondents in this study perceived the most negativity from their peers. Both groups also reported a similar frequency of anti-LG attacks (Gortmaker & Brown).

In response to homophobia and transphobia on college and university campuses, a number of institutions have implemented structural changes such as establishing LGBT resource centers, safe-space programs, institutional recognition of LGBT groups, domestic partner benefits, nondiscrimination policies, sensitivity training for RAs, integration of LGBT issues into course curricula, safe methods for reporting campus violence, and safe social outlets for LGBT students (L. Carroll & Gilroy, 2002; Chen-Hayes, 2001; Frankfurt, 2000; Gagné, Tewksbury, & McGaughey, 1997; Rankin, 2005). Campuses have also made changes that would more effectively include transgender students, such as addressing the problem of sex-segregated facilities (i.e., campus housing, bathrooms, locker rooms), ensuring affirmative counseling and health care practices, and establishing procedures for changing the gender designation on academic records (Beemyn et al., 2005). Unfortunately, even on campuses where such initiatives

have been put into place, LGBT community members have observed a less than welcoming campus climate (Rankin). The hope is that the future holds a more “transformed institution, [where] heterosexist assumptions are replaced by assumptions of diverse sexualities and relationships, and these new assumptions govern the design and implementation of all institutional activities, programs, and services” (Rankin, p. 22). As evidenced by the limited research presented here, much work and investigation remain in order to realize this vision. The present study of lesbian students’ attitudes toward transgender people serves as one step on the journey toward a more positive campus climate.

### Counseling and Psychotherapy with Transgender Clients

Counseling issues specific to transgender individuals have received minimal attention in the psychological literature (Korell & Lorah, 2007; Perez, 2007) and remain severely underrepresented within counseling psychology (Morrow, 2003; Phillips, Ingram, Smith, & Mindes, 2003). The majority of writings in this area have been published in professional journals and book chapters in the fields of clinical psychology, human sexuality, gay and lesbian studies, and transgender studies. Articles published in the field of clinical psychology focus primarily on the outcome of sex reassignment surgeries, offering little in the way of guidance regarding competent practice with transgender clients whose primary concerns are not surgical. While some scholars (e.g., Owens, Riggle, & Rostosky, 2007) have included transgender concerns in their writings about counseling lesbian, gay, and bisexual clients, such “LGBT” work rarely includes issues specific to the transgender population. Although well-meaning, the practice of

subsuming transgender under the heading of sexual minorities without addressing transgender-specific concerns results in ignoring the particular needs and experiences of transgender individuals (Morrow).

The present section will review the literature that explores counseling and psychotherapy with transgender individuals. The literature in this area focuses on the treatment of transgender clients in therapy, factors that may increase transgender clients' risk for psychopathology, and recommended competencies for therapists working with transgender clients. In order to provide a context for this review, the section will begin with a description of the psychological requirements of the Standards of Care for the Health of Transsexual, Transgender, and Gender Nonconforming People, Version 7 (World Professional Association for Transgender Health, 2011) for those seeking hormone therapy and/or surgical treatment. Next, the diagnostic criteria relevant to transgender individuals in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition, Text Revision (DSM-IV-TR; American Psychiatric Association, 2000) and the implications of these criteria will be described. The stances of professional organizations concerning transgender care will follow. Having established a context for this section, empirical studies on the topic of transgender issues in psychotherapy will be presented, followed by the non-empirical scholarship.

*Standards of Care for the Health of Transsexual, Transgender, and Gender Nonconforming People*

Transgender individuals who desire hormone therapy or surgical interventions to assist them in their gender transitions are required by many medical professionals to follow the Standards of Care for the Health of Transsexual, Transgender, and Gender

Nonconforming People, Version 7 (Standards of Care) established by the World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH), formerly the Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association (Anderson, 1998; WPATH, 2011). The Standards of Care are meant to provide “clinical guidance for health professionals to assist transsexual, transgender, and gender nonconforming people with safe and effective pathways to achieving lasting personal comfort with their gendered selves” (WPATH, 2011, p.1). These guidelines are intended to be flexible enough to allow for variation in the types of treatment people seek and universal in setting minimum eligibility requirements and standards for readiness to engage in the different kinds of treatment (WPATH, 2011).

The Standards of Care (WPATH, 2011) list recommended competencies for mental health practitioners who work with transsexual, transgender, and gender nonconforming people. Practitioners may specialize in the treatment of adults or children. The Adult-Specialist should hold at least a master’s degree in a clinical behavioral science field, have documented supervised training and competence in psychotherapy and clinical diagnosis, be knowledgeable about gender nonconforming identities and the assessment and treatment of gender dysphoria, and obtain continuing education in the treatment of gender dysphoria (WPATH, 2011). In addition to completing all of the requirements for the Adult-Specialist, the Child-Specialist should have training in child and adolescent development and be competent in providing psychotherapy to children and adolescents (WPATH, 2011).

The Standards of Care also specify the role that mental health professionals should play in the care of transsexual, transgender, and gender nonconforming clients

(WPATH, 2011). Therapists are expected to accurately assess for gender dysphoria and any co-existing mental health conditions, providing psychotherapy as needed. Therapists offer counsel concerning the range of hormone and surgical treatment options available and their implications. Additional responsibilities include determining the individual's eligibility and readiness for hormone therapy and/or surgery; documenting the personal and treatment history, progress, and eligibility in a chart or letter of recommendation; considering the availability of follow-up care throughout the client's life; and educating family, employers, and institutions about individuals with gender concerns (WPATH, 2011).

Given the flexibility of the Standards of Care, the requisite psychological treatment for a particular transsexual, transgender, or gender nonconforming person will vary according to the requirements set forth by the treating physician or surgeon (WPATH, 2011). The Standards of Care require that a psychological evaluation precedes all medical interventions, but they do not require psychotherapy or a specific number of sessions with a mental health provider. In actual practice, many medical professionals require individuals to engage in a period of psychotherapy prior to genital surgery, though the duration of psychotherapy varies (Anderson, 1998). In addition, 12 continuous months of hormone therapy and living in an identity-congruent gender role are mandatory in advance of genital surgery. A referral from one mental health professional is necessary for an individual to receive hormone therapy or breast/chest surgery, and referrals from two mental health professionals are typically required for genital surgery (Anderson; WPATH, 2011). Finally, most insurance companies require a formal psychiatric diagnosis of Gender Identity Disorder for medical and psychological service coverage

(Anderson), though such coverage is reportedly rare in the U.S. because it is considered elective or cosmetic (Winters, 2005).

Clients following the Standards of Care often present to counseling in pursuit of letters of recommendation, support for 12 months of living in an identity-congruent gender role, or fulfillment of a period of psychotherapy required by medical personnel. Although Mostade (2006) argued that the client-counselor relationship often “grows to a much deeper and more meaningful interaction” (p. 312) over time, many transgender and gender nonconforming individuals view the Standards of Care as a hurdle that must be jumped to obtain the treatment they desire.

#### *DSM-IV-TR Diagnostic Criteria for Cross-Gender Identification*

The classification of cross-gender identification in the DSM-IV-TR has been described as everything from appropriate and necessary to ambiguous and discriminatory. A review of its history reveals that the psychiatric declassification of homosexuality in 1973 was closely followed by the addition of transsexualism in 1975. This event aroused suspicion concerning the replacement of discrimination based on same-sex sexual orientation with discrimination based on non-conforming gender identity (Lev, 2007). The diagnosis of Gender Identity Disorder (GID) was added to the DSM in 1980 and was intended to replace transsexualism, which was eventually removed in 1994 (Chen-Hayes, 2001; WPATH, 2011). Four diagnostic categories that could potentially be assigned to transgender individuals remain in the DSM-IV-TR: GID in Children, GID in Adolescents or Adults, GID Not Otherwise Specified, and Transvestic Fetishism. The diagnoses of GID and Transvestic Fetishism are the subjects of controversy, as described below.

Transvestic Fetishism entails intense, recurrent sexually arousing fantasies, urges, or behaviors that involve cross-dressing and that cause clinically significant distress or impairment (APA, 2000). (Transvestic Fetishism should not be confused with the behavior of cross-dressing that is not primarily for sexual pleasure.) The most concerning feature of the classification for Transvestic Fetishism as it relates to the current discussion is that it is restricted to diagnosis in heterosexual men. According to Gainor (2000), such restriction renders the diagnosis problematic for both gender and sexual orientation. First, by restricting the diagnosis to men, it assumes the sexist position that the male gender is more desirable and powerful than the female gender. Thus, men who possess the sexual urge to cross-dress are considered disordered, ostensibly because men should not wish to give up their privileged social status. Their female counterparts, on the other hand, are not considered disordered, for a woman has good reason to desire male status. Second, the restriction of this diagnosis to heterosexual men insinuates that cross-gender behavior is unacceptable in a heterosexual man, but acceptable (and even expected) in a gay man, a belief perpetuated by the conflation of sexual orientation and gender expression (Gainor).

The DSM-IV-TR criteria for GID include a strong and persistent cross-gender identification, persistent discomfort with one's sex or a sense that the gender role of that sex is inappropriate, and clinically significant distress or impairment in important areas of functioning (APA, 2000). The transgender community stands divided in its support of the diagnosis (Lev, 2005; Richards, 2007; Winters, 2005). Pre-operative transsexuals often need the diagnosis to receive medical treatment, while post-operative or non-operative

transgender individuals may feel stigmatized by the diagnosis (Richards). These opposing positions are discussed in more detail below.

Those who advocate for the continued use of GID argue that because of the requirements set forth in the Standards of Care, obtaining the diagnosis of GID is an essential step to qualifying for hormones and surgical treatment. Many fear that without the diagnosis, access to these medical services would be denied (Lev, 2005; Richards, 2007; Winters, 2005). Advocates of GID also point to the economic disadvantage that some individuals would incur should insurance companies withdraw their coverage due to the absence of a diagnosed psychiatric condition (Winters). For their part, the WPATH (2011) noted that “the existence of a diagnosis for [gender] dysphoria often facilitates access to health care and can guide further research into effective treatments” (p. 6). Likewise, Fink (2005) advocated for including GID in the future DSM-V based on his treatment of transsexuals who experienced psychological distress surrounding their transition.

Critics of GID cite five major concerns with the diagnosis. The first concern relates to the unfairness of maintaining a diagnostic category used solely to access medical services, which is the case for well-adjusted transgender individuals who merely seek hormone and/or surgical interventions (Richards, 2007). The second concern with GID is that the name implies there are disordered and non-disordered ways of doing gender (Gainor, 2000; Goethals & Schwiebert, 2005; Lev, 2005). This implication serves to bolster the binary gender system by inferring that to be male or female is non-disordered, but to identify otherwise is psychologically disordered. This implication also supports the heteronormative notion that a person’s sex and gender should match and that

cross-gender individuals necessarily experience an uncomfortable opposition between their gender and biological sex, when many do not (Goethals & Schwiebert; Lev). Gainor asserted that GID has no place in psychiatric diagnosis, for she viewed gender identities as infinite in number and flexible throughout a person's life.

The third criticism of GID relates to criterion D, which refers to “clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning” (APA, 2000, p. 581). The DSM-IV-TR makes no distinction between distress imposed by societal prejudice and distress caused by gender dysphoria, the internal struggle to come to terms with one's gender identity (Gainor, 2000; Lev, 2005; Winters, 2005). Without such a distinction, it may appear that GID should be assigned to every transgender or gender nonconforming person who experiences distress, regardless of the source of that distress. Not every person with gender concerns, however, has GID (Ellis & Eriksen, 2002; Israel & Tarver, 1997). Assignment of the diagnosis could thus pathologize individuals simply for being themselves in an intolerant society (Gainor; Goethals & Schwiebert, 2005). In fact, the DSM-IV-TR states that “neither deviant behaviors (e.g., political, religious, or sexual) nor conflicts that are primarily between the individual and society are mental disorders unless the deviance or conflict is a symptom of a dysfunction in the individual” (APA, 2000, p. xxxi). Thus, there may be times when GID does not meet the DSM-IV-TR criteria for a mental disorder because the impairment experienced by the client is a direct result of the client's relationship with an intolerant society (Hill, Rozanski, Carfagnini, & Willoughby, 2005).

The fourth concern with the GID diagnosis involves ambiguous meaning regarding the term sex in criterion B, which makes it difficult to know when GID would

be resolved in an individual. Criterion B refers to “persistent discomfort with his or her sex or sense of inappropriateness in the gender role of that sex” (APA, 2000, p. 581). If this criterion refers to biological sex, then there does not appear to be a time when GID would be resolved in a transgender person. For, even healthy post-operative transsexuals would feel discomfort with their biological sex, however well-adjusted they may be in their post-transition body (Winters, 2005). If, however, the criterion refers to what Winters termed “present somatic sex,” (p. 82) then GID would be resolved once the transgender individual arrived at a satisfactory identity and no longer experienced gender dysphoria (Israel & Tarver, 1997; Winters). Clearly, the latter course would be more pleasing to transgender individuals who do not wish to be considered disordered their entire lives.

The fifth criticism of GID surrounds its diagnosis in children. Hill et al. (2005) complained that the GID in Children (GID-C) diagnosis is heavily based upon stereotypical gender behaviors, such as the following:

Boys...particularly enjoy playing house, drawing pictures of beautiful girls and princesses, and watching television or videos of their favorite female characters. Stereotypical female-type dolls, such as Barbie, are often their favorite toys, and girls are their preferred playmates. They avoid rough-and-tumble play and competitive sports and have little interest in cars and trucks or other nonaggressive but stereotypical boys' toys....Girls...display intense negative reactions to parental expectations or attempts to have them wear dresses or other feminine attire. They prefer boys' clothing and short hair, are often misidentified by strangers as boys, and may ask to be called by a boy's name....These girls

prefer boys as playmates, with whom they share interests in contact sports, rough-and-tumble play, and traditional boyhood games. (APA, 2000, p. 576-577)

Because the rules for gender roles change over time and vary by culture, Hill and his colleagues argued that the diagnosis cannot be a consistent descriptor of gendered behavior or condition. It has also been argued that GID-C's basis in stereotypical gender behaviors indirectly pathologizes gay and lesbian sexual orientations (Brown & Rounsley, 1996; Gainor, 2000; Hill et al.; Lev, 2007). Historically, cross-gender appearance and behavior were associated with same-sex sexual orientation, as one member of a gay or lesbian couple was assumed to take on the role of the other sex (Lev). Cross-gender behavior, even in young children, worries caregivers who erroneously believe they can ensure a heterosexual orientation for their children by intervening early in their children's gender behaviors (Brown & Rounsley). Thus, children diagnosed with GID-C may be exposed to aversive therapies for their gender variant behavior and may experience damage to their developing self-esteem and self-concept (Brown & Rounsley).

### *Stances of Professional Organizations*

A search of the mental health professional organization literature revealed some promising findings. In August, 2008 the American Psychological Association (APA) issued a statement of Transgender, Gender Identity, and Gender Expression Non-Discrimination (see <http://www.apa.org/about/policy/transgender.aspx>). In addition, the APA Task Force on Gender Identity, Gender Variance, and Intersex Conditions founded AFFIRM: Psychologists Affirming Their LGBT Family (see

<http://naples.cc.stonybrook.edu/CAS/affirm.nsf>). Unfortunately, the AFFIRM website states its support of transgender individuals, but recommends readings and provides bibliographies of LGB-related scholarship, omitting those on transgender topics. In 2008, the American Psychological Association of Graduate Students (APAGS) changed the name and focus of their then-GLB committee to the APAGS Committee on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Concerns in order to include the issues of transgender graduate students (see <http://www.apa.org/apags/governance/subcommittees/clgbtc.aspx>).

The American Counseling Association added T to its LGB division in 2007, forming the Association for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Issues in Counseling, and in September, 2008, issued a statement of Competencies for Counseling with Transgender Clients (see [http://www.counseling.org/Resources/Competencies/ALGBTIC\\_Competencies.pdf](http://www.counseling.org/Resources/Competencies/ALGBTIC_Competencies.pdf)). Finally, the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) added the T to its LGB committee in 2007, forming the National Committee on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Issues (see <http://www.socialworkers.org/governance/cmtes/nclgbi.asp>). The NASW also addresses transgender issues in its publications on its Diversity and Equality webpage. (see <http://www.socialworkers.org/diversity/new/lgbt.asp>).

The above work represents positive steps toward LGBT inclusion and demonstrates that mental health professional organizations are beginning to address the topic of transgender care.

*Empirical Studies on Counseling and Psychotherapy with Transgender Clients*

The majority of empirical studies about counseling and psychotherapy with transgender clients address the post-operative “success” or “failure” of sex reassignment surgeries in transsexual individuals (e.g., Abramowitz, 1986; Green & Fleming, 1990; Pauly, 1981). In the introduction to Rachlin’s (2002) empirical study, the author stated:

The substantial body of literature that looks at the outcome of gender confirming surgeries has explored the relationship between measures of post-surgical satisfaction and a number of biopsychosocial factors such as: the quality of surgical results; quality of social and family relationships; quality of professional life; pre-surgical emotional stability; quality of presurgical counseling; and quality of life in preferred gender role prior to surgery. (Introduction section, ¶ 6)

As post-surgical satisfaction among transsexuals is beyond the scope of this review, the above body of research will not be discussed in the current review of literature. It is noteworthy, however, that the main subject of inquiry in the psychological/psychiatric literature regarding transgender clients is the outcome of medical procedures for transsexual individuals. This literature appears to have overlooked the experiences of pre- and non-operative transgender clients.

After omitting the transsexual surgical outcome literature and excluding LGBT and sexual minority studies that do not specifically address transgender issues, eight empirical studies were found to examine counseling and psychotherapy with transgender clients. These studies address transgender clients’ experiences of psychotherapy (Rachlin, 2002), how guilt is experienced in cross-gender adults (Schaefer & Wheeler, 2004), the barriers to delivery of culturally sensitive mental health care to rural LGBT clients

(Willging, Salvador, & Kano, 2006a, 2006b), and transgender individuals' increased suicide risk (Clements-Nolle, Marx, & Katz, 2006; Fitzpatrick, Enton, Jones, & Schmidt, 2005; Mathy, 2002; Mathy, Lehmann, & Kerr, 2003). Each of these studies is described below.

Rachlin (2002) published the first empirical study that examined “how [t]ransgender people approach psychotherapy and what their experiences of treatment have been” (Introduction section, ¶ 13). Ninety-three transgender individuals were administered a survey assessing their reasons for seeking therapy, the outcomes of therapy, how they perceived their therapist's level of competence with gender issues, and what they looked for in a therapist. Participants were recruited through an FTM-oriented conference, FTM Internet newsgroups, and informal survey distribution. Because the author did not maintain a record of the number of surveys distributed, the response rate is unknown (Rachlin).

The convenience sample included 70 participants who were assigned female at birth (FTM) and 23 participants who were assigned male at birth (MTF; Rachlin, 2002). Respondents ranged in age from 17 to 57 years (median = 37). With respect to educational level, 28% reported having some college, 36% bachelor's degrees, 15% master's degrees, and 15% doctoral degrees. Participants reported living in urban (46%), suburban (32%), and rural (19%) areas of 28 U.S. states. Racially/ethnically, 85% of participants identified as Caucasian, 8% African American, 3% Mixed Heritage, 2% Native American, and 1% Hispanic (Rachlin).

The author also reported on the gender identity, gender presentation, and gender transition choices or physical status of respondents (Rachlin, 2002). For gender identity,

many participants identified with more than one term (non-mutually exclusive), as follows. The FTM respondents identified as 91% Female-to-Male or FTM, 77% Male, 34% Transgender, 31% Transsexual, 3% both Male and Female, 1% Female, and 1% Other. The MTF respondents identified as 87% Male-to-Female or MTF, 83% Female, 70% Transgender, 17% Transsexual, 13% both Male and Female, 9% Other, 4% Cross-Dresser, and 4% Male. As for gender presentation, the majority of participants (FTMs,  $n = 47$ , 68%; MTFs,  $n = 11$ , 48%) reported living full-time in their identity-congruent gender, meaning they presented that gender socially at least 90% of the time. The author described the remaining participants as being in earlier stages of transition and presenting part-time in various gender expressions (Rachlin).

Rachlin (2002) noted that participants' surgical status reflected the reality of FTM surgical options, as FTM genital surgery is generally regarded as costly, risky, and cosmetically and functionally compromised in comparison to MTF genital surgery. Among FTMs, only 3% had genital surgery and 16% were actively planning to have the surgery. Among MTFs, however, 23% had genital surgery and 35% were actively planning it. The numbers were reversed for top surgery, with 52% of FTMs having had mastectomy and chest reconstruction and 33% actively planning top surgery, whereas no MTFs had breast augmentation and only 19% were actively planning to have top surgery. The majority of respondents had undergone hormone replacement (FTMs, 80%; MTFs, 64%) and/or a name change (FTMs, 71%; MTFs, 45%; Rachlin).

Respondents reported on 150 contacts with therapists (Rachlin, 2002). Because participants were given the option of reporting on their experiences with one or two therapists, data analyses distinguished between the most recent and the former therapist

where relevant. Fifty-seven respondents reported on two therapists, and thirteen additional respondents reported they had seen more than one therapist, but only chose to report on the most recent (Rachlin).

Survey items were submitted to a principal components factor analysis (Rachlin, 2002). Two factors emerged from respondents' reasons for seeking therapy: Factor I - General Psychotherapy/Personal Growth and Factor II - Gender Exploration/Transition. The components of Factor I (General Psychotherapy) included some typical reasons people seek growth-oriented counseling. These were to improve relationships with others, reduce emotional discomfort, increase personal growth, resolve work or school conflicts, help with other decision-making, and increase comfort with their gender. The components of Factor II (Gender Exploration) related to progress in the gender transition process. These included help with decision-making regarding the gender transition, support during and after the transition, obtaining a letter for hormones or surgery, and seeking a first or second opinion about the gender condition. Most participants rated the former therapist higher than the most recent therapist on Factor I (General Psychotherapy) and rated the most recent therapist higher than the former therapist on Factor II (Gender Exploration). The author concluded that respondents may have sought therapy initially to cope with general personal concerns, whereas their focus in later therapy was on gender issues (Rachlin).

With respect to the outcomes of therapy, three factors were found to account for 60% of the variance in therapy outcome: Factor I - Progress in Gender Exploration/Transition, Factor II -Progress in General Personal Growth/Life Enhancement, and Factor III - Overall Satisfaction with the Treatment (Rachlin, 2002).

Components of Factor I (Gender Exploration) included helping clients clarify gender issues and possible transition options, helping clients make decisions about the transition, and providing support during transition. Components of Factor II (Personal Growth) included improved relationships, increased emotional stability, increased comfort with self, and assistance with other decision-making. Components of Factor III (Overall Satisfaction) included whether the client would recommend the therapist to others, the helpfulness of the experience, and whether anything changed as a result of the treatment (Rachlin).

Respondents reported making progress in therapy primarily in the area for which they sought therapy (Rachlin, 2002). That is, respondents who sought therapy for personal growth scored highly on the outcome factor of personal growth, and those who sought therapy for gender exploration scored highly on the outcome factor of gender exploration. In addition, the most recent therapist was rated significantly higher than the former therapist on outcome Factors I (Gender Exploration) and II (Personal Growth). No significant differences were found in the ratings of the two therapists with respect to outcome Factor III (Overall Satisfaction). Rachlin concluded that clients viewed both former and most recent therapists as satisfactory overall, but rated the most recent therapist higher on the more concrete outcomes of improved gender exploration and personal growth. The author suggested that these ratings may have been influenced by (a) clients' need to see their current or most recent therapist as helpful, (b) clients' experience of relief upon addressing gender issues with the most recent therapist, and (c) gains in personal growth that may have resulted from clients finally discussing their gender issues (Rachlin).

A composite variable of gender experience was created to describe clients' perceptions of therapist competence with gender issues (Rachlin, 2002). This variable was composed of survey items with varying quantitative scales that addressed clients' perceptions of the following therapist competencies: specialty area, connection to a transgender community, use of current gender-related information, estimated number of gender clients previously seen, adherence to the Standards of Care, and expertise about gender issues. Participants' written comments concerning therapist competence were also incorporated into the gender experience composite variable. Next, correlations were assessed between gender experience and (a) reasons for seeking therapy, (b) outcomes of treatment, (c) harm from therapy (i.e., judgmental comments about the client's gender), and (d) rapport (Rachlin).

Clients' rating of therapists' gender experience was positively correlated with rapport and client satisfaction, as well as with gender exploration – both as presenting issue and outcome factor (Rachlin, 2002). Thus, participants who sought therapy for gender exploration regarded their therapist as experienced with gender issues, reported making significant progress in gender exploration, and experienced positive rapport and satisfaction with the therapist. Gender experience was negatively correlated with harm from therapy, meaning that clients reported receiving more negative comments about their gender from therapists they regarded as having less gender-related experience (Rachlin).

Rachlin (2002) accounted for the gatekeeper phenomenon (i.e., viewing the therapist as merely a gatekeeper to obtaining hormones or surgery via the letter of recommendation) by assessing how the experiences of clients who sought therapy for a

letter only ( $n = 18$ ), a letter plus other reasons ( $n = 55$ ), and no letter ( $n = 77$ ) related to other variables. The author found that clients indicating letter only or letter plus other reasons were significantly more likely than no letter clients to have sought therapy for gender exploration and significantly less likely to have sought therapy for personal growth. The author concluded that when clients were at the stage of seeking a letter of recommendation, they had typically already advanced through significant personal growth and were prepared to address their gender transition concerns. It is not surprising that the same clients were also more likely than no letter clients to have chosen therapists they regarded as high in gender experience and therapists who followed the Standards of Care, as this would be important for advancing toward hormone replacement or surgical treatment. With respect to the outcomes of therapy, letter only clients did not report engaging in additional gender exploration or personal growth, but felt as satisfied with their therapist as other clients, ostensibly because they obtained the letter. Clients in the letter only group also saw their therapists for significantly fewer sessions ( $M = 10$ ) than the other clients ( $M = 52$ ; Rachlin).

Rachlin (2002) noted a number of limitations of the study, including the bias of administering a self-report measure, the nature of a non-random sample in limiting generalizability, the restricted race/ethnicity and social status of participants, and the bias of requesting data that refers to past events. A major strength of Rachlin's (2002) empirical study was its inclusion of a large number of FTM participants who are typically underrepresented in the transgender literature. The author also took great care to document demographic characteristics, including gender identity, gender expression, and the gender transition choices of respondents, making the replication of this study more

possible. In addition, this study, published in a transgender journal, was the first to survey transgender individuals about their experiences in psychotherapy and their perceptions of their therapists. Rachlin appears to have established a useful base from which psychologists may conduct additional studies with transgender individuals and gender therapists in order to learn what approaches are most effective for working with transgender clients.

Schaefer and Wheeler (2004) explored guilt in 787 gender dysphoric adults by developing an item pool of guilt descriptions collected in clinical practice and two ongoing research studies. Participants were asked “what forms guilt took in relation to gender feelings on a daily basis, and at the time when the patients initially recognized being gender variant” (p. 119). Because the reports by participants in the clinical research groups were consistent with those of clients in clinical practice, the groups were combined for analysis. Two anonymous, independent raters knowledgeable about guilt performed the initial content analysis, and then a jury of three experts reviewed and agreed on 13 categories of guilt. Participants included 685 pre-operative and 102 post-operative gender dysphoric adults. The definition of gender dysphoria included transsexualism, transgenderism, transvestism, and gender identity disorders (Schaefer & Wheeler).

Schaefer and Wheeler (2004) defined guilt as “the state of one who has committed an offense” (p. 118) and conceptualized guilt in relation to this study as existential, for it resulted from committing no act, but rather from the self-perceived offense of not conforming to gender stereotypes. The authors argued that guilt in cross-gender individuals is important to understand because it serves as a filter through which

life is interpreted, managed, and lived. The authors described cross-gender guilt as forming in childhood around ages two to three when the child first develops language to express its inner feelings, and again around ages ten to eleven when secondary sex characteristics become visible. When children are aware that they are not like other boys and girls they fear the social rejection that comes with being different. Children conclude that something is wrong with them; they become secretive, feel shame, and finally blame themselves for their difference (Schaefer & Wheeler).

Schaefer and Wheeler (2004) reported finding thirteen categories of guilt. These categories include: (a) Not Being Normal - feeling of deviance, as one does not fit into the standard male or female image; (b) What Others Might Think - fear of being discovered by others. This fear becomes projected onto others so that others seem to reject one's gender condition; (c) Appearing to Be One Gender, But Feeling Another - sense of deceiving others by not revealing one's gender status or gender history. This sense of deception is typically heightened by fear that one will be discovered; (d) Disappointment Caused to Family or Extended Family - sense that one has failed to fulfill the hopes and dreams of family, therapists, physicians, and other health care providers; (e) Depriving Others - assuming responsibility for hurting others by wanting or needing to be oneself, but failing to fulfill the expected gender role; (f) Assumption of Criticism - feeling that one will never be accepted by others because one feels oneself to be blameworthy and deserving of attack; (g) Blame for Something Not One's Fault - accepting blame for others' complaints and accusations, even when one is not at fault; (h) Need for Approval - desiring some authoritative validation of one's gender identity in order to relieve guilt; (i) Self-Deprivation - sense that one is unworthy of happiness,

acceptance, and peace of mind; (j) Sexual Feelings - guilt concerning erotic thoughts and their expression, as cross-gender clients often mistake healthy sexual feelings as unhealthy and deriving from their gender condition; (k) Religious or Spiritual - guilt leads one to feel the need to fulfill absolute dictates of one's religious faith or spiritual belief; (l) Not Feeling Guilt - state of denial in which even if one agrees to feeling some shame, one is not able to recognize guilt within oneself; and (m) Perpetual Payment - engaging in a lifetime of constant restitution, in the form of continual suffering or anxiety in order to assuage guilt (Schaefer & Wheeler).

The authors termed the collection of guilt categories primary guilt, reasoning that these guilt feelings lay at the heart of other sources of guilt that gender dysphoric adults experience, such as guilt about cross-dressing (Schaefer & Wheeler, 2004). They suggested that primary guilt stems from each person's "lack of understanding of the source of his or her dilemma, and the implied self-blame" (p. 118). The task for therapists, then, is to educate clients about how their gender dysphoria is connected to gender guilt. The authors also noted that because many gender dysphoric people are not accustomed to receiving acceptance and understanding from others, they may reject friendly or affirmative overtures, even from a therapist. Therapists can help in this situation by raising the client's awareness about such behaviors when they occur in the therapeutic relationship (Schaefer & Wheeler).

Interestingly, all 102 post-operative participants had their gender surgeries before the Standards of Care were developed (Schaefer & Wheeler, 2004). Thus, they would not have been required to seek psychological assessment. According to the authors, these participants reported believing that gender surgery would resolve their problems and they

were not aware of the role gender guilt played in their lives. After surgery, they continued to suffer from gender guilt, feeling misunderstood and fearful of becoming close to others. The authors drew on this information to demonstrate the value of psychotherapy for educating gender dysphoric adults about gender guilt (Schaefer & Wheeler).

One of the strengths of Schaefer and Wheeler's (2004) study is the large number of gender dysphoric individuals who contributed to the item pool of guilt descriptions. The authors' broad definition of gender dysphoria also enabled them to include participants who use a range of identifiers (e.g., transsexual, transgender, transvestite). A major limitation of the study is the restricted demographic information the authors included concerning both their clinical practice and research study participants.

In a qualitative study, Willging et al. (2006b) conducted ethnographic interviews with 20 mental health providers of LGBT clients in two rural communities of New Mexico. The purpose of the study was to examine "the social dynamics of communities and clinic settings that impede the delivery of culturally relevant services to...LGBT people living in rural areas" (p. 867). The purposive sample included psychologists, social workers, substance abuse counselors and HIV/AIDS outreach workers who identified as male (n = 8, 40%), female (n = 11, 55%), and transgender female (n = 1, 5%). Racially/ethnically, participants identified as White/Anglo (n = 13, 65%), American Indian (n = 6, 30%), and Hispanic (n = 1, 5%). The authors described employing line-by-line coding, open coding, and focused coding in their analysis of data (Willging et al.).

Willging et al. (2006b) found that rural mental health care providers had observed many instances of anti-LGBT bias in their colleagues and in their communities. These observations were characterized by therapeutic neutrality, or believing that one practices

fairness when one actually engages in discrimination. For example, participants stated that LGBT clients should be treated no differently than heterosexual clients. First, the statement disregards differences that are culturally relevant for LGBT clients. Second, the comparison of LGBT to heterosexual ignores clients' gender expression and focuses solely on their sexual orientation by assuming that heterosexual is LGBT's opposite. Mental health providers reported taking for granted that their clients were heterosexual and observing other providers pressure LGBT individuals to change their sexual orientation. Group leaders were observed discouraging LGBT clients from openly discussing sexuality while heterosexual clients were allowed to do so. Only one of the providers in the study had formal training to work with LGBT clients (Willging et al.).

The mental health providers in Willging et al.'s (2006b) study demonstrated little understanding of the specific needs of LGBT clients, particularly in a rural setting where LGBT-related community support was limited and revealing one's identity was risky. For example, providers concluded that there was no interest in forming a support group for LGBT clients, as no LGBT people had volunteered to join. Furthermore, providers who worked in residential treatment facilities reported isolating LGBT clients or refusing to admit them under the auspices of protecting the clients from prejudicial others. Among those who worked with children and adolescents, providers feared LGBT children may convert the others, so they were separated. Willging et al. concluded that a lack of explicit policy regarding the treatment of LGBT clients, deficient LGBT-related training, and heterosexually-oriented value systems impeded culturally sensitive service delivery to these rural LGBT clients. This study's strengths and limitations will be discussed following the Willging et al. (2006a) study below.

Willging et al. (2006b) triangulated their findings with those of Willging et al. (2006a) who interviewed 38 LGBT individuals from two rural areas of New Mexico who had recently sought help for psychological concerns such as depression, anxiety, relationship problems, and substance abuse. The purpose of the study was to “illustrate how an ethnically diverse group of rural LGBT people in New Mexico use secular (professional and lay) and sacred (indigenous and Christian) mental health resources to alleviate psychological distress, addiction, or both” (Willging et al., 2006a, p. 871). Participant recruitment involved snowball sampling, advertisements, and invitations through community forums on LGBT issues. Participants included 20 (53%) males, 15 (39%) females, 2 (5%) transgender females, and 1 (3%) transgender male. The sample represented the racial and ethnic diversity of New Mexico, with 16 (42%) identifying as Hispanic, 13 (34%) American Indian, 8 (21%) White/Anglo, and one (3%) Other. Nearly all members of the LGBT sample were low income and uninsured (Willging et al., 2006a).

Willging et al. (2006a) found that the LGBT participants’ help-seeking processes were influenced by the lack of affirmative LGBT social networks and services, fear of anti-LGBT bias, and lay understandings of mental illness. Participants employed adaptive strategies involving family connections, nonprofessional healing options, and negotiation of identity disclosure to mitigate the effects of these barriers to care. However, such strategies did not necessarily result in positive outcomes, particularly for participants who did not conform to gender norms. Financial constraints greatly affected use of secular and sacred healing resources. (p. 872)

Participants mainly socialized within non-LGBT networks because they found LGBT people to be hidden within their community. This limited their exposure to LGBT-affirmative mental health referrals, which are typically passed through word-of-mouth. Fear of anti-LGBT bias kept many away from secular professional healers (i.e., psychologists, social workers, counselors) because participants were familiar with these individuals from the community and doubted their care would be affirming. Among lay people, indigenous healers believed LGBT identity was a sign of mental illness and that laziness caused mental illness. Christian mental health providers viewed gay and lesbian behavior as a result of devil possession and in need of exorcism or reparative therapy. Participants who sought the support of their families were often referred to secular or sacred resources when others failed or were not known to them. Participants reported remaining silent about their LGBT identity when they sought any form of help, as they anticipated the negative consequences of disclosure. Financial constraints prevented some participants from accessing professional resources, whereas others were kept from returning to their indigenous healers due to the inability to pay (Willging et al.).

According to Willging et al. (2006a), “participants utilized all available community-based resources, including those tainted by homophobia and transphobia, in attempts to meet basic mental health needs. Moreover, participants frequently combined multiple and sometimes contradictory approaches to mental health” (p. 873). For example, one Hispanic transgender woman was hospitalized in the city of Albuquerque for serious depression and heavy drinking following a rape. The psychiatric hospital staff humiliated her because she was transgender, so she moved back to her rural home to be with her family. She experienced further rejection of her transgender status within her

family and was referred to the church where she underwent reparative therapy and eventually became suicidal (Willging et al.). The authors concluded that maintaining silence about one's LGBT identity had become a viable help-seeking strategy, despite its limitations. For this reason, they did not recommend simply urging rural mental health providers to become proactive regarding LGBT mental health needs. Instead, they suggested that further research be conducted to find a better way to bridge the apparent schism between community support systems and LGBT-affirmative care (Willging et al.).

Willging et al.'s (2006a, 2006b) triangulation of interview data served to strengthen the reports of both rural mental health providers and the rural LGBT participants. Although the LGBT participants were not reported to be clients of the providers interviewed, the two groups clearly shared a similar context – that of rural New Mexico. The authors also appeared to respect the culture of the region in their final recommendations rather than imposing their own beliefs about how to effect change in a homophobic and transphobic system. Indeed, interviewing LGBT participants about their use of secular and sacred mental health resources appeared to be culturally sensitive for this sample.

One criticism of the two studies is that while the authors described their data analysis method, they did not specify their qualitative methodology. In addition, Willging et al.'s (2006b) study left several questions unanswered. First, it is unclear whether the sample was representative of mental health providers in rural New Mexico, especially given its largely White/Anglo and cisgender makeup. Second, why were lay, indigenous, and Christian mental health resources not interviewed in addition to the secular professional resource of the mental health clinic? Third, it is not clear whether the

authors' focus on sexual orientation over gender identity was a result of the limited awareness of the mental health providers or a lack of transgender clients presenting to the community clinic.

In the first study to assess the independent risk factors for attempted suicide in a transgender sample, Clements-Nolle et al. (2006) interviewed 392 MTF and 123 FTM self-identified transgender individuals in San Francisco. The interviews were part of a larger study (Clements-Nolle, Marx, Guzman, & Katz, 2001) about HIV risk, health care use, and the mental health status of transgender persons. Participants were recruited through targeted sampling, respondent-driven sampling, and agency referrals. Participants were administered two measures of mental health: the Center for Epidemiology Studies Depression scale (CES-D) and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Inventory (RSEI). They were also asked whether they had received treatment for alcohol or other drug use, whether they had ever attempted suicide, and whether they had experienced gender discrimination and/or gender victimization. Gender discrimination (e.g., firing from a job, eviction from housing) was assessed separately from gender victimization (e.g., verbal abuse or harassment, physical abuse, rape) and participants were asked to describe each event so that it could be accurately categorized (Clements-Nolle et al., 2006).

Demographic characteristics for the sample of 515 transgender individuals included 13% (n = 66) under age 25 and 87% (n = 449) over age 25; 37% (n = 188) White, 23% (n = 120) Latina/Latino, 23% (n = 116) African American, 11% (n = 58) Asian/Pacific Islander, and 5% (n = 24) Native American; 61% (n = 314) heterosexual, 24% (n = 122) bisexual, and 14% (n = 73) lesbian/gay; 51% (n = 265) unemployed in the

past 6 months and 49% (n = 250) employed in the past 6 months; 23% (n = 118) with less than a high school diploma and 77% (n = 396) with at least a high school diploma; 57% (n = 291) previously incarcerated and 43% (n = 223) never incarcerated (Clements-Nolle et al., 2006). Regarding measures of mental health and questions about alcohol or drug treatment, gender discrimination, gender victimization, and attempted suicide:

Low self-esteem was common among participants (median score on the [RSEI] = 32). Sixty percent of participants were classified as depressed (CES-D > 16), 28% had been in alcohol or drug treatment, 59% had been physically forced to have sex or raped, 62% experienced gender discrimination, 83% experienced verbal gender victimization, and 36% reported physical gender victimization. The prevalence of attempted suicide was 32% (95% CI = 28%-36%). (Clements-Nolle et al., 2006, p. 59)

FTM and MTF participants differed significantly on all demographic characteristics except age (Clements-Nolle et al., 2001). The median age was 36 years for FTMs and 34 years for MTFs. Because the study was based on a non-random sample of participants, this sample's characteristics cannot be said to accurately reflect the makeup of the transgender population in San Francisco. It is noteworthy, however, that MTFs were significantly more likely than FTMs to endorse demographic characteristics that typically correspond with disenfranchised status. That is, MTFs were more likely than FTMs to identify as women, racial/ethnic minority, be HIV positive, report prior incarceration, unstable housing, low education, and low monthly income. In fact, while 81% of FTMs were employed, MTFs obtained money through the following means (non-mutually exclusive): part- or full-time employment (40%), sex work (32%), Supplemental Security Income and Social Security Disability Insurance (29%), and

General Assistance (23%). It appears that a combination of societal sexism, racism, heterosexism, and transphobia may have played a part in the experiences of the MTFs in this study, an experience that some lesbians may be able to relate to as they consider their views of transgender individuals (Clements-Nolle et al.).

According to Clements-Nolle et al. (2006), FTMs and MTFs did not significantly differ from one another on measures of the independent variables. Thus, results were collapsed for the two groups.

A history of attempted suicide was significantly higher among transgender individuals who were [W]hite (38% vs. 29%;  $p = .04$ ), less than 25 years of age (47% vs. 30%;  $p = .006$ ), recently unemployed (37% vs. 28%;  $p = .03$ ), and had been incarcerated (38% vs. 25%;  $p = .002$ ). Attempted suicide was also significantly associated with depression ( $\text{CES-D} > 16 = 40\%$  vs. 20%;  $p < .001$ ), a low self-esteem score (mean RSEI = 30 vs. 33;  $p < .001$ ), and a history of alcohol or drug treatment (50% vs. 25%;  $p < .001$ ), forced sex or rape (41% vs. 19%;  $p < .001$ ), gender discrimination (42% vs. 16%;  $p < .001$ ), verbal gender victimization (34% vs. 21%;  $p = .02$ ), and physical gender victimization (49% vs. 23%;  $p < .001$ ). There were no significant differences between suicide attempters and non-attempters with regard to sexual orientation or education. (Clements-Nolle et al., 2006, p. 59)

The authors noted that the results of this study confirmed the individual risk factors identified in the LGB suicide literature. Importantly, this study also showed that societal risk factors such as gender-based discrimination and victimization are independently associated with attempted suicide for transgender individuals. In their discussion, the

authors referred to Herek's (1992) observation that transgender individuals experience more intense discrimination and victimization than LGB individuals because they challenge cultural norms related to both sexuality and gender. The authors concluded that there is an "immediate need for strategies to increase societal acceptance of transgender populations" (Clements-Nolle et al., p. 64) in order to prevent suicide attempts among transgender people.

Mathy (2002) conducted a quantitative study that explored the impact of sexual orientation, psychiatric history, and compulsive behaviors on the suicidality of a nonclinical sample of transgender individuals. Two surveys of human sexuality were administered through an international news organization Website over a one-month period. One survey used a selected random sample of participants and the other used a convenience sample. Because no statistically significant differences were found between the two samples, they were combined for analysis (Mathy).

Mathy (2002) surveyed participants using a 76-item questionnaire adapted from a previous study. The survey assessed suicidal ideation, suicide attempts, psychiatric history, compulsive behaviors, and demographic information. Race/ethnicity was not included because of the international focus of the study (i.e., U.S. and Canada) and the small sample size. Neither the biological sex nor the identity-congruent gender expression of transgender participants was requested. Suicidal ideation and suicide attempts were assessed as dichotomous (yes or no) variables, as were psychiatric history (i.e., past or current use of psychotherapy, past or current use of medication for a psychiatric condition) and compulsive behaviors (i.e., difficulty controlling or excessively using alcohol, drugs, work, sex, shopping, spending money, gambling, or

food). Participants self-identified their sexual orientation as one of the following: heterosexual/straight, gay/lesbian, bisexual, and none of the above (Mathy).

The survey responses of the 73 North American transgender individuals (ages 19-58,  $M = 36.88$ ) were compared to those of six other groups: heterosexual women ( $n = 1,083$ ; ages 18-76,  $M = 30.12$ ), heterosexual men ( $n = 1,077$ ; ages 18-80,  $M = 33.75$ ), lesbian women ( $n = 256$ ; ages 18-69,  $M = 33.73$ ), gay men ( $n = 356$ ; ages 18-70,  $M = 32.97$ ) and women ( $n = 73$ ) and men ( $n = 73$ ) who were psychosocially matched to the 73 transgender participants (Mathy, 2002). The author found that the transgender sample showed a statistically significantly greater risk of suicidal ideation and suicide attempts than every group except lesbian women. Furthermore, no significant relationship was found between suicidality and sexual orientation for the transgender sample. The author reasoned that transgender individuals are impacted by heterosexism regardless of their sexual orientation, for their sexual object choice is never as simple as the “opposite” sex. This would explain why the results did not show any additional effect of sexual orientation on suicidal ideation or suicide attempts for the transgender participants. Lesbians’ increased risk of suicidal ideation and suicide attempts, which were likely impacted by both heterosexism and sexism, led the author to conclude that “sexism and heterosexism may act synergistically to compound the risks of suicidality” (Mathy, p. 62) among lesbians and transgender individuals.

Mathy (2002) also noted that transgender individuals with a history of suicidal ideation and suicide attempts were significantly more likely to have past or current psychotherapy and past or current use of psychiatric medication. The author concluded that transgender individuals with a history of psychopathology were likely to have

received professional assistance. Although transgender participants with a history of suicidal ideation (without suicide attempts) were not found to report engaging in compulsive behaviors, those with a history of suicide attempts did have a higher likelihood than non-attempters to report excessively using or difficulty controlling alcohol or drugs. Mental health providers are thus advised to monitor their transgender clients' substance use, as it may compound the effects of mood disorders, resulting in increased suicide attempts (Mathy).

Because this study focused on the suicidality of the transgender sample, it may appear that a large proportion of the transgender participants reported a history of psychopathology and suicide ideation/attempts (Mathy, 2002). However, as the author pointed out,

nearly two-thirds (63%) of transgender respondents reported they had not experienced serious thoughts of suicide, and more than three-fourths (77%) reported they had not made a serious suicide attempt or gesture. Although 53.4% of transgender respondents had been in psychotherapy previously, only 17.8% were in psychotherapy currently. Fewer [sic] than one-third (31.5%) had used medications to treat a psychiatric condition previously, and fewer [sic] than one-fourth (21.9%) were using psychiatric medications currently. (p. 61)

The author regarded this data as evidence that transgender identity per se does not indicate psychopathology, with the caveat that the sampling procedure used in this study precludes generalization (Mathy).

One of the strengths of Mathy's (2002) study, if not its primary focus, was the use of a nonclinical sample of transgender individuals to demonstrate the existence of

psychological health among transgender people and the use of professional assistance among those who indicated psychopathology. In addition, the author's use of the Internet news site allowed for survey distribution to a population that is difficult to access. Among the study's limitations was the exclusion of race/ethnicity as a demographic characteristic. The authors omitted race/ethnicity from the surveys in part because U.S. racial/ethnic categories would not have had relevance for Canadian participants. However, only two of the transgender respondents were Canadian (Mathy). Further, it seems that regardless of the international focus of the study, the relevance of race and ethnicity in the U.S. would make recording such information important, at least for the U.S. sample.

An additional limitation of the study was the omission of detailed gender information for the transgender sample, a demographic characteristic present in other studies (e.g., Rachlin, 2002). It is not possible to know, for example, how many participants identified as transgender woman vs. transgender man (or another gender). This information could be important for two distinct reasons. First, it is important to learn whether gender differences exist among transgender people, such as between FTMs and MTFs, in relation to the variables under study. The answer could impact mental health interventions for transgender clients. Second, it is critical for studies to include transgender individuals who represent the heterogeneity within this subgroup, rather than limiting research to the most accessible members (i.e., MTFs). This seems to be a ripe area for future studies to investigate.

In response to a lack of suicide literature differentiating the experiences of bisexual women from bisexual men, Mathy et al. (2003) compared transgender

individuals with bisexual women and men on incidence of suicidal ideation and attempts, psychopathology, and compulsive behaviors. The authors reasoned that because lesbian women and transgender individuals showed similar risk of suicidal ideation and suicide attempts (Mathy, 2002), it is possible that bisexual women, who may also experience a combination of sexism and heterosexism, would show increased risk of suicidal ideation and attempts over bisexual men (Mathy et al.).

The authors conducted secondary analyses on the Internet sample of 73 transgender individuals described above (Mathy, 2002), and an Internet sample of bisexual women ( $n = 792$ ) and bisexual men ( $n = 1,457$ ) obtained from a large dataset used in six prior peer-reviewed papers addressing a variety of topics (Mathy et al., 2003). All participants were administered the survey as described above. Results indicated that indeed, bisexual women and transgender individuals showed statistically significantly higher rates of suicidal ideation, suicide attempts, prior and current psychotherapy, and prior and current use of psychiatric medications than bisexual men. No significant differences were found among any participants for compulsive behaviors (i.e., alcohol, drugs, sex). The authors concluded that while bisexual men face heterosexism, transgender individuals and bisexual women are subject to both heterosexism and sexism, which interact to increase the oppression these groups experience (Mathy et al.).

A major advantage of Mathy et al.'s (2003) study was that the large sample of bisexual participants made it possible to compare bisexual men and women to transgender individuals. Typically, sexual minority samples are too small for such comparisons among subgroups. In addition, by studying these subgroups, Mathy et al. demonstrated that the homogeneity among subgroups often assumed by the acronym

LGBT is not always accurate. A major limitation of the study was an absence of demographic characteristics for the bisexual sample. Mathy et al. aptly noted that Internet samples often indicate economically advantaged groups, which are typically not ethnically diverse.

Fitzpatrick et al. (2005) conducted a quantitative study that evaluated “the unique contributions of sexual orientation and gender role orientation on suicide risk and associated psychopathology, as well as the interaction of these two factors” (p. 36). Participants included 77 undergraduate students recruited from a psychology course ( $n = 47$ , 61%) and from gay, lesbian, and transgender student organizations ( $n = 30$ , 39%). They ranged in age from 16 to 34, though the majority ( $n = 69$ ) were 18-24 years of age. Participants included 31 male and 46 female students (transgender was not included as a demographic variable; see gender role orientation below). With regard to race/ethnicity, 57 (74%) participants identified as Caucasian, 5 (6%) Asian/Pacific Islander, 4 (5%) Black, 3 (4%) Hispanic, 3 (4%) Other, and 5 (6%) Unreported (Fitzpatrick et al.).

The sexual orientation of participants was assessed using the Measure of Sexual Orientation, a single-item self-report instrument whose scale includes five items: exclusively heterosexual, heterosexual with some homosexual experience, bisexual, homosexual with some heterosexual experience, and exclusively homosexual (Fitzpatrick et al., 2005). Because no significant differences were found between participants who identified with the latter four categories, these groups were collapsed and termed sexual minorities. Thus, 42 heterosexual and 34 sexual minority participants were identified among the sample. The Bem Sex Role Inventory was used to place participants into one of three gender role orientation groups: cross-gendered ( $n = 27$ ), androgynous ( $n = 21$ ),

and gender-adherent (i.e., cisgender;  $n = 30$ ). Finding no significant differences between the androgynous and gender-adherent participants, these groups were collapsed into a single category in the final analysis in order to compare cross-gendered individuals to those who were not cross-gendered (Fitzpatrick et al.).

Participants were administered 6 measures of psychopathology, including the Beck Suicide Scale, Beck Depression Inventory, Beck Hopelessness Scale, Social Problem Solving Inventory, Reasons for Living Inventory, and the Structured Clinical Interview for Diagnosis for Axis I DSM-IV Disorders – Patient Edition (Fitzpatrick et al., 2005). Axis I disorders were endorsed by 52.2% of participants and included mood disorders (26.1%), anxiety disorders (17.0%), substance abuse or dependence (6.1%), and eating disorders (3%). While sexual minority youth endorsed significantly greater lifetime prevalence rates of mood disorder than their heterosexual counterparts, no significant group differences were found for any other diagnostic category. Neither were there overall prevalence rate differences across gender role groups for any specific psychological disorder (Fitzpatrick et al.).

Using stepwise regression, the authors found that the cross-gender role was associated with increased suicidal symptoms, less positive problem orientation, and decreased peer support and peer acceptance as compared to gender conforming and androgynous youth (Fitzpatrick et al., 2005). Interestingly, no significant effects were found for sexual orientation and no cross-effects were found for sexual orientation and gender role orientation. The authors suggested that the current study may have been too small to assess such a combined effect. They also wondered whether sexual orientation effects, which were found in prior studies involving high school students, may be more

likely to show up in a younger sample whose sexual identity may be less developed (Fitzpatrick et al.).

When considering their finding of low lifetime prevalence rates of psychopathology, Fitzpatrick et al. (2005) noted that the self-identification of participants for this study, particularly those who were “out” on campus, may have biased the sample toward students who enjoyed more social support than other LGBT samples. The authors also suggested using an alternative measure of gender role orientation. They recommended the Femininity scale of the California Personality Inventory as a better measure of gender role behavior than the Bem Sex Role Inventory.

Interestingly, transgender identity was not included in the study as a demographic characteristic (Fitzpatrick et al., 2005). Instead, the independent variable of gender role orientation appears to have taken its place. By identifying participants as male and female, but not transgender, several points are unclear. Did the cross-gender participants reject the identity label of transgender or use some other term(s)? How many members of the sample would have identified as MTF or FTM, the descriptors used by other researchers? When participants endorsed male and female as their sex, did they indicate their biological sex, their current legal sex, or their identity-congruent sex/gender expression? It seems it would be helpful for comparison to other studies and for future research to know the transgender identity of the participants.

#### *Non-Empirical Literature on Counseling and Psychotherapy with Transgender Clients*

The majority of scholarship about transgender individuals has focused on rectifying what is wrong with the sex-gender incongruity inherent in transgender identity

(Korell & Lorah, 2007). Because such a focus on pathology is unlikely to be effective in psychological treatment, scholarly work that addresses transgender identity as an uncommon but normal variant of human behavior is sorely needed (Gainor, 2000). Transgender clients may share a number of experiences in common with gay, lesbian, and bisexual clients, yet the issues surrounding gender nonconformity are unique and should be treated as such (Koetting, 2004). Thus, the literature reviewed in this section specifically addresses transgender issues (even when they are discussed among LGB concerns) and focuses on affirmative counseling practices with transgender clients. Because the subject matter that each author addresses blends and overlaps with the subjects of others, the current section has been divided into four topic areas for the purpose of clarity. These are: client presenting concerns, goals of therapy, therapeutic interventions, and cultural competencies. Each topic is discussed below.

### *Presenting concerns*

Because of the taboo against talking about nonconforming gender, transgender clients often enter therapy feeling confused and distressed about their gender identity, having had no outlet through which to express their feelings (Goethals & Schwiebert, 2005). They may seek therapy in order to make sense of their gender-related feelings and obtain help adjusting to sex reassignment and other surgical procedures (Anderson, 1998). Transgender clients also present to therapy for as many and varied reasons as clients who are not transgender, yet some of their presenting concerns may be conceptualized as related to the social stigma of gender nonconformity (Anderson). Such presenting concerns may include depression (Anderson; Gainor, 2000), suicidality

(Anderson; Korell & Lorah, 2007), social isolation (Anderson; Gainor), guilt (Koetting, 2004), family relationship difficulties (Anderson; Koetting; Korell & Lorah), discrimination (Gainor; Korell & Lorah), body dissatisfaction (Korell & Lorah), and other concerns specific to cross-dressers (Mostade, 2006).

Transgender clients who have begun hormone replacement therapy may experience depression as a result of changes in their hormone levels (Gainor, 2000). Suicide attempts are also common among transgender clients presenting to therapy, particularly those with a history of depression or substance abuse (Anderson, 1998; Korell & Lorah, 2007). With regard to social isolation, clients who experienced gender nonconformity early in life may have had the kinds of childhood and adolescent relationships that would mitigate the development of their interpersonal skills (Anderson). As a result, some transgender adults' interpersonal skills may be "fixated at a level far below that of the client's chronological age" (Anderson, p. 219). This can make forming friendships and intimate partner relationships, which are important for building a support system, a difficult task.

Transgender clients who present to therapy with guilt feelings may experience what Koetting (2004) described as gender guilt, or the feeling that something is inherently wrong with them because of their gender nonconformity. Clients who present with gender guilt believe that because their gender is so objectionable to others, they themselves must be abhorrent. Gender guilt may result in the use of secretiveness as a coping strategy to avoid hurting others with the knowledge of their transgender status. Such secretiveness, particularly when used with loved ones, leads to intense shame about lying to others (Koetting).

Much like gender guilt, internalized transphobia often causes transgender clients to remain closeted due to a number of fears (Mostade, 2006). Transgender clients fear for their personal safety, should they disclose their identity to others. They may also fear that they will be unsuccessful in passing in their identity-congruent gender. Some clients fear becoming emotionally intimate with another person and losing important relationships upon coming out. The secretiveness that inhibits many clients' relationships may be alleviated by educating them about the effects of transphobia (Mostade).

Transgender clients who have revealed their identity may present to therapy with problems with family relationships (Anderson, 1998). Relationships may be strained as family members adjust to the loved one's new gender. Some transgender clients have already come out as gay or lesbian and their transgender status represents a second coming out - an additional burden on both the client and the family (Koetting, 2004). The degree to which family members will be supportive may be unknown, and relationships may remain strained throughout the client's life (Koetting; Korell & Lorah, 2007).

Discrimination may lead transgender clients to seek help dealing with unfair practices in employment, housing, medical treatment, social services, sport competitions, and military eligibility (Gainor, 2000; Korell & Lorah, 2007). Ethnic minority clients may face rejection by their ethnic communities, including the pressure to maintain a heterosexual orientation. Unfortunately, the scholarly literature concerning transgender people of color is scarce; most studies are cross-cultural in focus and originate in the field of anthropology (Gainor). Body dissatisfaction and excessive concern with appearance are additional presenting concerns, particularly for those clients who feel that their bodies are incompatible with their gender identity (Korell & Lorah). The primary concerns for

many cross-dressing clients are conflict in the partner relationship due to the cross-dressing behavior, low self-esteem, and experiencing cross-dressing as a compulsive behavior (Mostade, 2006).

### *Goals of therapy*

The overall goal of psychotherapy with clients experiencing gender concerns is the relief of symptoms so that clients may lead productive and fulfilling lives (Anderson, 1998). A number of more specific goals have also been articulated. One is to educate transgender clients about gender identity in order to counteract the inaccurate and often damaging information that exists elsewhere on the topic. Another goal is to empower clients by helping them put their otherwise unaided feelings and needs into words (Anderson; Goethals & Schwiebert, 2005). The development of coping skills is also important so that clients who face intolerance, violence, undeserved shame, and the denial of their personal freedoms can acknowledge these acts and learn to deal with or avoid them in the future (Anderson; Gainor, 2000). Clients who have successfully managed harassment in the past may also be taught to apply their stigma management resources to future instances of discrimination (Gainor; Mostade, 2006).

Anderson (1998) observed that some transgender individuals are unable to complete their sex reassignment/gender confirming surgeries due to financial constraints or health problems. The goals of therapy with these clients are to help them acknowledge this loss and accept that cross-living may be possible even without physically changing their bodies. An additional goal is for clients to learn to make informed decisions about the course of their lives, given their particular gender transition status (Anderson). A

therapeutic goal for clients just beginning their gender transition may be to improve their cross-gender presentation through instruction by the therapist or referral to others knowledgeable about the vocal expression, spatial awareness, dress, mannerisms, gestures, and gait specific to the client's identity-congruent gender (Mostade, 2006).

The goals of therapy with cross-dressers deserve particular attention, as cross-dressers typically display a bigender presentation (Mostade, 2006). The bigender presentation contrasts with that of transgenderists and transsexuals who typically wish to align the body's expression with a singular gender identity. In addition, cross-dressers are often heterosexual men who cross-dress part-time, such as at home, among safe friends, or at cross-dressing clubs or conventions (Lev, 2007). These clients may experience problems when cross-dressing reaches the level of a compulsive behavior or when a partner is distressed by the behavior. Goals for therapy with cross-dressers may include defining patterns of behavior that lead to distress, handling compulsive behaviors, confining cross-dressing to appropriate venues, articulating the client's needs to a partner, broadening the client's ability to experience sexual pleasure when cross-dressing has become the exclusive mode of doing so, and normalizing the cross-dressing behavior for the client's partner so that it is understood that cross-dressing will likely continue (Anderson, 1998; Mostade).

### *Therapeutic interventions*

The therapeutic interventions discussed in the non-empirical literature include the assessment needs of transgender clients entering therapy, views from clinical psychology and psychoanalysis regarding psychological treatment of transgender clients, and two

specific theoretical models that may be effective for working with transgender individuals.

Intervening early in therapy with accurate assessment of the client's strengths and presenting concerns is important (Gainor, 2000). Useful areas to explore include psychosocial stressors, symptoms of stress, coping skills, defense mechanisms, family history and dynamics, relationship and sexual history, history of abuse, sexual orientation issues, social support networks, addictive behaviors, and substance abuse. It is also important in the assessment phase of therapy to distinguish between the internal distress of gender dysphoria and the impact of living in society as a gender nonconforming person (Gainor).

R. A. Carroll (1999) reviewed the clinical psychology literature for empirical post-operative follow-up studies of clients who had undergone sex reassignment/gender confirming surgery. The author drew three conclusions from these studies about the psychological treatment of transgender clients. First, therapists should guide their clients' exploration of gender identity toward the client's own choice of a resolution, whether it be to accept one's given gender, cross-live part-time, or cross-live full-time. Second, therapists should address psychological, vocational, and interpersonal issues that are unique to clients with gender dysphoria, thereby tailoring treatment to the clients' needs. Third, therapists should identify and focus on psychological problems that may be unrelated to gender dysphoria (R. A. Carroll).

Samons (2001), who wrote from a psychoanalytic perspective, shared her clinical observations of MTF clients who structured their lives in order to keep themselves closeted. She used the analogy of a self-made prison to describe how MTF clients

suppressed their cross-gender feelings. Samons reported that these clients seek therapy when the internal system of resistance crumbles and clients are in danger of revealing their cross-gender feelings.

Samons (2001) described five main ways in which clients imprison themselves. First, clients choose careers that are male-dominated, traditionally chauvinistic, or rely on professional credibility such as auto mechanic or forensic chemist. Being discovered as transgender in such a career would have severe consequences. Alternatively, clients may choose careers in the family business where a sense of family obligation keeps the client from coming out and thus disappointing or embarrassing a parent – typically the father. A second way closeted MTF clients imprison themselves is to enlist in the military in order to force their masculinity to the forefront. While this strategy rarely succeeds, it reinforces others' perceptions of the person as highly masculine. Third, clients choose traditionally masculine hobbies such as hunting and fishing and behave in macho ways in order to hide internal femininity from others. A fourth way MTF clients imprison themselves is to select a marriage partner who is female and who espouses conservative, anti-transgender values. Clients also follow a religion that views sexual diversity as sinful (Samons).

By engaging in some or all of these strategies, closeted MTF clients are likely to be well established in the adult role and thus much older when disclosure occurs, which impacts their marriages, children, and elderly parents, all of whom clients must consider before coming out (Samons, 2001). Clients also use their families as reasons to stay closeted and continue to suppress their feelings of cross-gender identity. They seek counseling when they experience any of the following: increased access to other

transgender people, emotional exhaustion from long-term secretiveness and suppression of cross-gender feelings, and the realization that a transgender life has not been experienced and there may be limited opportunity in life remaining to try it (Samons).

In order to intervene in therapy with these clients, Samons (2001) recommended therapists be prepared to educate clients about the short-term advantages of being closeted and the long-term effects of being closeted. For example, while there is safety and privacy in the closet, there may also be defenses built up against one's own feelings, preventing authenticity in relationships and draining emotional energy. For clients who wish to rush the coming out process, therapists should "rein in the client" (p. 154) until the implications of coming out have been considered and the best approach to coming out has been prepared. For clients who have built up great fears of coming out, therapists may need to urge clients to take steps toward disclosure (Samons).

Goethals and Schwiebert (2005) recommended using the empowerment model of feminist therapy for working with transgender clients. This model locates problems in the client's oppressive environment rather than within the client. It also emphasizes egalitarian relationships between clients and therapists such that clients are viewed as experts of their own experiences. Therapist self-reflection is a requisite for engaging clients in ethical psychotherapy according to the feminist model. The authors gave three examples of ways to employ self-reflection. First, therapists should be willing to demonstrate their interest and enthusiasm in learning from the client, but should not rely on the client to educate them about transgender issues. Second, for therapists who identify as cisgender, they should resist the urge to constantly deny being transgender in order to maintain a more neutral stance on the matter of identity. Third, therapists should

be able to question their own gender performance, reflecting on questions such as, “What about my gender identity makes it culturally legible and valid?” and “What about my gender identity makes me feel confined, even disempowered?” (Goethals & Schwiebert, p. 467).

Lemoire and Chen (2005) proposed using six core aspects of person-centered therapy for working with LGBT adolescents. First, they suggested demonstrating unconditional positive regard, congruence, and empathy toward clients. These three principles of person-centered therapy can help clients reclaim disowned or devalued aspects of themselves as they work toward integrating their identity and coming out to others. This approach also helps clients counteract the stigmatizing social environment and overcome internalized homophobia and transphobia (Lemoire & Chen).

The second aspect of person-centered therapy involves adopting the client’s perspective so that the client’s reality, rather than the therapist’s, is the main focus (Lemoire & Chen, 2005). Understanding how the client perceives the world honors the fact that each LGBT adolescent is unique and therefore brings unique experiences to therapy. For example, each client makes sense of stigmatizing experiences differently. This information can inform therapists about how clients view their identity and their relationships. Of particular importance for LGBT adolescents who are closeted about their identity is their sense of deceiving loved ones. Some clients believe that the love and acceptance they receive would not be given if their friends and family knew their “real” identity. These adolescents maintain distorted perceptions of nearly all their relationships, exacerbating their loneliness and becoming further isolated (Lemoire & Chen).

The third aspect of person-centered therapy that can be helpful when working with LGBT adolescents is to use unconditional positive regard, congruence, and empathy to encourage clients to generate their own notions of self-concept (Lemoire & Chen, 2005). By creating the necessary environment for self-exploration, LGBT adolescents may, for the first time, have the opportunity to explore how they truly think and feel about themselves. It can be therapeutic for these clients to be allowed to generate their own insights and thoughts about their lives, rather than being taught by an external authority (Lemoire & Chen).

Once the client's self-concept has been bolstered, therapists may encourage movement from an external to an internal locus of evaluation (Lemoire & Chen, 2005). This shift helps clients cope with negativity stemming from the social environment. The person-centered approach emphasizes entering one's internal world so that one can distinguish between one's own feelings and perceptions and those of others. Thus, clients can discover when the sources of their distress are external, and learn to evaluate themselves rather than leaving this responsibility to others (Lemoire & Chen).

A fifth useful aspect of person-centered therapy is to believe in the client's potential for self-growth (Lemoire & Chen, 2005). By acknowledging that a client's sexual identity is not a source of pathology and need not be changed, therapists may encourage clients to identify external stressors that interfere with personal growth. Again, the therapeutic environment created through the person-centered approach provides the necessary conditions for clients to recognize their own potential for growth and for this growth to occur.

Finally, therapists can ensure that the growth process is client-directed (Lemoire & Chen, 2005) by following the client's lead concerning what topics are most relevant to discuss and allowing clients to set their own pace regarding coming out and making other life changes. This approach encourages clients to take ownership of the change process and validates their own sense of timing and interpersonal experiences.

While Lemoire and Chen (2005) touted the usefulness of person-centered therapy for working with LGBT adolescents, they also recommended three additional approaches that they believe compensate for the non-directiveness and non-judgmental stance that can limit person-centered therapy. The first recommendation is to explicitly validate the client's identity in order to compensate for discrimination in the client's social world. Typically, the person-centered therapist neither criticizes nor lauds a client's behaviors or beliefs. In this circumstance, however, assurance of the positive nature of the client's identity can be helpful. The second recommendation is to guide the client through an assessment of risk concerning the disclosure of the client's identity. The authors believed it would be irresponsible and unethical of therapists to push clients into premature disclosure before helping them assess and make preparations for possible negative reactions by others. The third recommendation is that therapists encourage LGBT adolescent clients to attend positive sexual minority community events, services, and youth support groups in order to meet others who share their concerns and who may provide positive role modeling (Lemoire & Chen).

### *Cultural competencies*

Several recommendations have been made regarding competencies for therapists working with transgender clients. These include adapting a multicultural counseling model for working with transgender clients (L. Carroll & Gilroy, 2002), rethinking the nature of gender (Korrell & Lorah, 2007), identifying one's gender-related biases (Gainor, 2000; Mostade, 2006), and engaging in transgender advocacy (Chen-Hayes, 2001).

L. Carroll and Gilroy (2002) adapted the multicultural counseling competencies advocated by Sue, Arredondo, and McDavis (1992), Sue et al. (1982), and Sue and Sue (1999) to address the attitudes, knowledge, and skills that counselors should acquire when working with transgender clients. Regarding attitudes, the authors recommended that therapists become aware of their own transphobia and the ways that they display transphobia to their clients and trainees. Indicators of transphobia may include addressing clients with a pronoun that is inconsistent with the client's self-presentation, feeling uneasy teaching trainees about transgender issues, or taking a pathological perspective in conceptualizing transgender clients' presenting concerns (L. Carroll & Gilroy).

With respect to knowledge, L. Carroll and Gilroy (2002) recommended that therapists seek information about key transgender historical and sociopolitical events and the worldviews and life experiences of transgender individuals. Therapists should be willing to conceptualize clients' psychological symptoms as coping mechanisms that have developed in response to prejudice. They should also realize that gender variant people have different understandings of gender identity and may not identify with the transgender community or the transgender movement. Finally, the authors suggested

becoming familiar with the Standards of Care and their criticisms in order to better serve transgender individuals during the vulnerable time of pre-transition (L. Carroll & Gilroy).

Concerning skills, L. Carroll and Gilroy (2002) recommended that therapists develop the skills of listening, empathy and the validation of client feelings in order to counteract clients' stigmatizing experiences. Therapists should learn to comfortably ask clarifying questions when they are unfamiliar with a particular topic, and should be trained in the treatment of major psychological disorders. Specific approaches to psychotherapy that L. Carroll and Gilroy recommended include client-centered, constructive, and narrative therapies which may empower clients to tell their own stories without interference by the therapist or the therapist's worldview. Finally, the authors advised employing cognitive flexibility to enhance effectiveness at assessing, diagnosing, and treating mental health problems in transgender clients and making referrals to medical personnel who are transgender affirming (L. Carroll & Gilroy).

In their writing about affirmative psychotherapy with transgender clients, Korell and Lorah (2007) addressed how therapists view gender. They suggested that a conceptualization of gender as a set of distinct and unchanging points along a continuum may not be a helpful perspective. In order to address transgender clients' questions about gender variance, the authors recommended that therapists think of gender as fluid; that is, changing throughout the client's life in any number of ways.

Gainor (2000) addressed cultural competencies through her recommendations for working with transgender clients. Gainor recommended that therapists become aware of their own values concerning sex, gender, and sexual orientation so that these views do not impede the therapeutic work. Second, therapists should maintain a list of professional

contacts with whom they can consult about ethical dilemmas and other questions concerning their gender clients. Third, gender specialists must accept “cross-dressing and sex or gender incongruity as a psychologically unchangeable, congenitally attributed, natural phenomenon” (p. 156). Thus, attempts to change behaviors viewed as incongruous (and thus problematic) should be avoided. Finally, therapists must have no personal investment or restrictions in the direction the client takes with regard to expression of the “true self” (p. 156). This will ensure that the therapist’s values do not unduly influence the client’s decision-making (Gainor).

Mostade (2006) highlighted some of the ways genderism and transphobia can build interpersonal barriers between therapists and their transgender clients. Genderism and transphobia can impact therapists’ ability to deeply understand the very real prejudice that occurs in gender variant individuals’ lives. Without such an understanding, therapists have difficulty demonstrating unconditional positive regard which is essential to the therapeutic relationship. Furthermore, any display of genderism or transphobia by the therapist may inadvertently activate a client’s internalized transphobia, thereby inhibiting the work of therapy if not addressed. Mostade recommended that therapists be willing to rethink their own gender, including their feelings about “mannish women, effeminate men, and transsexual people” (p. 310) as well as their own gendered upbringing and the unearned privilege of gender congruence.

Chen-Hayes (2001) conceptualized client advocacy as essential to competent therapeutic practice with transgender individuals. According to the author, advocacy could be as simple as using the correct gender pronouns or as complex as guiding clients through the nuances of gender identity disclosure. Additional advocacy efforts may

include helping clients express their gender in ways that will lead to success in passing; increasing one's awareness of the privileges of heterosexual and traditionally gendered identities; learning ways to challenge gender privilege; and avoiding the assumption that one already knows a client's current or future gender identity or sexual orientation (Chen-Hayes).

An additional form of client advocacy that Chen-Hayes (2001) recommended is a focus on clients' experiences of multiple oppressions. Classism, for example, impacts transgender individuals' ability to afford hormone replacement therapy or surgery. Racism affects transgender people of color in a number of ways, such as limiting resources that address gender variance among people of color and limiting the visibility of transgender individuals within ethnic communities. Ageism influences transgender youth and children who are vulnerable to caregivers and clinicians who attempt to change their gender expression. Finally, ableism and beautyism lead those who feel stigmatized by a DSM-IV diagnosis to attempt to conform to dominant cultural standards of beauty in order to pass and feel successful in their transitions (Chen-Hayes).

Chen-Hayes (2001) also recommended that therapists challenge the horizontal hostility they witness in their clients. Horizontal hostility refers to internalized oppression among non-dominant group members who use prejudice against each other to express their frustration with discriminatory practices. An example of horizontal hostility would be transsexuals struggling against cross-dressers. It is more appropriate and productive for clients to challenge the dominant group's practices that lead to the restriction of power, privilege, and access to resources for non-dominant groups (Chen-Hayes).

## Transgender Identity Development

The construction and testing of models of transgender identity development have received scant attention in the literature. The number of models in existence has not been adequately established, as Devor's (1997, 2004) stage theory of transsexual identity formation is the most frequently cited and alternatives are rarely mentioned. This researcher uncovered seven models that address the development of a transgender identity, including three (Baumbach & Turner, 1992; Ebaugh, 1988; Tully, 1992) that were developed prior to the removal of transsexuality from the DSM. Because these older accounts of identity formation were founded on pathologizing concepts, they do not inform the present discussion outside of acknowledging that more current theories have evolved somewhat from their early counterparts. Thus, those proposed prior to 1994 will not be included in this review. Two models of MTF identity development (Gagné et al., 1997; Lewins, 1995) and two models of FTM identity development (Devor, 1997, 2004; T. Lee, 2001) will be reviewed in this section. It is worth noting that some transgender identity models are based on empirical research, yet none have been empirically validated. These models vary in their conceptualization of transgender identity so that no unified theory of transgender identity formation yet exists (Lev, 2007).

Lewins (1995) developed a model of MTF transsexual identity formation by interviewing and/or reviewing the records of patients who sought services at a gender clinic in Australia. Lewins proposed a series of six stages in what is termed "the process of becoming a woman" (p. 70). The author noted that the stages are serial but that some stages may overlap with one another or be skipped altogether. The author views becoming a woman as a social process because self-identifying and coming out to others

are shaped by social influences. The first stage, abiding anxiety, is characterized by a feeling of discomfort with confusion about one's gender, and typically appears early in transsexuals' lives, as manifested in identifying with girls as playmates and assuming that one will grow up to be a girl. This anxiety may be amplified by punishment for behaving in ways others perceive as feminine. Cross-dressing relieved anxiety in most transsexuals studied. Discovery involved participants' introduction to transsexualism and consequent recognition of themselves as transsexual. The abiding anxiety of the previous stage was somewhat relieved upon finding a category with which one could identify. Purging and delay refers to a two-part process by which transsexuals purged, or entered into denial about transsexual identity, actively trying to reconfirm their male identity (usually through heterosexual marriage), and delayed, or postponed living as a woman. Factors such as self-perceived physical appearance, family concerns, employment issues, and religious beliefs contributed to transsexuals' delay (Lewins).

In the fourth stage of Lewins' (1995) model of MTF identity formation, acceptance, transsexuals acknowledged that "living as a woman is the only way to cope with gender confusion" (p. 91). It was during this stage that most transsexuals sought the services of the gender clinic, requesting sex reassignment surgery, thus beginning the process of meeting surgical eligibility requirements. Surgical reassignment came for most transsexuals after problems with finances and unrealistic expectations of the benefits of reassignment surgery were resolved. The final stage, invisibility, was characterized by transsexuals suppressing public access to information about their gender histories following sex reassignment surgery. Some transsexuals changed jobs or moved in order to limit their contact with people aware of their previous identity. With invisibility came

“increasing confidence in being a woman and a degree of taken for grantedness of one’s own gender” (Lewins, p. 106).

Gagné et al. (1997) presented a model of transgender identity formation based on interviews with 65 masculine-to-feminine individuals who self-identified as transsexual (n = 41), cross-dresser (n = 19), and gender radical (i.e., transgenderist; n = 5). By comparing these groups, the model demonstrates some of the heterogeneity that exists among individuals who hold a transgender identity. The central theme of the model is the concept of appearance, referring to how participants adjusted their physical characteristics in order to successfully interact with others in their identity-congruent gender expression. Four developmental steps were identified concerning the exploration and disclosure of transgender identity. First, transgender participants’ early transgendered experiences were typified by the feeling that they were or wanted to be girls. Feminine behaviors were generally tolerated by others through toddlerhood, but were then punished, causing shame in participants who continued, in secret, to feel confusion about their gender. These children learned to isolate themselves because they felt a sense of failure playing with boys and were disciplined for playing with girls. Individuals who first recognized transgender feelings during adolescence or adulthood reported using alcohol or drugs to repress their feelings (Gagné et al.).

In the next step in Gagné et al.’s (1997) model, coming out to one’s self, discovering other transgender people allowed participants to view available identities and thus to accept their own. Many participants came out during the 1960s and 1970s when transgender role models were rarely as available as they are today through the media and Internet. Part of the coming out process involved cross-dressing in private, which held

distinct meanings for each of the groups studied. Transsexuals viewed cross-dressing as an opportunity to be themselves for the first time. Gender radicals experienced it as a chance to blend feminine and masculine attributes. Cross-dressers saw it as an opportunity to express their feminine selves. During this developmental step, many transsexuals reacted to their newfound identities by engaging in hypermasculine activities such as those described above by Samons (2001; i.e., enrolling in the military, marrying heterosexual women, taking traditionally male jobs), hoping to “cure” themselves. Others purged their lives of feminine clothing and makeup from time to time, vowing never to cross-dress again. All of these supposed remedies were unsuccessful in changing individuals’ identities (Gagné et al.).

Gagné et al.’s (1997) next step, coming out to others, was characterized by fear and anxiety as transgender individuals painstakingly prepared for disclosure. Initially they came out on a need-to-know basis, usually to a female partner. When participants had prepared by gathering information and allowing time for the disclosure to be processed, it was typically a positive experience. Coming out at work, however, was problematic for transsexuals, most of whom were forced out of their jobs. Coming out to others also involved cross-dressing in public for the first time. In many cases, passing in public served to legitimize transsexuals’ identities. Participants described driving around in their cars while cross-dressed until they felt confident enough to go to a gay bar, transgender event, or support group. The vast majority of participants reported seeing a psychotherapist who provided the main instructions and encouragement for them to come out (Gagné et al.).

By the final step, resolution of identity, most participants had established a true sense of identity (Gagné et al., 1997). For gender radicals, this meant wanting to be recognized as transgender in public. For transsexuals and cross-dressers, it meant wanting to be known and to socialize as women. Support groups played a central role in participants' development of identity, particularly with regard to their appearance. Transsexuals used support groups temporarily, attending seminars on feminine makeup, style, and mannerisms until they were able to pass. For cross-dressers, support groups provided an opportunity to cross-dress in public. Gender radicals found the groups to be potential social movement organizations (Gagné et al.).

T. Lee (2001) introduced a model of FTM gender identity formation based on interviews with 12 FTM transsexuals. A full description of the study, including a comparison to butch lesbians' accounts of identity, can be found in the Butch and Femme Identities section of Chapter II, below. T. Lee's model focuses on FTMs' experiences of identity in childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. During childhood, participants identified as tomboys, which in retrospect they viewed as an early indication of transsexualism. Adolescence and adulthood brought about the process of gender identity development that T. Lee termed othering, meaning that participants self-identified by contrasting their own gender to the gendered characteristics of other groups of people. For example, when adolescence brought physiological changes, FTMs reacted to their bodies with a sense of alienation and resentment. Thus, they saw themselves as different from heterosexual women and came to identify as lesbian. During adulthood, participants discovered they were also different from lesbians and through a process of elimination,

concluded they must be men. Thus, heterosexual women and lesbians served as others in the FTMs' development of a transsexual identity.

Devor (1997, 2004) proposed a fourteen stage model of transsexual identity formation based on extensive research with FTM transsexuals. The most widely accepted of the transgender identity models, it has also been applied to the experiences of MTF transsexuals through the author's formal and informal contacts with the MTF population. Cass's (1996) model of sexual orientation identity formation and Ebaugh's (1988) theory of role exit – leaving one identity behind to take on another - provided the foundation for the model. The themes of witnessing and mirroring are central to each stage of Devor's model. Witnessing refers to the deep need to be seen by others as we see ourselves. Mirroring refers to the desire to see ourselves reflected in others. The fourteen stages emulate those of the Cass model (i.e., identity confusion, identity comparison, identity tolerance, identity acceptance, and identity synthesis) but include several repeated stages to account for gender transition. The stages are summarized below.

Stage one, abiding anxiety, is characterized by a sense that something about one's social role and/or body is not right (Devor, 2004). According to the themes of witnessing and mirroring, such anxiety is not surprising, as transgender individuals are rarely witnessed or mirrored by others within a gender dichotomized society. In stage two, identity confusion about originally assigned gender and sex, transgender individuals doubt the appropriateness of their assigned gender. As children, they insist they are another gender. When punished for gender incongruence, they secretly fantasize about being a different gender and hope that puberty will bring such changes. Adolescents and adults who realize the social stigma they will face may attempt to conform to traditional

gender roles as they sort out their confusion. Stage three, identity comparisons about originally assigned gender and sex, involves looking to members of one's gender and sex who are most like oneself, such as tomboys or butch lesbians, and adopting the role that allows for better witnessing and mirroring than before (Devor).

In stage four of Devor's (2004) model, discovery of transsexualism or transgenderism, individuals encounter the phenomenon of transgender identity for the first time. This often marks the beginning of further identity confusion and comparisons, as described in stages five through eight. Devor observed that with the advent of the Internet, it is uncommon for people to remain unaware of transgenderism for long. Those who immediately accept this identity for themselves will quickly move to stage nine, identity acceptance. For those who do not, stages five through eight could take years.

During stage five, identity confusion about transsexualism or transgenderism, individuals seek information about transgender identity as they move from doubt to a consideration of transgender identity for themselves (Devor, 2004). In stage six, identity comparisons about transsexualism or transgenderism, individuals compare themselves to three groups of people in order to determine who seems most similar to them: transgender people, people from their assigned gender and sex, or people from the gender and sex to which they may transition. During stage seven, tolerance of transsexual or transgendered identity, individuals begin to separate from their assigned sex and gender and perceive themselves as "probably transsexual" or "probably transgendered" (Devor, 2004, p. 55) without quite accepting the identity. Stage eight, delay before acceptance of transsexual or transgender identity, is characterized by a period of delay as individuals examine themselves and transgender identity to make certain it is a good fit. They move toward

acceptance when intimate partners and other loved ones are able to witness them accurately. Support groups, conferences, or online sources also provide confirmation of their identity through mirroring (Devor).

Stage nine, acceptance of transsexual or transgendered identity, is characterized by individuals' ability to "say to themselves and to others, 'I am transsexual' or 'I am transgendered'" (Devor, 2004, p. 59). In stage ten, delay before transition, individuals distance themselves from their gender of assignment and deepen their transgender identity as they plan for gender transition. Informing others of their intention to transition and planning for medical procedures causes some delay, which can be frustrating for those who have fully accepted their identity, but whose pre-transition selves are not accurately witnessed by others. In stage eleven, transition, individuals feel exhilarated and frustrated as their transition preparations come to fruition. Some will be satisfied with few changes or with consistent witnessing and mirroring by those around them. Others will never be satisfied or will spend years transforming their bodies, seeking completion. A period of grief may accompany this stage, as individuals cope with the loss of the formerly gendered self. There may also be reluctance to express grief, for fear that it would cast doubt on their commitment to transition. Because of the more permanent effects of testosterone, MTFs typically have greater difficulty passing than do FTMs, an important distinction during this stage when individuals may become upset if others fail to witness their transitioning identities or exhibit hostility toward them (Devor).

Stage twelve of Devor's (2004) model, acceptance of post-transition gender and sex identities, is typified by individuals being "routinely witnessed and mirrored as who they feel themselves to be" (p. 63). Anxiety dissipates during this stage as individuals

accumulate experiences of successful post-transition living that lend authenticity to their gender identification. By stage thirteen, integration, most transgender individuals will have integrated their new gender identity into their lives. Although their transgender identity becomes less salient over time, they will always engage in stigma management, attending to how others obtain information about them and being alert to danger. Finally, individuals reach stage fourteen, pride, in which they live with a sense of pride in themselves for successfully transitioning. Some may openly identify as transgender and join transgender advocacy efforts. Pride may also co-exist with other stages, as individuals feel pride in themselves “for having the courage and integrity to pursue their own very special journey” (p. 65), whatever stage of development they have reached.

While there is no single theory of how transgender individuals form their identities, some commonalities are apparent between models. First, the models generally assume a lack of awareness of the existence of transgender identity in early stages and underscore the importance of discovering transgender identity for applying the label to oneself. Second, theories of transgender identity formation point to a sense of difference as early as toddlerhood, as children begin to display cross-gendered interests and receive social sanctions for doing so. An additional commonality among the models is a period of actively rejecting one’s transgender identity prior to coming to acceptance. A waiting period between the time transsexuals commit to surgical transition and when they actually receive sex reassignment surgery is another similarity. Cross-dressing has also been identified as an important outlet for transgender individuals to express themselves, and in some cases relieved anxiety spurred by gender dysphoria. Finally, feedback from known and unknown others provided the impetus, especially during later stages, for

individuals to develop confidence in their physical appearance and thus maintain the presence that enabled them to be accurately regarded in their identity-congruent gender expression.

Rankin and Beemyn (2008) noted several limitations of existing models of transgender identity development. First, the models tend to suggest that medical procedures signify the goal of gender transition and that transition is incomplete without sex reassignment surgery. The models fail to account for those who opt out of sex reassignment surgery or who are unable to have the procedures for medical or financial reasons. Second, some models assume that once individuals – particularly transsexuals - have transitioned, they no longer identify as transgender, but rather, wish to be integrated into women's and men's social roles without revealing their gender histories. This assumption is especially evident in models developed prior to 1994 (when transsexuality was removed from the DSM), but still exists in later theories; it appears to be better accounted for by Devor's (1997, 2004) pride stage. A third limitation of existing models of transgender identity is their failure to examine the intersections of multiple identities such as race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, and ability status. This was true for all of the models reviewed. Finally, the experiences of transgender youth have been overlooked, although Devor (2004) and Gagné et al. (1997) did observe that youth have access to websites, chat rooms, and other online venues that may curtail their confusion and isolation in comparison to transgender people who grew up in previous decades.

## Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation

The conflation of gender identity and sexual orientation leads to some degree of shared experience of discrimination between transgender people and LGB people. Transgender individuals who display a nontraditional gender expression such as appearing to be a man while wearing makeup or appearing to be a woman while sporting a crew cut are often assumed to be LGB. Likewise, LGB people who break gender norms are often assumed to be or to want to be the other sex (Gainor, 2000). This confusion happens because many of the stereotypes about LGB people are based on gender expression and gender appropriate behavior. In fact, even heterosexual individuals who defy gender norms are mistaken for being LGB based on their gender expression. Thus, it is the gender expression of individuals rather than their actual gender identity or sexual orientation that most often leads to acts of violence (Gainor).

Transgender people and LGB people share some similar concerns in addition to the threat of violence against them. First, coming out to self and to others is a key developmental task for both groups (Brown & Rounsley, 1996). Second, transgender and LGB individuals experience heterosexism in their environment. One example of heterosexism during early childhood is caregivers' assumption that gender nonconforming children may become LGB. Heterosexist caregivers may try to prevent children from becoming LGB by discouraging gender nonconforming behavior. This can have a significant effect on how a child gains affirmation about identity, regardless of the child's future gender identity or sexual orientation (Brown & Rounsley). Third, transgender and LGB individuals share a history of assumed pathology as indicated by DSM diagnostic categories for mental disorders (APA, 2000; Lev, 2007).

Differences also exist between the concerns of transgender people and the concerns of LGB people. While coming out is a key developmental task for both groups, coming out as transgender can elicit a much more negative reaction than coming out as LGB, as gender nonconformity is typically considered more repugnant than LGB identity (Brown & Rounsley, 1996). Coming out as transgender may also involve more drastic changes in appearance and social functioning than coming out as LGB. Finally, gender identity typically develops very early in life, while sexual orientation is discovered somewhat later. This means that transgender individuals may not have an opportunity to explore their sexual orientation until after gender issues have been resolved (Brown & Rounsley).

### Lesbian Identity Development

Accounts of gay and lesbian identity formation proliferated following the removal of homosexuality from the DSM in the mid-1970s. Reynolds and Hanjorgiris (2000) and Eliason and Schope (2007) identified models that specifically describe the formation of lesbian identity. These include nonlinear accounts of lesbian identity formation (Eliason, 1996a; Ponse, 1978; Rust, 1992, 1993), a typology of lesbian women (Kitzinger, 1987), and the more widely accepted developmental stage models of lesbian identity (Cass, 1979, 1984, 1996; Chapman & Brannock, 1987; Faderman, 1984; McCarn & Fassinger, 1996; Sophie, 1985-1986). Each model reviewed here serves as a marker of the evolution in thinking about sexual orientation over the years. As such, the models are presented in chronological order within their respective subsections. Because developmental stage models currently serve as the standard for conceptualizing gay and lesbian identity

formation, these models will be the main focus of this review. Discussion concerning the concept of gender in the context of models of gay and lesbian identity development will conclude the section.

### *Nonlinear Accounts of Lesbian Identity Formation*

Ponse (1978) proposed one of the first models for understanding lesbian identity formation, suggesting a trajectory of lesbian identity construction consisting of five elements: (a) experience of a subjective sense of difference from heterosexuals due to feelings of sexual and/or emotional attraction to women, (b) recognition of feelings as having lesbian meaning, (c) acceptance of a lesbian identity and coming out to others as lesbian, (d) seeking a lesbian community, and (e) engagement in an emotional or sexual relationship with a woman. Ponse theorized that while the five elements could occur in any order, the expression of any one element inevitably leads to the expression of the other elements.

Ponse (1978) found that, in reality, women's feelings (toward women, men, both, or neither), activities (with women, men, both, or neither), and identities (as lesbian, bisexual, or heterosexual) were not always consistent with one another. Sexual orientation was found to be more fluid than previously thought, thus requiring a more complex framework. To account for these discrepancies, Ponse developed four identity/activity subtypes: (a) lesbian identity with lesbian activity; (b) lesbian identity with bisexual, heterosexual, or celibate activity; (c) bisexual identity with lesbian activity; and (d) heterosexual identity with lesbian activity. With regard to the four subtypes, Ponse discovered that the lesbian community held bisexual- and heterosexual-

identified women in low esteem, even when they engaged in lesbian activity. That is, individuals who exhibited any four of the five elements of lesbian identity construction were expected to adopt a lesbian identity (element three), even if they engaged at times in bisexual, heterosexual, or celibate activity (Ponse).

Rust (1992, 1993) presented a social constructionist account of lesbian identity through research that sought to recognize differences between lesbian and bisexual women. Reacting mainly to the developmental stage models that had been proposed during the 1980s, Rust rejected the stage model notion that sexual identity represents an internal essence that becomes fixed as one matures. Instead, Rust asserted that identity is a product of socialization and therefore, as society transforms, “changes in self-identity are to be expected of psychologically and socially mature individuals” (Rust, 1993, p. 68). Indeed, Rust found considerable fluidity and uncertainty over time in the ways women described and labeled their identities. For example, only one-third of the lesbian sample was solely attracted to women, with the remaining participants 50% to 95% attracted to women (Rust, 1993). Furthermore, many respondents reported participating in heterosexual relationships both before and after coming out. Heterosexual relationships occurred more frequently the longer individuals had been out. Given the fluidity of lesbian identities, it is not surprising that the women in Rust’s sample provided the following definition of lesbian identity: “The dominance of homosexual feelings and behavior over heterosexual feelings and behavior” (Rust, 1992, p. 376). Interestingly, Rust observed the lesbian community as accepting of heterosexual feelings among lesbians, but as unaccepting of heterosexual activity among lesbians.

Eliason (1996a) introduced a nonhierarchical, cyclical model of lesbian identity assumption composed of four cycles that integrate the cognitive, social, and historical contexts in which identities form and change. Not unlike Rust (1992, 1993), Eliason challenged the linearity of developmental stage models and the assertion that sexual orientation resolves itself in a singular, stable identity. The model begins with pre-identity, or a lack of awareness that lesbian identity exists. Individuals in this cycle may feel different from others as they take in information from the dominant culture about sexuality. Unlike the other cycles, individuals cannot return to pre-identity, for once awareness of lesbian identity has been established, it cannot be revoked. The second cycle, emerging identities, is characterized by recognition of dominant cultural influences. In this cycle, individuals compare themselves to stereotypes about lesbians and begin to question the validity of those images. The third cycle, experiences/recognition of oppression or invalidation, involves an increase in the significance of lesbian identity as individuals recognize discrimination, harassment, social exclusion, and invisibility based on sexual orientation. In the fourth cycle, re-evaluation/evolution of identities, increased knowledge and experience in the world leads to the creation of new meanings in self-identities. Importantly, Eliason emphasized the potential for social forces to impact not only lesbian identity during this cycle, but also racial and ethnic and other forms of identity. One example of how the model may work in a cyclical fashion is that individuals may experience or observe oppression in a new form, such as the firing of a coworker based on sexual orientation, and consequently recognize additional dominant discourses (i.e., lack of protection in the workplace) which

may lead to new ways of re-evaluating their identities (i.e., deciding not to come out at work; Eliason).

### *Typology of Lesbian Women*

Kitzinger (1987) conducted a Q methodological study of accounts of lesbian identity based on “the set of meanings ascribed by a woman to whatever social, emotional, sexual, political, or personal configuration she intends when she describes herself as a ‘lesbian’” (p. 90). Kitzinger’s analysis revealed five factors or typologies of lesbian identity, which Eliason (1996b) helpfully named (a) lesbian identity as personal fulfillment; (b) in love with a person, not a gender; (c) sex is only a small part of identity; (d) political lesbians; and (e) lesbian identity as a cross to bear (note that Eliason’s original term lesbianism, based on Kitzinger’s own terminology, has been replaced by the more accepted term lesbian identity).

Kitzinger (1987) characterized Factor I (lesbian identity as personal fulfillment) in terms of personal happiness, as the women in this group had felt sexually unresponsive and socially conformist in their heterosexual marriages and found lesbian identity to be emotionally fulfilling. Factor II (in love with a person, not a gender) emphasizes romance as the women in this group fell in love with a person who happened to be a woman. Reluctant to label themselves, these women felt they could just as easily be called heterosexual if they fell in love with a man. Factor III (sex is only a small part of identity) depicts lesbian identity as an essential, personal sexual orientation, yet the women in this group did not wish to be defined solely on the basis of one small aspect of identity. They emphasized their similarity to heterosexuals and minimized the importance of sexual

orientation in everyday interactions. Factor IV (political lesbians) represents a constructionist account of lesbian identity not unlike that of Faderman's (1984; see below), as the women in this group actively defined their identity in the context of the radical feminist movement. Believing that heterosexuality serves men through the exploitation of women, this group identified as lesbian as a strategy to undermine patriarchy. Finally, traditionally negative religious and scientific objections to lesbian identity surfaced in Factor V (lesbian identity as a cross to bear), as this group took on lesbian identity as "an unfortunate condition" (Kitzinger, p. 120). These women disliked their feelings of difference and viewed lesbian identity as a personal inadequacy.

Kitzinger (1987) applied a feminist critique to the five factors of lesbian identity described above. Four of the factors were found to be problematic when viewed through a feminist lens. As a personal and private identity, Factor I (lesbian identity as personal fulfillment) was seen as too far removed from any political stance to effectively protest patriarchy. Factor II (in love with a person, not a gender) was criticized for borrowing terminology (e.g., falling in love) from the "official morality" (p. 108) in order to achieve mainstream social acceptance. The minimizing of sexual orientation and the avoidance of self-labeling characteristic of Factor III (sex is only a small part of identity) were described as justifying "the need to think and act in accordance with the recommendations of the dominant culture" (p. 112). Finally, Kitzinger critiqued Factor V (lesbian identity as a cross to bear) for relieving women of personal responsibility for their sexual orientation and depoliticizing lesbian identity "in a bid for acceptance" (p. 122). In stark contrast to the above evaluations, Kitzinger lauded Factor IV (political lesbians) for its disruption of dominant cultural views on sexuality.

*Developmental Stage Models of Lesbian Identity*

The most widely accepted models of lesbian identity formation are the developmental stage models, which portray lesbians undertaking a (primarily) linear journey from poor psychological adjustment during early stages to more advanced psychological adjustment in later stages (Eliason & Schope, 2007). Stage models assume an essential sexual orientation that is discovered and developed into an identity via interaction between individuals and their social and cultural environments. In general, the models begin with an assumption of heterosexuality which is initially questioned when individuals recognize some kind of difference between themselves and heterosexual others (Liddle, 2007). The models also recognize that possible lesbian identity may be met with a crisis response due to the social stigmatization it may entail. Thus, the importance of seeking a lesbian community and positive role models is emphasized as a way of alleviating feelings of isolation. Individuals' heightened awareness of intolerance against gay and lesbian people is said to lead to a period of anger toward heterosexuals as a group, which may also spark activism. The models typically portray healthy identity development as that which moves beyond anger into a more peaceful, integrated identity (Eliason & Schope; Liddle).

Cass (1979, 1984, 1996) proposed a six stage model of gay and lesbian identity formation that has both theoretical and empirical validity (Eliason, 1996b). The most extensively studied model in the psychological literature, this model asserts that identity formation is a developmental process that occurs when individuals interact with their environment (Reynolds & Hanjorgiris, 2000) and attempt to reach congruity between self-identity, self-perception of their sexual behaviors, and their perceptions of what other

people might think about their sexual behaviors (Eliason). Each stage of the model consists of multiple pathways that lead to a number of outcomes, including the next stage of the model, a positive or negative impression of possible gay or lesbian self-identity, or foreclosure on gay or lesbian identity when the costs of continuing the developmental process seem too great. When individuals meet the challenges of each stage, they take the healthiest course. This leads to the development of a stable gay or lesbian identity in which individuals live openly and at peace with themselves and society (Eliason & Schope, 2007). Although Cass intended the model to describe both gay and lesbian identity, each of Cass's six stages will be described below in terms of lesbian identity, in accord with the topic of the present section.

Cass's (1996) model begins with a prestage in which individuals assume they are not lesbian. Thus, stage one, identity confusion, is characterized by attaching lesbian meaning to individuals' behaviors or feelings for the first time. Doing so often results in confusion and individuals must employ strategies to cope with this confusion. Those who resolve that they may, indeed, be lesbian, advance to stage two, identity comparison. During this second stage, individuals consider the rewards and costs of self-labeling as lesbian. They employ strategies to either devalue heterosexuals or inhibit their lesbian behavior. The strategy they choose determines whether they will emerge with a positive or negative sense that they probably are lesbian (or with foreclosure on lesbian identity). Lesbian identity is said to be tolerated during stage three, identity tolerance, as individuals become intensely aware of the differences between themselves as likely members of a sexual minority group and others as members of the more valued heterosexual majority. Positive contact with other lesbians at this stage leads to the

development of a positive lesbian identity. Negative contact with the lesbian community leads to a tolerated but negative lesbian identity or to identity foreclosure whereupon individuals disengage from their lesbian contacts (Cass).

As individuals enter stage four, identity acceptance, their increasing contact with other lesbians leads to a stronger sense of membership in this group (Cass, 1996). The negativity of minority group membership is offset by a new perspective of lesbian identity as equally valid as heterosexual identity. In stage five, identity pride, a dichotomy is established as lesbians devalue heterosexuals and give lesbian identity preferred status. Advancement to the next stage depends on lesbians' interactions with supportive heterosexuals, who spoil this dichotomy. Lesbians who encounter negativity from heterosexuals maintain the dichotomous stance of this stage. Finally, stage six, identity synthesis, involves building an increasing network of supportive others and further devaluing heterosexual individuals who are not supportive. The inner psychological experience of lesbian identity deepens as individuals interact with others openly as lesbian (Cass).

Faderman (1984) developed an account of lesbian identity that incorporates the influence of the radical feminist movement. Faderman's account is based on Minton and McDonald's (1984) 3-stage progression toward gay male identity in which gay men experience an attraction to the same sex (egocentric stage), then feel guilt and social isolation in response to internalized homophobia (sociocentric stage), and finally develop a positive gay identity through challenging social norms (universalistic stage). Faderman interviewed women who came to identify as lesbian through the feminist movement and found that a reversal of Minton and McDonald's three stages fit lesbian experiences

better. Beginning with the universalistic stage, lesbians who joined the feminist movement learned that social norms could be critically evaluated. They viewed lesbian identity as a political strategy rather than a sexual identity. The sociocentric stage did not entail the guilt and isolation characteristic of Minton and McDonald's model. Faderman theorized that forming lesbian identity within the context of a social support group helped lesbians avoid internalized homophobia. The egocentric stage was also experienced differently by lesbian-feminists who did not necessarily engage in sexual contact with women, nor center their lives on emotional or sexual feelings toward women (Faderman).

Sophie (1985-1986) constructed a four stage model of lesbian identity development by combining six theories of lesbian or gay identity formation and testing the resulting model against the reported experiences of 14 women who were "experiencing changes in sexual orientation" (p. 42). Sophie found support for the early stages of the model, but discrepancies existed for the later stages. Sophie theorized that sociohistorical context – namely, the availability of social support - plays a larger role than previously thought in the development of lesbian identity. In stage one, first awareness, individuals consider lesbian identity as a possibility for themselves. This stage involves feelings of alienation from self and others as same-sex attraction is kept secret. Stage two, testing and exploration, is characterized by increased contact with the gay and lesbian community in order to test individuals' possible lesbian identity. Disclosure to heterosexuals remains limited at this stage. In stage three, identity acceptance, individuals advance from a negative to a positive lesbian identity, spending more time with the gay and lesbian community and beginning to disclose their identity to heterosexuals. The fourth stage, identity integration, involves much of what Cass (1996) described in her

identity pride stage. That is, individuals form a dichotomous view of others in which they feel anger toward heterosexuals and pride in lesbians and in their lesbian identity. Disclosure of sexual orientation occurs during this stage as the lesbian identity becomes more stable across contexts and more integrated into individuals' overall self-concept (Sophie).

Chapman and Brannock (1987) proposed a five stage model of lesbian identity awareness and self-labeling which posits that lesbian identity develops as lesbians contrast their internal experiences with what they see in the heterosexual environment. Stage one, same sex orientation, is characterized by a sense of connection to other women, though no name for this feeling is necessarily recognized. In stage two, incongruence, lesbians first recognize that their feelings toward women are different from those of heterosexual women. In stage three, self-questioning/exploration, lesbians become aware of strong emotional and/or sexual attraction to women and explore the possibility that they may be lesbian. Stage four, self-identification, consists of acknowledging a lesbian identity. Finally, in stage five, choice of lifestyle, individuals maintain their lesbian identity, but choose whether to pursue relationships with women (Chapman & Brannock).

McCarn and Fassinger (1996) proposed a four phase model of lesbian identity formation that has become the second most cited model of lesbian identity development. The popularity of McCarn and Fassinger's model undoubtedly stems from its novel approach to identity formation, which was influenced by racial, ethnic, and gender identity models (Reynolds & Hanjorgiris, 2000). McCarn and Fassinger posited two separate but interrelated branches: personal identity formation, which refers to the

individual process of coming to terms with one's feelings, behaviors, and attractions, and reference group orientation, which refers to the process of defining oneself as a member of an oppressed group (Eliason & Schope, 2007). The authors also addressed previous models' failure to capture the essence of later stages of development by challenging the notion that individuals must live openly as lesbians in order to achieve a fully integrated identity. Instead, McCarn and Fassinger connected identity integration to the development of political consciousness. They described lesbians' decisions to disclose their sexual orientation as influenced by factors such as work environment, geographic location, and racial or ethnic group membership (Reynolds & Hanjorgiris).

In McCarn and Fassinger's (1996) model of lesbian identity development, individual identity and group membership branches may occur at comparable or varying rates, but are theorized to have a reciprocal relationship. Thus, the dual branches are described here together, according to each of the four phases. Note that by describing phases rather than stages, the authors allowed individuals to return to earlier phases of development rather than to progress in a strictly linear manner. The first phase is awareness. For individual identity, this phase is characterized by individuals' first awareness of feeling different from the expected, heterosexual norm. Lesbians begin to question their assumption that they and all others are heterosexual. For group membership, this phase involves the discovery of lesbian and gay people. Initial awareness of those who are not heterosexual is often met with some degree of confusion as individuals realize their heterosexist assumptions. The second phase is exploration. Individuals explore their sexual feelings during this phase, though they do not necessarily engage in sexual behaviors. Lesbians may experience strong sexual feelings toward other

women in general or toward another woman in particular. The group membership branch of the exploration phase entails learning about lesbian and gay people and exploring personal attitudes toward this reference group, including possible membership in it (McCarn & Fassinger).

Phase three is deepening/commitment (McCarn & Fassinger, 1996). The individual identity branch is characterized by a deepened sense of greater attraction to women than to men. Individuals also make a commitment during this phase to seek self-fulfillment as they discard the belief that they are heterosexual. In the group membership branch of deepening/commitment, individuals develop a stronger sense of commitment to the lesbian community as a reference group. They also acknowledge the potential negative consequences of such a commitment. The final phase is internalization/synthesis. The individual branch of phase four entails arriving at some internal clarification of and consistency in lesbian identity. Public identity may also be reformulated as individuals integrate their sexual orientation into public life. The authors are clear that it is not the outcome of these decisions (e.g., whether one comes out to coworkers) but the process of making these decisions by which individuals complete identity synthesis. The individual branch of this final phase is complemented by the group membership branch, in which individuals internalize their membership in a minority group and synthesize the group identity into their overall self-concept (McCarn & Fassinger).

### *Limitations of Developmental Stage Models*

Despite their frequency of use in psychological theory and practice, developmental stage models are fraught with limitations. A number of the models were based on a review of literature but have little or no empirical support (Eliason & Schope, 2007; Reynolds & Hanjorgiris, 2000); many were not validated following their development (Eliason, 1996b). The retrospective nature of accounts of lesbian identity development is also problematic, as individuals tend to reconstruct the past in ways that make sense of the present. Accessing accurate accounts of childhood and adolescent feelings and behaviors is difficult to do in individuals who have already accepted a lesbian identity (Eliason & Schope). Furthermore, the vast majority of identity development models are based on research with White, middle-class, well-educated samples (Eliason). The models overwhelmingly fail to acknowledge the influence of cultural factors such as age, race, ethnicity, geographic region, and religion, which may impact how and to what degree lesbians disclose their identity and to what extent women rely on the lesbian community for support (Liddle, 2007; Reynolds & Hanjorgiris). As Cass (1996) noted, models that focus on individual experience and the development of wholeness are informed by Western psychologies and thus fail to include alternative worldviews.

Developmental stage models have been criticized for their apolitical stance, as they depict integrated identities as those that fit into society, rather than viewing anger and activism as ongoing, healthy responses to intolerance (Eliason, 1996b; Eliason & Schope, 2007). Another limitation is the models' simplistic and reductionistic treatment of a highly complex process (Reynolds & Hanjorgiris, 2000). Most models emphasize a

linear trajectory of development, ignoring the possibility as Ponce (1978) and Rust (1992, 1993) suggested that sexual orientation is a fluid construct with a sometimes variable endpoint (Eliason; Liddle, 2007; Reynolds & Hanjorgiris). Furthermore, sociocultural changes such as the increase in media images and online information about alternative genders and sexualities are likely to impact lesbian identity formation. For example, non-awareness of gay and lesbian people or the assumption that everyone is heterosexual may no longer be as relevant to early stages of development (Eliason & Schope).

### *Gender in the Context of Gay and Lesbian Identity Development*

Initial inquiry into models of gay and lesbian identity formation reveals that the concept of gender is highly relevant in considerations of whether gay men and lesbian women experience sexual identity formation in different ways and thus whether separate models should be developed to treat the unique experiences of each group. Within the models themselves, discussion of the exploration of gender identity is nonexistent. The concept of gender role behavior is, however, explicitly mentioned by authors of two theories. First, McCarn and Fassinger (1996) wondered whether “the presence and expression of same-sex desire requires some nontraditional role behavior” (p. 518). The authors theorized that “in models of identity development, this might be manifested in feeling fundamentally different from other girls or women” (p. 519), a concept that is characteristic of most developmental stage models, but that is not connected to the idea of gender role behavior by any other theorist. McCarn and Fassinger did reaffirm the inaccuracy of “the common stereotype that only nontraditionally sex-typed women become lesbians” (p. 518).

Troiden (1989) also referred to gender role behavior in his model of gay and lesbian identity formation. This model was not included in the above review because it is based on research with gay men only. Troiden infused three of the four stages of the model with gender role concepts, including (a) a childhood sense of difference from other boys and girls based on gendered play preferences, personality characteristics, and intellectual interests; (b) the attachment of gay or lesbian meaning to the early sense of marginality that resulted from engaging in gender atypical interests and behaviors; (c) the inhibition of gender atypical behaviors as a strategy for avoiding identity confusion; and (d) an exploration of gay or lesbian identity through gender stereotyped means (i.e., men gain sexual experience with a variety of partners while women gain sexual experience in the context of emotional relationships). Eliason and Schope (2007) aptly observed that addressing gender atypical behavior in this way “leaves out LGBT people who had gender-conforming childhoods, and dismisses the possibility of transgender identity in some individuals who do have gender-atypical childhoods” (p. 16). Indeed, the sophistication of conceptualizing gender in models of lesbian identity formation is sorely lacking.

### The Socially Gendered Body

In contemporary Western societies, gendered identity is defined by dichotomously sexed bodies. For example, masculinity or maleness is equated with the presence of a penis while femininity or femaleness is equated with the opposite of maleness, the absence of a penis, or the presence of a vagina (Braun & Wilkinson, 2005). Women, in particular, “experience gender in an embodied way; they live in and through bodies that

are marked and framed through the discourses and practices of society” (J. Lee, 1997, p. 455). Social norms and cultural values tend to “emphasize women’s association with the body and appearance rather than the mind and rational thought” (Anleu, 2006, p. 359). The socially gendered body may hold importance for lesbian women as they relate their own bodies to their gender identity and thus make sense of the physical changes that some transgender individuals make when they transition. Several qualitative studies concerning women’s experiences of their bodies as socially gendered support the notion that women link their physical bodies to their gender. These studies are discussed below.

Through focus groups and a series of individual interviews with 55 women, Braun and Wilkinson (2005) “interrogated women’s talk about the vagina and identity as women to critically examine the commonsense linking of genitals and gendered identity” (p. 509). Participants were ages 20 to 50 who identified as heterosexual (n = 42), lesbian (n = 6), other (n = 6), and bisexual (n = 1). Ninety-two percent of the sample was White. The authors found that women talked about genitals and identity in four main ways. First, they affirmed that having a vagina enabled them to feel like and to be women. These participants spoke in both personal and global terms that indicated their perspectives were true for them and seen as common among women in general. Second, participants connected womanhood to associated genital functions such as [hetero]sex and reproduction, strongly connecting femaleness to motherhood. Third, women questioned the inevitability of the link between genitals and identity. These women spoke in personal terms only, indicating their perspectives differed from the normative view. The fourth way women talked about genitals and identity was to challenge or attempt to disrupt the link between the two. This approach occurred rarely and it nearly always resulted in the

unintended reinforcement of the connection, such as referring to an odd or newsworthy instance which emphasized its unexpectedness (Braun & Wilkinson). Such a perspective may impact lesbians' acceptance of women who have a penis or who do not have a vagina, as is true for some transgender individuals. In addition, the women in this study had difficulty discussing how genitals relate to their identity as women. The authors theorized that the link between genitals and gender is so taken for granted that it is difficult to articulate. If, indeed, lesbian women have not critically evaluated this link, then understanding transgender bodies may present a challenge for them.

In a phenomenological study about women's experiences of breast development, J. Lee (1997) interviewed women who identified as White (n = 73), Mexican American (n = 9), Asian American (n = 4), African American (n = 7), and Native American (n = 1). They ranged in age from 18 to 94 years and identified as heterosexual (n = 92), lesbian (n = 10), and bisexual (n = 2). Participants reported a combination of anticipation/dread, objectification, and power in response to the development of their breasts during puberty. Women who reported anticipation and dread looked forward to breast development as a sign they had entered womanhood, yet they dreaded the meaning of womanhood as a potentially "negatively scripted and restricted mode of being" (J. Lee, p. 464). When women's breast development began, they experienced men as voyeuristic and thus felt objectified. Some women wore sweatshirts or coats in order to "look kind of boyish" (p. 466) and to avoid men's stares. Women also felt a sense of power as they recognized that breast development improved their social status. They appreciated men's increased attention and their new sense of belonging with other women. Those with small breasts recalled stuffing their bras with socks so they could join these social groups (J. Lee).

These data underscore the mainstream cultural view of breast development as a marker of womanhood, thus linking the body to gendered identity.

Millsted and Frith (2003) investigated the meaning of breast development for eight White women ages 20 to 25 whom they interviewed about “their experiences of being large-breasted” (p. 458; sexual orientation was not reported). Participants described their breasts as simultaneously visible/objectified and feminine/attractive. As a visible part of their bodies, women were unable to hide their breasts from the uninvited gaze of men. Thus, breasts became a source of disempowerment and distress. On the other hand, women also experienced their large breasts as a tangible sign of femininity, marking entry into womanhood and visibly signifying female sexuality. The authors noted that in both cases, “women’s experience of their large-breasted bodies as feminine [was] inseparable from the evaluation of their bodies as feminine by others” (Millsted & Frith, p. 462). Participants reported having an awareness of themselves as privileged in the arena of “actively ‘doing’ femininity” (p. 464) because of the social meaning of their large breasts. Again, this study supports the notion that women’s bodies are infused with social meaning in a highly gendered way.

Kelly (2007) conducted a grounded theory study to investigate “the perceptions that lesbians over age 30 have about their body image and how society and the lesbian community affected these perceptions” (p. 875). The author interviewed 20 lesbian women ages 32 to 57 years who identified as White (n = 14), Hispanic (n = 2), Asian American (n = 2), African American (n = 1), and American Indian (n = 1). The author discovered that lesbians had difficulty speaking to others about their bodies, a phenomenon labeled body silence. Influenced by the dominant heterosexual culture and

the lesbian subculture, the women in this study reported five dimensions of body silence, or reasons why they did not speak to others about their bodies. First, participants who met dominant cultural expectations of beauty avoided discussing body image with other lesbians because members of the lesbian community often questioned their sexual orientation based on their appearance. Second, lesbians feared that in talking with other lesbians about their bodies, their intentions might be misread as sexual or romantic attraction. Third, lesbians who did not meet dominant cultural standards of beauty reported feeling ashamed of their bodies and wanting to hide from their partners, especially during intimacy. Fourth, the lesbians in this study believed their partners felt obligated to view their bodies positively, negating the relevance of partner feedback. Fifth, lesbians felt unable to discuss their bodies with heterosexuals because they had been encouraged to look more feminine or to lose weight so that they could attract a man rather than a woman (Kelly). Where discomfort exists among lesbians regarding talk about their own body image, it is possible that discomfort also exists among lesbians concerning discussion and acceptance of transgender bodies, especially when those bodies are even more visibly outside of dominant cultural beauty norms.

Pitman (2000) interviewed eight lesbian women ages 20 to 40 years with the goal of exploring “how the intersection of gender, sexual identity, race, ethnicity, and class affect lesbians’ feelings about their bodies” (p. 49). Participants identified as White (n = 5), African American (n = 1), Chinese immigrant (n = 1), and Mexican immigrant (n = 1). They were working-class (n = 1), lower-middle-class (n = 2), middle-class (n = 3), and upper-middle-class (n = 2) and reported varying levels of body dissatisfaction. The author’s main finding was that lesbian body image is neither a unidimensional nor a

universally experienced construct. That is, it is “based on a web of intersecting identities” (Pitman, p. 54) including race, acculturation, class, and lesbian identity. For example, Pitman noted that women of color and White women tend to focus on different aspects of body image, with White women concerned about body size, weight, and shape and women of color focused on hair, skin tone, height, eye color and shape, and breast size and shape. One might conclude that if multiple identities are salient to lesbian women’s body image, then factors such as race, ethnicity, and class may also impact lesbians’ views of transgender bodies.

### Butch and Femme Identities

The present section establishes a context for studying lesbian attitudes toward transgender people by reviewing research concerning lesbian gender identity, specifically, butch and femme genders. Literature that describes the experiences and development of lesbians’ own gender identities may serve as a useful lens through which to view lesbians’ perspectives on transgender identity.

The most publicly visible and widely studied of lesbian genders are butch and femme identities, also known as butch/femme or the butch-femme system (Levitt & Hiestand, 2004; Munt, 1998; Nestle, 1992a). These genders “function culturally to structure expectations of personal identity, social interactions, and romantic play” (Levitt & Hiestand, p. 605). Although the terms butch and femme can have different meanings in various contexts, the meanings defined here include those that most closely correspond with the terms as understood within the context of lesbian gender. Rubin (1992) defined butch as “a category of lesbian gender that is constituted through the deployment and

manipulation of masculine gender codes and symbols” (p. 467). Butch may refer to a lesbian who feels more comfortable in masculine than feminine clothing, exudes a masculine attitude or energy, and/or uses masculinity to indicate her sexual orientation (Rubin). In contrast, femme lesbians typically feel comfortable expressing femininity by wearing makeup and feminine clothing and adopting hobbies and behaviors that would be considered feminine by the larger culture (Levitt et al., 2003; Rubin). Individuals for whom gender presentation appears neutral, includes a mixture of masculine and feminine characteristics, or is neither masculine nor feminine are referred to as androgynous (Green & Peterson, 2006).

Although some butch lesbians partner with other butches, and some femme lesbians partner with other femmes, (and some do not partner at all,) the most common pairing is butch with femme (Levitt & Hiestand, 2005; Rubin, 1992). It should be noted, however, that not all lesbians claim butch or femme identities (Levitt & Hiestand, 2004; Levitt & Hiestand, 2005), and some lesbians object to butch and femme identities (Levitt & Bigler, 2003). In addition to reviewing the development of butch and femme gender identities and the ways butches and femmes experience their genders, both separately and in relation to one another, much can be learned from the butch-femme system itself. Several examples are presented below.

Butch/femme communities were initially locations where boundaries were drawn against outsiders in order to maintain the safety of those who “belonged,” or who identified as lesbian (Rubin, 1992). This sense of belonging is still contested today, though its focus has shifted from a concern with lesbian identification per se to a concern with a complex combination of shared experiences around gender-based oppression. In

particular, butch lesbians and FTM transsexuals, both of whom express masculinity, guard the boundaries of their communities from one another. Characterized as border wars (Halberstam, 1998b; Hale, 1998), an examination of the tensions that exist at the site of these physical and ideological boundaries may be useful for exploring what maintains divisions between lesbians and transgender people. Theory concerning these butch/FTM border wars will be presented.

The legacy of the early feminist movement is still alive in many butch/femme communities. Feminist values, such as opposition to patriarchy, lead some butches and femmes to view transsexuals as resistant to the feminist cause. For example, FTMs are perceived as accessing male privilege through their male gender expression (Halberstam, 1998b). FTMs are also viewed as former women who crossed into enemy territory by becoming men (Halberstam). MTF transsexuals are considered suspect for failing to reject stereotyped signs of femininity, such as wearing makeup and dresses (Monro, 2000). MTFs are also distrusted due to their perceived history as men who benefited from male privilege (Morrow, 2003) and who presently appear to pretend to be women (Wilchins, 2004). Feminism's impact on butch/femme communities in relation to views on transgender identity will be discussed.

The concept of butch/femme and the terminology that pairs butch with femme has been criticized by some researchers (Rifkin, 2002) as reifying the heterogendered system. This system normalizes traditional gender roles for men and women, essentially equating masculinity with power and femininity with weakness, and the two as a natural complement of one another, where masculine desires feminine and vice-versa (Rifkin). As applied to butch/femme, the heterogendered system is particularly bothersome to the

femme, who becomes the passive female necessarily coupled with the powerful, masculine figure (i.e., the butch). Because of this pairing, femmes fight stigma among lesbian communities and work to establish femme identity as powerful in its own right (Levitt, Gerrish, & Hiestand, 2003). The heterogendered system also confers masculinity only upon those having male bodies, which is problematic for butches and transgender people who may not possess traditional male bodies, but who nevertheless lay claim to masculinity (Rifkin). Because the language surrounding gender identity is potentially problematic, the impact of terminology on lesbian attitudes toward transgender people will be explored.

The present discussion will begin with an overview of the historical development of butch and femme roles. A review of the literature concerning contemporary butch and femme identity will follow. Discussion concerning these topics and suggestions for future research will conclude the section.

### *Historical Context*

Butch and femme roles developed as a basic organizing principle for the lesbian community in the 1940s-1950s when working-class and young middle-class lesbians pioneered the creation of lesbian bar culture (Faderman, 1991; Lapovsky-Kennedy & Davis, 1993; Levitt & Hiestand, 2005). These social spaces fostered lesbian community and intimate relationships, providing refuge from the social repression of the post-World War II era. Butches and femmes reflected the masculine and feminine images of the time period in their dress and behavior. Without historical models for their relationships, butches and femmes based their behavior on the heterosexual gender roles that were

familiar to them (Lapovsky-Kennedy & Davis; Levitt & Hiestand). These roles, however, served a purpose beyond that of establishing rules for personal appearance. Adopting a butch or femme role was necessary for gaining entry to lesbian bar communities (Lapovsky-Kennedy & Davis). Police raids and entrapment were such a threat that anyone who did not present as butch or femme was regarded with suspicion. Lesbians who might not otherwise identify as butch or femme took on these roles as proof of their lesbian identity. These gender roles were so central to the lesbian community that “butch” and “femme” replaced “gay” or “lesbian” as personal identifiers for many lesbians (Lapovsky-Kennedy & Davis).

The visibility of butch and femme roles that resulted from the emergence of bar culture brought about a conflict between lesbians of different classes (Faderman, 1991). When working-class butches and femmes shocked the public with their controversial attire and coupling, older middle-class lesbians, whose social mores dictated an appropriate degree of feminine dress and behavior, blamed them for drawing negative attention to all lesbians (Faderman; Lapovsky-Kennedy & Davis, 1993). Older middle-class lesbians also held professional jobs that required them to maintain high moral standing. They rarely participated in bar culture because they could not risk such visibility (Faderman; Lapovsky-Kennedy & Davis). Because older middle-class lesbians were likely to value feminist ideals, they often scorned butches and femmes who, in their eyes, replicated the patriarchal heterosexual roles on which butch and femme genders were based (Faderman; Lapovsky-Kennedy & Davis). Working-class and young middle-class butches and femmes, in turn, derided older-middle class lesbians for blending in

with heterosexual society, suggesting they must be confused about their sexual orientation (Faderman).

In contrast to their middle- and working-class counterparts, upper-class lesbians, who enjoyed financial stability without working, were able to live more openly without risking the material consequences of job loss (Faderman, 1991). They had little need for the lesbian bar culture, and in most cases, felt uncomfortable socializing among the working-class at bars located in dangerous neighborhoods. By not participating in bar culture, they avoided the social necessity of adopting butch and femme roles (Faderman).

Black and Latina lesbians were even less involved in the bar culture that defined many White working-class women's experiences (Moore, 2006). Although they did adopt butch and femme gender roles, they socialized more at private house parties in racially segregated neighborhoods. Because of this separation, they often avoided the physical harassment that White butches and femmes experienced (Thorpe, 1996).

It is argued that the working-class and young middle-class lesbians who adopted butch and femme roles did not merely imitate the heterosexist male-female model (Lapovsky-Kennedy & Davis, 1993). Instead, they defiantly transformed these gender roles, creating an authentic lesbian lifestyle that established for lesbians the right to romantic and sexual relationships with women. By appearing together publicly as butch/femme couples, they effectively denounced male control, enraging society by promoting women's autonomy (Lapovsky-Kennedy & Davis; Levitt & Hiestand, 2004). Their visibility fostered a unique culture and identity based on gender categories that were different from traditional male and female genders (Levitt & Hiestand). Butches assumed male privilege through their masculine appearance and sexuality, sometimes

passing as men in order to gain employment and avoid harassment (Feinberg, 1993). Yet, for the most part, they did not identify as men, but as women. Femmes, in turn, directed their attraction to butches, not as men, but as masculine women. Thus, the butch-femme system became a form of pre-political resistance, facilitating the union of public and private selves that had for so long been separated (Lapovsky-Kennedy & Davis). Banding together as members of a lesbian community, butches and femmes helped one another cope with the intense public discrimination they faced as a result of their increasing visibility (Levitt & Hiestand).

Femme women were not recognized as lesbians in the same way as butch women until around the 1950s when the prevailing thinking about homosexual identity began to change (Lapovsky-Kennedy & Davis, 1993). Before the 1950s, sex and gender were so inextricably linked that gay and lesbian people were defined by the gender inversion model of identity. This model posited that individuals who adopted the role of the “opposite” gender in order to pursue sexual relations with their own gender were considered to be homosexual (Lapovsky-Kennedy & Davis). Therefore, butches’ masculinity defined them as lesbians, but femmes, who did not adopt an opposite gender role, were denied the same status unless accompanied by a butch. In contrast, the object choice model of the 1950s defined homosexuality by one’s sexual interest in a person of the same gender (Lapovsky-Kennedy & Davis). This change reduced the importance of gender roles as a marker for lesbian identity, freeing lesbians to experiment with butch and femme roles until they found a good fit. As a result of the object choice model, femmes began to be recognized as lesbians independently of butches. Butch-femme culture, however, continued to be emphasized within the lesbian community, because of

its usefulness as a tool of political and social resistance, demonstrating, for example, that women could live their lives without men (Lapovsky-Kennedy & Davis).

The visibility of butch and femme roles declined dramatically in response to the feminist movement of the 1960s-1970s (Levitt & Hiestand, 2004). Heterosexual and lesbian feminists insisted that the butch-femme system reproduced the patriarchy and sexism of the heterosexual roles on which they were based (Faderman, 1991; Levitt & Hiestand). Feminists accused butches of assuming male privilege within their romantic relationships with femmes as well as socially, through their stereotypically male manner of dress. Femmes, in turn, were seen as encouraging the objectification of women by failing to cast away their high heels, dresses and makeup (Levitt & Hiestand). Feminism promoted androgyny as an alternative to feminine and masculine roles of any kind (Levitt et al., 2003; Levitt & Hiestand). Historically, androgyny minimized gender cues through the expression of neither masculinity nor femininity. Feminists believed androgyny to be the strongest way to resist the social constraints of sexist gender roles. They enforced androgyny to such a degree that butch and femme lesbians were forced to either adopt androgyny for themselves or withdraw from the lesbian community altogether (Levitt & Hiestand). Black and Latina women were not as involved in the early feminist movement, whose mainly White leaders omitted racism as a concern (Moore, 2006). Black and Latina lesbians, therefore, were not as influenced by the push toward androgyny. They maintained butch and femme identities when White women were discarding them for androgynous gender presentations (Moore).

Butch and femme roles experienced resurgence in the 1980s, when post-feminist lesbians broke free from lesbian-feminism, which restricted their gender expression to the

unisex image of the androgyne (Faderman, 1991; Levitt et al., 2003). Contrary to the 1950s, this reclamation of gender roles was not a social necessity, but a thoughtful act of self-definition (Faderman; Levitt et al.). In the 1980s, butch and femme roles bridged class divisions and were flexibly defined and expressed while maintaining the feminist image of the powerful woman (Faderman). For many lesbians, the roles became a playful means for bringing sexual power, pleasure, and excitement to their lives (Faderman).

### *Review of Butch and Femme Research*

Although butch and femme have long been the public face of lesbian identity (Nestle, 1992b), little research has been conducted to shed light on how these lesbian genders are experienced today. Butch identity has received more public attention than femme identity, most likely because of the rising interest in transgender studies, of which butches are sometimes a part (Halberstam, 1998b; Hale, 1998). Likewise, more work has been published about butches than femmes. In fact, femme identity has often been conceptualized as a complement to butch identity (Levitt, et al., 2003) and the research reflects this. For this reason, the present review will address butch identity first, followed by femme identity. Articles that describe both butch and femme gender will conclude the review. Each section will begin with a description of empirical work on the topic. Next, relevant theoretical pieces will be reviewed, followed by case studies or personal accounts.

### *Butch identity*

The major empirical contribution to the literature concerning butch and femme genders, conducted in response to a paucity of psychological research on the topic, was a qualitative study published as four articles. Hiestand and Levitt (2005) and Levitt and Hiestand (2004) described butch identity development, Levitt et al. (2003) detailed femme identity development, and Levitt and Hiestand (2005) discussed lesbian sexuality among butches and femmes. The two articles describing butch identity will be discussed in the present subsection. Levitt et al.'s article will be presented in the following subsection under the heading Femme Identity. The findings of Levitt and Hiestand (2005) will be presented in the third subsection under the heading Butch and Femme Identities. Because the overall methodology for each of the articles is the same, methods are explained below, as detailed in Levitt et al. and Levitt & Hiestand (2004).

Levitt et al. (2003) and Levitt and Hiestand (2004) used grounded theory methodology to conduct and analyze semi-structured interviews with 12 lesbians who self-identified as butch and 12 lesbians who self-identified as femme. Participants were recruited from a lesbian separatist community in northern Florida that supported butch-femme identities (see Levitt & Horne, 2002 for more information about the community's values). The researchers sought diversity in their sample by selecting participants who varied in age (butches, 23-62,  $M = 38.9$ ; femmes, 21-53,  $M = 35.3$ ), relationship status (butches, 5 single, 7 partnered; femmes, 5 single, 7 partnered), occupation (butches, from labor to professional; femmes, from cosmetologist to speech pathologist), geographic background (butches, 1 woman of Caribbean-South American origin, 11 women raised in northern and southern U.S. states; femmes, not reported), and length of time in the

community (butches, 2-25 years,  $M = 12.9$ ; femmes, 2-34 years,  $M = 12.25$ ). The participants' race/ethnicity (butches, 8 White, 1 Latina, 2 Jewish, 1 Italian; femmes, 12 White) reflected the primarily European American makeup of the community (Levitt et al.; Levitt & Hiestand).

The first author, Levitt, conducted all interviews, which ranged from one to three hours in length (Levitt et al., 2003; Levitt & Hiestand, 2004). Researchers performed three credibility checks, including asking participants to reflect upon the interview process, reaching consensus between researchers as to the generation and labeling of categories and concepts, and seeking feedback about the results from women in the community. Saturation of the data from both sets of interviews was reached with the ninth interview, as no new categories emerged through the last three transcripts (Levitt et al.; Levitt & Hiestand). Because this research included lesbians who identified primarily as European American and were recruited from one specific community, the authors cautioned researchers about generalizing the results to all butch and femme lesbians (Levitt & Hiestand, 2005).

From their analysis of interviews with 12 butch lesbians, Levitt and Hiestand (2004) developed a model of contemporary butch gender. The authors identified seven categories that describe the lived experience of butch identity. The first, Innate-choice debates: An essential experience, involved agreement among participants that they had never made a decision to be butch, but that their butch identity seemed to be an innate aspect of themselves. The second category, Butch perceptions of gender: Butch as beyond masculinity or femininity, entailed butches identifying as a third sex rather than as feminine or masculine, feeling discomfort with femininity but comfort with being

female, and emphasizing that preferring masculine gender expression and activities did not mean they wanted to be men. In the third category, Growing up as a butch lesbian: Coming to terms with being different, participants reflected on their childhood and adolescent experiences of being tomboys who were urged to become more feminine as they grew older, and the distress that accompanied eventual restriction from male social contexts (Levitt & Hiestand).

Levitt and Hiestand's (2004) fourth category of butch experience, Expectations of butches: I am not a stereotype, included feeling pressure from the lesbian community to conform to butch stereotypes (e.g., to be tough, protect others, be sexually dominant), while also realizing that, in comparison to the 1950s, identifying as butch was freeing, rather than a social necessity. In the fifth category, Aesthetic aspects of being butch: Representing my gender in a safe manner, participants described finding a way to express their butch gender that felt comfortable and that allowed them to navigate a variety of social contexts safely, given their vulnerability to discrimination due to their visibility as lesbians. The sixth category, Emotional qualities of being butch: Balancing care and strength, was characterized by feelings of strength and power that the women accessed through their butch identity; feelings they could not experience through forced femininity (Levitt & Hiestand).

Finally, in Levitt and Hiestand's (2004) seventh category describing butch identity, Social relations: Negotiating butch identity with others, participants related how their butch identity impacted relationships with romantic partners, friendships with heterosexual women and men, and opportunities to educate others about gender diversity. With their femme partners, butches described a deep respect for femmes rather than a

sense of power over them; this respect led to a desire to care for and protect their partners. Butches reported difficulty maintaining friendships with heterosexual women because of the potential for misunderstanding due to flirtation or misreading of butches' gender. Friendships with heterosexual men were comfortable, but at times the men spoke about women in offensive ways, forgetting butches identify as women. Participants also described their butch identity as developing alongside a motivation to speak out about gender. They felt proud to advocate for themselves and teach others about lesbian identity and gender differences (Levitt & Hiestand).

Levitt and Hiestand (2004) emphasized the importance of the study's core category, quest for authenticity, which meant that butch women "sought to remain authentic to their internal sense of gender" (p. 617). In developing butch identity, the women reported engaging in a process of negotiation between being true to their internal (essential) sense of gender and expressing their gender in accordance with (constructed) meanings that varied by social context. Butches developed the ability to balance the expectations of others with what they felt fit their personal identity. This work demonstrated the influences of essentialism and constructivism, essentialism as a leftover from the 1950s and constructivism as touted by feminists and the modern civil rights movement. This convergence of perspectives has allowed butch lesbians the freedom to express their gender in ways that feel congruent with their internal gender experience (Levitt & Hiestand).

The participants in Levitt and Hiestand's (2004) study found their quest for authenticity complicated in three ways. First, the conflation of sex and gender led butches, who expressed masculine characteristics, to be charged with a lack of fidelity to

their biological sex, female. Second, those who espoused a strictly essentialist perspective on gender led to butches feeling as though they must fit some stereotype for how butches should look and act, as though there was an innate, correct way to be butch. Third, those who espoused an entirely constructivist perspective on gender led to butches feeling denied the internal sense of gender that drove their quest for authenticity (Levitt & Hiestand). Interestingly, these barriers to expressing an authentic gender are not unlike those described by transgender theorists (e.g., Butler, 1990; Rubin, 1992) as complicating the experience of transgender individuals. In fact, Levitt and Hiestand conceptualized the butch women in their study as part of the transgender community because they transgressed gender. The authors complained that butch lesbians are typically left out of discussions about transgender identity because of the focus on transsexual experience.

Hiestand and Levitt (2005) subsequently developed a seven stage model of butch identity development based on one of the dominant categories from their analysis of interviews with butch lesbians, *Growing up as a butch lesbian: Coming to terms with being different*. They used Cass's (1979) model of homosexual identity formation as a reference for formulating their model. Stage one, gender conflict, was characterized by an early sense of gender difference, usually dating to the pre-school years, before sexual orientation came to awareness. This sense of gender difference led to confusion about gender identity, causing participants to feel isolated from other children. Social isolation worsened when parents exerted pressure to adopt a more feminine appearance. In stage two, collision of gender conformity and sexual orientation pressures, peers and teachers joined with parents in exerting pressure on the participants to express femininity. This usually occurred during middle and high school, when enduring gender nonconformity

led to participants being labeled as lesbian or ostracized. Although most participants had a clear sense of their sexual orientation by adolescence, their fear of stigmatization kept them in the closet about both their gender identity and sexual orientation. Without terminology to describe their difference from their peers, participants' gender and sexual orientation tended to be conflated (Hiestand & Levitt).

In Hiestand and Levitt's (2005) third stage, gender awareness and the distinguishing of differences, participants began to embrace their sexual orientation and to seek out other lesbians. Finding butch-identified lesbians served a critical need for participants, whose gender differences had remained unnamed. Now they could differentiate between sexual orientation and gender identity, question their gender identity freely, and feel affirmed for their gender differences. Further exploration of butch identity occurred in stage four, acceptance of lesbian identity leading to gender exploration, when participants actively sought out the butch-femme community in order to understand butch identity. Participants reported testing whether they seemed overly butch or not butch enough within this reference group. Through continued contact with the butch-femme community, negative stereotypes about butch lesbians were shed. Stage five, gender internalization and pride in sexual orientation, was characterized by the adoption of a butch identity. In this stage, participants felt their gender expression align with their internal sense of gender, resulting in increased comfort and a sense of solidarity and commitment to other butch women (Hiestand & Levitt).

In stage six, gender affirmation and pride, the shame participants had felt toward certain gendered aspects of themselves turned into pride (Hiestand & Levitt, 2005). As a result, participants became more open with others about their gender and more

comfortable presenting a butch gender expression across contexts. Their sense of pride motivated them to make their butch gender more visible, a political act that embraced a feminist ideal. Finally, in stage seven, integration of sexual orientation and gender difference, butch identity became a part of participants' whole sense of self, including their sexual orientation. Although butch identity became integrated, it remained a primary identifier for participants, possibly because of the routine gender discrimination they faced. Participants experienced both an internal sense of gender difference as pivotal to their adoption of a butch identity, as well as a social understanding of that difference that they constantly negotiated with others (Hiestand & Levitt).

Through qualitative inquiry, T. Lee (2001) described butch lesbians' and FTM transsexuals' current and retrospective accounts of the development of their gender identities, focusing on childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. T. Lee conducted semi-structured interviews with an opportunistic sample of 6 lesbians and 12 FTMs. Participants identified as British and North American. All the FTMs had at one time identified as lesbian or were viewed by others as lesbian. Although the lesbians did not self-identify as butch, the author described them as fitting a commonly accepted definition of butch as "mildly to strongly masculine in feeling and/or presentation" (p. 348).

Butches commonly reported having a tomboy identity during childhood, which they interpreted as evidence of lesbian identity (T. Lee, 2001). For FTMs, a tomboy identity also characterized their childhoods, but they took this as an early indicator of a transsexual identity. The physical changes brought on by puberty led to similar experiences for lesbians and FTMs who felt resentment, fear, and alienation toward their

bodies. The changes of puberty led FTMs to identify as lesbian, which was later found to be important in their development as transsexual. In adulthood, the FTMs discovered their differences from lesbians and, through a process of elimination, concluded that because they were not heterosexual women or lesbian women, they must be men. FTMs viewed lesbians as “unproblematically ‘women’” (p. 353), mainly because of the woman-centeredness among lesbian communities which they did not share. The lesbian participants, however, did not experience themselves as unproblematically women. Rather, butches felt they did not fit into the heterosexualized category of woman and thus felt like outsiders. Butches subsequently found the lesbian label to be an identity through which they could express their masculinity as women, a sort of third option between woman and man (T. Lee).

T. Lee (2001) found more similarities than differences in the identity development of butch lesbians and FTM transsexuals. Both groups underwent a process of identifying as “not feminine” which led to a lesbian identification. FTMs went on to identify as “not lesbian woman” and thus, transsexual. The author described the experience of identity development for both groups as occurring through a process of “othering.” That is, participants drew upon essentialist gender categories and heterosexual conceptions of gender to attribute gendered characteristics to groups referred to as “other.” The author clarified that lesbians and FTMs did not use one another in a reciprocal fashion for such attributions. Rather, for the butch lesbians, heterosexual women represented social others and heterosexual men were sexual others. For the FTMs, heterosexual women and lesbian women were both social and sexual others. In this way, othering was used by both groups

as a means to self-identify, as in a process of elimination by comparison to one's own gendered self (T. Lee).

According to T. Lee (2001), othering explained how butch lesbians and FTMs could share similar life histories but experience and account for them in different ways. T. Lee situated her findings in the context of the butch/FTM border wars, the location of debate over the blurring versus clarity of the categories of butch and FTM. The author argued that the division between butch lesbian and FTM histories is a product of narrative construction rather than a product of lived experience. The similar developmental events reported by participants in this study supported this assertion. T. Lee aptly concluded that there may be potential for relieving butch/FTM tensions by educating the two groups about the similarities among their developmental experiences, particularly around gender stereotyping and harassment (T. Lee).

Several limitations of T. Lee's (2001) study warrant consideration. First, all the FTM participants had previously identified as lesbian, making the similarity of their experiences to lesbians' all the more likely. It would be helpful to also interview FTMs who never identified as lesbian. Second, although the author set reasonable parameters for the inclusion of butch participants, it is noteworthy that none of the lesbians identified themselves as butch. This leads to questions about how the experiences of self-identified butch lesbians may have been different from those identified by the author. Third, T. Lee did not report on demographics other than the nationalities of participants. Race/ethnicity, income, and age, for example, may be important factors.

An additional limitation of T. Lee's (2001) study was that the process of othering, which appeared to be a core theme, was not well articulated and was presented only

briefly in the conclusion. Further, in the introduction, the author asked, “[H]ow accurately does each group represent the other?” (p. 328), indicating that information concerning lesbian beliefs about transsexuals would be discussed. Instead, FTMs’ beliefs about lesbians were explored, but butches’ views of FTMs were not. The process of othering did, however, appear to explain why. In other words (to answer T. Lee’s question), FTMs misrepresented the experiences of butches, but butches did not even hold FTMs in their awareness as they developed their identity. Rather, lesbians described their experiences in relation to heterosexual women and heterosexual men, their social and sexual others (T. Lee). Thus, it appears that in order to learn explicitly about butch lesbians’ attitudes toward transgender people, one must look beyond butch developmental experiences and perhaps ask the question directly.

Much of the theoretical work on the topic of butch identity is focused on butch/FTM border wars. Halberstam (1998b) theorized that the tensions between butch lesbians and FTM transsexuals occur because both groups view masculinity as a limited resource. She explained that butch lesbians and FTMs accuse each other of gender normativity when, in fact, neither group experiences themselves as gender normative. By believing that the other group is gender normative, butches and FTMs claim their own unique experience of masculinity, and thus assert their ownership of it. The author reasoned that the most productive argument concerning masculinity should not be about whether transsexuals or butches own it, but rather, how masculinity can be deconstructed from its position as the sole property of the White, middle-class, heterosexual male so that it can be shared by everyone who wishes to claim it. She therefore insisted that any

meaningful change in the gender system must include alternative masculinities that are feminist, antiracist, and queer (Halberstam).

Halberstam (1998b) emphasized the importance of understanding the differences between how butches and FTMs enact masculinity and what gender means to each of them. She theorized that butches, in a sense, play with gender, using masculinity to signal romantic interest in femmes or to subvert traditional notions of womanhood. FTM transsexuals, on the other hand, hold fast to gender, expressing masculinity as a matter of personal survival. The differences between butches and FTMs depicted by Halberstam are not unlike the differences that have been noted between transgenderists and transsexuals (Butler, 1990) concerning their respective transgender rights goals. While transsexuals fight to be recognized legally and socially in their identity-congruent gender presentation, transgenderists work to eradicate the gender system altogether. While this may be an exaggeration of the issue, the divergence it suggests leads to the question, If these differences exist between transgenderists and transsexuals, are there differences in how lesbians view transgenderists and how lesbians view transsexuals?

Additional perspectives about how FTMs view butch lesbians can be found in Hale's (1998) theorization of why FTMs guard their territory from butches and how the borders can be "demilitarized." According to Hale, FTMs are often mistaken as being butch or assumed to really be butch, so butch lesbians become the "primary negative identificatory referent class," (p. 330) or who FTMs are not. In addition, many FTMs at one time identified as lesbian and therefore try to expunge the lesbian label from their lives by distancing from lesbians. Hale suggested that if boundaries must be drawn, they should not be based on identity categories such as lesbian and transsexual. Rather,

boundaries could be drawn based on people's values, such as respect for gender diversity. Hale explained that trust between people should not be automatic just because a person has a certain identity. Instead, trust between individuals and groups should develop when values are shared (Hale). Perhaps if butch lesbians understood and respected FTMs' need for a distinct identity, and FTMs likewise understood the non-normative gender experiences of butches, border tensions could be eased.

Crawley (2002) attempted to clarify the blurry borders between butch lesbian and FTM identities through the character Jess from *Stone Butch Blues* (Feinberg, 1993). Crawley viewed Jess's identity as related to the audience to which Jess presented at any given time. When a butch/femme lesbian community was available to Jess as a refuge, Jess presented as butch. However, when that community no longer existed for Jess, Jess turned to passing as a male within a heterosexual context. This provided Jess with physical safety and job security. When the story concluded, there was some question as to whether Jess was, in the end, really a lesbian or transgender. Crawley argued that Jess's "final" identity could be said to depend on how Jess wished to be "read" by others, in addition to what communities were available for receiving Jess. Crawley used this semi-autobiographical work of Feinberg's to show how reading one another's gender according to one another's chosen identity could remedy some of the problems that exist between butches and FTMs. That is, if communities remained open to accepting individuals, however they chose to identify, people like Jess would have physically and emotionally safe places to call home (Crawley).

According to Halberstam (1998a), researchers have complained that the recent focus on butch/FTM issues has led to an over-emphasis on butch identity in the literature,

rendering femme identity invisible. Halberstam denied such claims, arguing instead that the automatic coupling of butch with femme, as in the butch-femme system, has led to people assuming that both identities must be studied equally in order to legitimate them both. Halberstam presented reasons why butch identity should continue to be researched, regardless of the state of research about femme identity. First, she noted that while more research has been conducted about butch than about femme, there is still much to be learned about butch identity. Halberstam also observed that because young butches typically learn from and model themselves after older butches, they need access to one another's stories. Such role modeling affords them the strength to endure feeling outcast.

Jalas (2003) and Zevy's (2004) theoretical work focused on the conceptualization of butch identity within psychoanalysis. Jalas (2003) examined the relationship between tomboy and butch lesbian identities by reviewing the scant psychoanalytic and psychiatric literature on Gender Identity Disorder (GID) as it relates to butch lesbians. She found that psychoanalytic theory tends to "pathologize all cross-gender identification that does not resolve itself into normative heterosexual femininity" (p. 680). This evidenced the continued pathologization of minority sexual orientations. She urged psychology and psychoanalysis, in particular, to examine their prejudicial perspectives on masculinity in adult females. Because psychoanalysis viewed tomboy identity in girls as normative, Jalas wondered, Why does "a typically unalarming tomboy childhood not lead to a...nonpathological butch lesbian adulthood?" (p. 657). Jalas suggested that psychoanalysts listen to gay and lesbian voices in order to transform their understanding of gender nonconformity in gay and lesbian people.

Zevy (2004), in turn, examined psychoanalysis for ways therapists can better understand the process of development from tomboy to butch lesbian in order to help butch lesbians on their developmental journey. She described therapy as a common place for butch lesbians to turn in order to make sense of their lives. According to Zevy, the development of tomboys who become butch differs from the development of tomboys who grow up to be femme lesbians or heterosexual. Zevy theorized that butch lesbians possess a need to manipulate space in such a way as to match the power of the male role models in their lives. She provided clinical examples, from a psychoanalytic perspective, in which therapy could be improved by giving lesbian clients encouragement and permission to talk about how they experienced their gender development in combination with their sexual orientation. Zevy asserted that without such encouragement, butch lesbians are likely to assume that non-lesbian therapists hold the same gender normative assumptions as the other people in their lives who do not understand butch gender. Zevy coined the term evolutionary butch to indicate that butch identity evolves both internally, within the individual, and externally, within the culture, over time. Psychologists are well positioned to assist lesbians with understanding an evolving butch identity.

Inness (1998) and Strickland (1999, 2002) provided personal accounts of their experiences as butch lesbians to illustrate their perspectives on butch identity. Inness (1998) described a butch's experience using a public women's restroom as a metaphor for how butches lack a place of belonging in heterosexual society. She described how butches are often mistaken for men when they use the women's restroom. In response, restroom users flash hard glances at butches, question their reason for being there, force them out, or call security. Inness theorized about what makes heterosexuals uneasy about

butches' presence. She reasoned that butches reveal the artificiality of the gender system by entering women's space while presenting as masculine. In addition, butches proudly claim their gender outlaw status rather than insisting that they are just like heterosexuals. Finally, butches reject the notion that, as women, they are a commodity to be traded with men (Inness).

Strickland (1999, 2002), a university professor and psychologist, gave her account of growing up butch in the South following World War II when male and female roles were separate (1999), and where she learned through having a younger brother that boys were valued over girls (2002). She experienced joy as a tomboy, but felt heartbroken when she moved through puberty and her mother restricted her from playing football and other boys' games at which she excelled (2002). She was "stripped of whatever was endearing about tomboy activities and had no label or model for who [she] was" (2002, p. 78) while other boys and girls knew about and seemed to feel comfortable with their gender roles. She described living a double life as a budding professional, passing as a (heterosexual) woman at work and living closeted as a lesbian in her personal life (1999). Strickland complained that when she finally felt comfortable as a butch lesbian in the mid-1980s, she learned that lesbian-feminism had rendered the butch role politically incorrect (2002). She planned to hold onto her butch identity anyway, because it described her well and she believed it sent a message that if gender roles were less important and more flexible, people could choose how they wish to express themselves and thus feel more at home in the world (2002).

The experiences of Inness (1998) and Strickland (1999, 2002) are not unlike those of transgender people, whose varying abilities to be regarded as their identity-congruent

gender and difficulties with enforced gender roles have led to similar accounts of discomfort and rejection (L. Carroll, Gilroy, & Ryan, 2002). Much like T. Lee (2001) suggested, knowledge of the similarities experienced around harassment and gender stereotyping could lead to building bridges between butch lesbians and transgender people.

### *Femme identity*

The major empirical contribution to the literature about femme identity, as noted above, was Levitt et al.'s (2003) qualitative study in which the authors developed a model of contemporary femme gender. The model included six categories describing the lived experience of femme identity. In the first category, Femme as essential within two fluid continua, participants described their lesbian identity as falling somewhere along a fluid continuum of sexual orientation (homosexual – heterosexual) and their femme identity as falling along a fluid continuum of lesbian gender identity (butch – femme). This category also included femme's recollections of having negative or unfulfilling experiences with men, which prompted some of the women to choose a lesbian identity. Femme identity, however, was described as an essential quality, as participants felt they had always been femme. The second category, Femme as a lesbian label that should not be prescriptive, involved an appreciation of femme as a useful construct for describing participants' feelings and experiences concerning their gender. Femmes sometimes found the label problematic, such as when it prescribed a woman's appearance or behavior, or when it was misunderstood as meaning not lesbian (Levitt et al.).

In the third category of femme identity, Developmental process of becoming femme, four major stages were identified from participants' recollections (Levitt et al., 2003). The first stage concerned having memories of growing up femme, which meant combining masculine and feminine traits at different times throughout their development. For example, the women may have been tomboys as children, then feminine during early adolescence, and both feminine and athletic (a stereotypically masculine trait) during high school. They may have dated men, but also felt attracted to women. Participants typically contrasted their experiences at this stage with what they had heard about butch lesbian experiences. That is, the femmes wished they had known about their lesbian identity earlier, as butches seemed to (because of their atypical gender presentation), but femmes recognized the difficulty butches had growing up because they could not hide their gender identity, and thus their sexual orientation (Levitt et al.).

During the second stage in the developmental process of becoming femme, participants described coming out as lesbian (Levitt et al., 2003). The women's femme gender presentation complicated their coming out to self as well as to others. Because most participants originally viewed lesbian identity in the stereotypical sense of being butch or androgynous, they had difficulty recognizing lesbian identity within themselves. Their traditionally feminine appearance also made coming out to others challenging because others shared the stereotyped notion that lesbians are masculine. Thus, femmes experienced a mixture of reactions to their disclosure, including disbelief and surprise. The women's ability to pass as heterosexual led many of them to come out to others in order to maintain personal integrity and increase lesbian visibility (Levitt et al.).

The third stage in the developmental process of becoming femme concerned discovering and learning about butch/femme culture, which typically occurred after the women came out as lesbian (Levitt et al, 2003). This education came about through reading, participating in butch-femme community activities, and meeting femme role models. Participants experienced a sense of belonging and relief upon finding this community. Several of the participants had thought they must adopt a butch or androgynous appearance in order to be lesbian; learning about the butch/femme community enabled them to shed this notion and embrace their femme gender. Many women came to this understanding by overcoming their previous conception of femmes as having undesirable qualities, such as passivity and weakness, which did not fit with their personal identities (Levitt et al.).

In the fourth stage in the developmental process of becoming femme, participants reported a second coming out, that is, coming out as femme (Levitt et al., 2003). This occurred for the women who did not initially identify as femme, but who instead had adopted a butch or androgynous gender presentation in order to be accepted or to accept themselves as lesbian. This second coming out was experienced as confusing and scary because it changed the way they were perceived by the mainly butch and androgynous lesbian community. Once accepted into the butch/femme community, however, femmes reported feeling a sense of freedom to be themselves (Levitt et al.).

The fourth category of femme identity, Enacting femmeness: The components of being femme, was characterized by how femmes expressed their gender (Levitt et al., 2003). First, participants recognized that there is no one way to be femme, as femme identity is different for each person. On the whole, however, the women described the

physical appearance of femmes as having a certain aesthetic quality which included wearing makeup and feeling comfortable dressing in feminine clothing. An important part of this aesthetic involved radically transforming the meaning of their stereotypically feminine behaviors. Femmes reported examining how they enacted femininity so that they could do so in a way that was different from how heterosexual women made meaning of femininity. Femmes also wanted to be sure their choices were not motivated by a desire to pass as heterosexual (Levitt et al.).

In the fifth category of femme identity, Social relationships: Balancing equality and difference, participants related the ways their femme identity impacted relationships with romantic partners, friendships with heterosexual men, and experiences within the lesbian community (Levitt et al., 2003). Femmes described being partnered with or primarily attracted to butch women. Within their romantic relationships, femmes increased their femininity in order to play to their butch partners' masculinity, thereby heightening sexual attraction. In all aspects of their romantic relationships, from sexual interactions to household duties, participants described maintaining a balance of power that was distinct from what they observed in heterosexual relationships. For example, their wish to be admired by their partners was rooted in a desire to exchange sexual energy. It pointed to the "power of beauty and a sense of self or subjectivity [that made femmes] confident enough to house the vulnerability of objectivity" (Levitt et al., p. 112).

In their relationships with heterosexual men, femmes reported experiencing defensiveness from men who assumed that their lesbian identity meant they were man-haters (Levitt et al., 2003). At other times, femmes' gender expression led men to believe they were not lesbian and thus men flirted with them and expected flirtation or apology in

return. Participants maintained their power by resisting the temptation to respond to the men in ways that would be expected of a feminine, heterosexual woman. They also experienced sexist harassment, including cat-calls, come-ons, and sexual comments from heterosexuals. Because of the complications that occurred in relationship with heterosexual men, some participants limited their social engagements to the lesbian community and indicated they felt safer and more comfortable there (Levitt et al.).

Within the lesbian community, femme role models helped participants, who lived through feminist rejection of butch-femme in the 1970s, change their view of femme as subordinate to realize the power of their identity (Levitt et al., 2003). While they acknowledged still experiencing disapproval among some lesbian communities, femmes described lesbian communities as coming around toward accepting femmes as “real” lesbians (Levitt et al.).

The sixth category of femme identity, Being femme is inherently political, pointed to the political aspect and power inherent in femme identity. Within lesbian community, femmes attempted to remedy femmephobia, or negative attitudes toward femmes, by pointing out damaging lesbian stereotypes. Within heterosexual society, femmes revealed their lesbian identity in order to increase lesbian visibility and dispel the myth that all lesbians are masculine. They found it helpful to allow heterosexuals to get to know them before coming out, so that prejudicial attitudes could be reduced (Levitt et al.).

Levitt et al. (2003) emphasized the importance of the study’s core category, Maintaining integrity: Upholding beliefs about sexual desire and gender representation. This category represented the central theme that ran across all other categories of femme

experience. It indicated that femme lesbians were concerned that their beliefs about diversity in gender presentation be recognized within their relationships and in the larger culture. Participants reported that their behaviors had different meanings in heterosexual versus lesbian contexts, and they actively related those meanings to others. Femmes insisted that they did not enjoy heterosexual privilege because their values demanded that they come out to others. In developing femme identity, they “had the courage to stand by their personal values...and to work to be seen and acknowledged in their entirety” (p. 110). It would be interesting to learn whether femme lesbians would apply these same values to an appreciation of transgender individuals’ gender diversity and their struggle to be acknowledged for living in a way that is true to their gender identity.

In their theoretical work about femme identity, Maltry and Tucker (2002) presented three arguments that critiqued the authentication of exclusively masculine lesbian identities. Their goal was to encourage femme identity to be viewed as subversive and legitimate. First, they argued that a queer context does not automatically signify that gender transgression will take place. If it did, then butches, by definition, would always transgress gender, and femmes, because of their feminine appearance, would not. Rather, a queer context is a place where transgressive acts could be performed. The authors explained their reasoning through their second argument, that a person’s intention is a viable position from which to articulate subversive femininity. That is, femmes may be viewed as gender normative because they wear feminine clothing, but if their intention is not to comply with conventional standards of beauty, but rather to feel comfortable with their femme gender, then gender transgression has occurred (Maltry & Tucker). The femmes in Levitt et al.’s (2003) study modeled this concept when they scrutinized their

own motivations for wearing makeup or dressing up. Maltry and Tucker completed their critique by asserting that no one lesbian image should be considered authentic. By refusing to define lesbians by the butch image, for example, femmes may be afforded lesbian status and thus, the space to enact gender transgression (Maltry & Tucker).

Maltry and Tucker (2002) provided three examples of how femmes can enact gender transgression. The first is through performing queer sexual acts such as using strap-on dildos and participating in BDSM (Bondage, Discipline/Domination, Submission/Sadism, and Masochism; see Green & Peterson, 2006). Through these forms of sexual behaviors, power is consciously negotiated and intentionally constructed, thus eliminating the traditional oppressive gender power structures associated with heterosexual relationships. The positions of “top” and “bottom” confuse the traditional configurations of power, as the bottom sexual partner may stop the top partner’s sex play at any time. Second, the authors asserted that femmes can perform gender transgression through loudness. The intentional creation of noise represents gender subversion in a culture that assigns femmes the silent or quieter role. In addition, a femme’s powerful articulation of her political views would be unexpected. The authors’ third example of femme gender transgression was the use of the body. Wearing feminine and masculine clothing creates confusion for others regarding one’s gender identity. Body art, such as tattoos and piercings, visually disrupts normative femininity. Finally, women of size challenge heterosexual concepts of attractiveness for females and the idea that feminine persons cannot take up space (Maltry & Tucker). The authors’ arguments and suggestions highlighted that femmes struggle to be seen for who they are, rather than as a copy of something else (i.e., heterosexual women). Might femmes likewise consider transsexuals

to be creating authentic identities for themselves, rather than copying male or female identities for some secondary purpose (e.g., male privilege)?

Harris and Crocker (1997) compiled a collection of stories by femmes about femme experience in response to the concern that femme identity has been portrayed as sexually passive, related to butch, or omitted altogether from lesbian writing. Through these narratives, Harris and Crocker sought to construct femme as a “sustained gender identity” (p. 5), meaning that femme is a chosen form of femininity that has existed for generations and surpasses mere role-playing. By emphasizing the sustained aspect of femme gender, the authors sought to avoid “the entrapment of femme in either too stable – one that sees femininity as biologically assigned – or too flexible – one that sees femme as one of many costumes – an identity category” (p. 5). The authors’ notion of stable versus flexible femme identity appeared to mirror essentialist versus constructivist perspectives on lesbian gender (Levitt et al., 2003; Levitt & Hiestand, 2004). Selections from Harris and Crocker’s work (i.e., Albrecht-Samarasinha, 1997; Ortiz, 1997; Rugg, 1997), presented below, echo a number of experiences reported by the femme participants in Levitt et al.’s (2003) study.

Ortiz’s (1997) experience as femme Latina involved actively claiming femme and Latina identities because she could easily pass as White and heterosexual in both lesbian and heterosexual communities. Thus, she frequently had to come out to others to make her identity known. Because of her ability to pass, she was viewed by lesbians as someone “who can potentially cross over to the enemy if need be” (p. 90). She was also offered token female roles within the lesbian-queer community. Ortiz became “tired of having to educate straight folks about queer issues, men about women’s issues, and

butches about the difference between being butch and being male” (p. 91). Her energy and that of other femmes was often divided between combating butch/femme stereotypes within the lesbian-queer community and fighting lesbian stereotypes among heterosexuals. She described femme identity as “not the clothes, although the courage to wear them is femme. It’s not the makeup, although the look is femme. Femme is intrinsic power and comfort in your own body,” (p. 91). Much like the femmes in Levitt et al.’s (2003) study, Ortiz believed that being femme required an active commitment to be out. She respected femmes’ choice to come out when they could have enjoyed heterosexual privilege (Ortiz).

Albrecht-Samarasinha (1997) published an interview with butch-femme activist Amber Hollibaugh, who asserted that femme identity is just as constructed as butch identity, and thus is just as queer or gender transgressive. Hollibaugh, herself femme, drew parallels between the construction of femininity in femmes and the construction of femininity in drag queens, who were her role models. Hollibaugh stated that both groups consciously decided what aspects of femininity to appropriate and what aspects to avoid because their respective identities would be compromised.

Rugg (1997) identified two constant, interconnected problems for femmes: invisibility as a lesbian and authenticating one’s femme identity. She found these problems to be exacerbated by assimilationist lesbians and gays - those who attempted to blend in with heterosexual culture in order to change society’s perceptions about gay and lesbian people. To illustrate her point, Rugg drew on her discovery of assimilationist lesbians in 1990s bar culture. She described introducing her butch lesbian date to some acquaintances one evening. Rather than extend a friendly greeting to Rugg’s date, the

lesbians expressed dismay and revulsion upon learning that Rugg's date was not a gay man. Such lesbians rejected and distanced themselves from anyone who did not blend in with heterosexual culture, including butch lesbians and transgender people.

Unfortunately, this perspective was a successful strategy among early gay rights advocates who emphasized the normality of gays and lesbians and skirted gender rights issues in response to attacks by conservatives (Wilchins, 2004). Rugg described the existence of assimilationist lesbians as a barrier to femmes achieving visibility as lesbians and authenticity as femmes. Their presence in lesbian communities also rendered invisible not only femmes who disagreed with their politics, but also the gender variant individuals who were absent from their social spaces.

Rugg (1997) also reported that one aspect of assimilationist politics involved playing with style trends and having fun with gender. The goal was to fit in with heterosexual culture while at the same time expressing some form of gender subversion (e.g., wearing a skirt while sporting a tattoo). Rugg was quick to note that for some people – particularly transsexuals – playing with gender is not an option because their lives are constantly in danger. Her writing echoed Halberstam's (1998b) theory regarding the divergent perspectives on the enactment of gender by butches and transsexuals. Like Halberstam, Rugg cautioned against the notion that gender can always be playful.

### *Butch and femme identities*

Several empirical studies investigated both butch and femme identities. Weber (1996) conducted the first empirical study of butch and femme identities that used social class as a variable and that invited lesbians to define butch and femme identity from their

own perspective. Weber surveyed 235 self-identified butch (26%,  $n = 62$ ), femme (34%,  $n = 79$ ), and independent (i.e., not butch- or femme-identified; 40%,  $n = 94$ ) lesbians whom she recruited through snowball sampling in areas of Florida and the northeastern U.S. Weber identified participants as White (93%) and Women of Color (7%). Social class was defined by income and education level. Income ranges included \$0-\$25,000 (45%), \$25,001-\$50,000 (37%), \$50,001-\$100,000 (17%), and over \$100,000 (1%). Participants' education levels included some high school (4%), high school graduate (17%), some college (34%), BA or BS (23%), MA or MS (13%), and PhD, JD, MD, or Postdoctoral (9%). The survey, a 23-page questionnaire containing 109 close-ended questions and 9 open-ended questions, was administered as part of a larger study (Weber) which does not appear to have been published.

Weber's (1996) research supported the hypothesis that higher education levels and higher income would significantly correspond with lesbians' self-identification as independent. That is, as education and income increased, participants were more likely to adopt an independent identity and to reject a butch or femme identity. Thus, Weber concluded that butch and femme were largely working-class identities among this study's sample. Education was found to most strongly predict an independent identity; income level was also statistically significant. These data imply that social class may be an important variable to consider in future research about lesbian gender (Weber). Indeed, researchers have included participants who represent a range of socioeconomic groups in subsequent studies about butch and femme identity (e.g., Hiestand & Levitt, 2005; Levitt et al., 2003; Moore, 2006). Weber's findings are not surprising when viewed in relation to the historical roots of butch/femme communities among working class lesbians

(Lapovsky-Kennedy & Davis, 1993). However, later researchers, who investigated the role that butch/femme communities play in the lives of contemporary lesbians who adopt butch and femme identities (e.g., Levitt et al.; Levitt & Hiestand, 2004), did not report butch/femme to be a strictly working-class phenomenon. This topic appears to warrant further investigation.

Weber (1996) conducted unstructured follow-up interviews with willing participants following collection of the survey data. Participants confirmed that their self-definitions (of butch and femme) differed from the stereotypical portrayals of butch and femme identity. Butches experienced disinterest in typical “girl” activities such as wearing makeup and dresses. They felt freer wearing men’s clothes and more comfortable working with power tools and joining athletics. Butches emphasized that they did not in any way wish to be men, but were happy to be women. Femmes, in turn, described feeling drawn toward traditional female activities, while at the same time finding freedom in excluding oppressive attitudes from their lives. Butches and femmes maintained their respective gender identities independently of being partnered (Weber).

Despite providing a useful starting point for future researchers interested in studying butch and femme gender, several limitations of Weber’s (1996) study should be noted. First, methodology and participant demographics related to the follow-up interviews were not reported. Additionally, the study’s sample was mainly White, which limits the study’s generalizability to populations of color. Finally, with over 80% of the sample earning \$50,000 or less, it appears that the higher income levels were not well represented. This may have limited the authors’ findings of butch/femme community among higher social class participants.

Krakauer and Rose (2002) conducted an empirical investigation of the impact of coming out as lesbian on physical appearance. They administered a paper-and-pencil questionnaire (part of a larger study) to 81 lesbians, ages 18-30, who were recruited from gay and lesbian community events and gathering places in a Midwestern city. The majority (80%) of participants were White and had completed at least some college (81%). The questionnaire consisted of open-ended questions as well as quantitative ratings along a Likert-type scale. The authors used the Goldfarb Fear of Fat Scale to measure concern with weight gain or loss (Krakauer & Rose).

Participants reported making definite changes in their physical appearance upon coming out as lesbian (Krakauer & Rose, 2002). Style of dress and mannerisms adopted upon coming out were mainly butch or androgynous. Coming out was cited as most influential in the decision to get a body piercing or tattoo, change hairstyle, and gain or lose weight. The majority (63%) of participants related that they had been advised to look more butch or androgynous in order to be recognizable as a lesbian. Lesbians changed their appearance in order to fit in with peer group norms, signal potential romantic/sexual partners, and signal lesbian group membership. Most participants conformed to what they thought a lesbian should look like, but this conformity lessened the longer they were out. Weight concern also significantly decreased upon coming out.

Krakauer and Rose's (2002) study underscored the continued prevalence of the stereotype that lesbians are all masculine or more closely resemble the butch image than the femme. The authors noted that the study was limited by the mainly White and highly educated sample. In addition, the young age of participants may have been a limitation,

as attitudes toward personal appearance may change over time, and may differ for lesbians who are further along in their identity development.

Levitt and Horne (2002) provided the first empirical evidence that gender expression may be important in the development and social experiences of lesbian women. The authors administered a 15-item survey to 149 lesbian-queer women in a southeastern U.S. lesbian separatist community where butch and femme identities were valued (see Levitt et al., 2003). The sample included lesbians (87%,  $n = 131$ ), bisexual women (8%,  $n = 12$ ), and those who identified their sexual orientation as other (3%,  $n = 4$ ). The authors used the term queer to refer to the non-heterosexual identity of participants who indicated a bisexual or other sexual orientation. Respondents self-identified their lesbian-queer gender as butch (16%,  $n = 24$ ), femme (31%,  $n = 47$ ), androgynous (31%,  $n = 47$ ), or other (15%,  $n = 22$ ). A majority of participants were White (88.1%); seven were Latina and two were Black. The survey, designed specifically for this study, included questions that addressed participants' beliefs about their experiences of identifying as butch, femme, and androgynous. The questions were based on information the authors gathered from previous interviews of 12 butch and 12 femme women from this community. The authors included observations made by these butch and femme women, where relevant, to illustrate their findings.

Levitt and Horne (2002) found that femmes were the only group who became aware of their sexual orientation significantly later than they became aware of their gender expression. The authors reasoned that gender atypicality among butch, androgynous, and other lesbian-queer women likely signaled an earlier exploration of sexual orientation for them than for the femmes. With regard to the impact of

participants' lesbian-queer gender on their social experiences, Levitt and Horne reported significant results in the areas of discrimination, romantic relationships, and the perceived effects of identifying as butch or femme within a queer community. The reported frequency of discrimination based on gender expression in heterosexual society differed significantly between participants of different gender expressions. Butch women reported experiencing the highest rate of discrimination, followed by androgynous, other, and femme women. The authors drew on their interviews with butch and femme lesbians to explain that, in a heterosexual context, butches tend to be more recognizable than femmes as lesbians, and thus may be more likely to experience discrimination (Levitt & Horne).

Butch and femme women reported their respective gender expressions to be significantly more important to them in romantic contexts than did the androgynous and other women (Levitt & Horne, 2002). The authors noted that their butch and femme interviewees described butch and femme identities as important for signaling romantic and sexual attractions and behaviors. The authors deduced that androgynous and other lesbian-queer participants may not have rated their gender expression as important within romantic relationships because they did not participate in the butch-femme romantic system. Finally, participants agreed that developing a femme identity has more positive effects for femme women than developing a butch identity has for butch women. The authors inferred from the interviews that this finding was likely due to a misperception among queer women that femmes were advantaged for having an identity resembling that of heterosexual women and the failure of queer women to realize the rewards and strength that come with identifying as butch (Levitt & Horne).

Levitt and Horne (2002) noted several limitations of the study, including the focus on a single lesbian-queer community, the methods of self-report and retrospection, and the difficulty of assessing reliability of their brief survey. An additional limitation is the primarily White racial composition of the sample, which limited the generalizability of the results. While the use of anecdotes from interviews with butch and femme lesbians was helpful for illustrating relevant concepts, the authors did not provide details of the interview methodology, so the conclusions they drew from the interviews must be interpreted with caution. It should be noted, however, that later publications by the first author (e.g., Levitt et al., 2003; Levitt & Hiestand, 2004) appear to describe the interviews in detail.

In a qualitative study that drew upon data from interviews with butch and femme women, Levitt and Hiestand (2005) examined the intersection of lesbian gender and sexuality in the processes of attraction, flirtation, and sexual activity. Gender was found to interact with sexuality in 3 main ways. First, the recognition of butch and femme genders within romantic relationships resolved the invisibility and discrimination the women faced outside of the butch-femme community. Second, the butch-femme community formed a system in which gender differences could be heightened to generate sexual attraction and sexual tension in relationships. Third, both butch and femme women conceptualized their genders as having an element of political resistance. Participants expressed an intrinsic sense of their own gender while also recognizing that expressions of their genders were shaped by the community and changed over time. These findings support arguments for both the constructed and essentialist natures of butch and femme lesbian genders (Levitt & Hiestand).

Moore (2006) investigated how Black lesbians made meaning of their gender presentation. She recruited participants through predominantly Black gay public social events. Her methodology included participant observation, focus groups, survey (n = 100), and semi-structured interviews (n = 56; survey participants) with women in New York City who identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, in the life or women loving women. Participants identified as Black (64% Black American; 20% West Indian or Caribbean) or Latina (10%) and ranged in age from 21 to 61 (M = 36). Education levels included completion of high school (36%), bachelor's degree (29%), and master's degree or higher (33%). Moore combined education, income, and occupation to create a measure of socioeconomic status (SES). Levels of SES among participants included working class (45%), middle class (42%), and upper-middle class (13%). Three types of households were represented in the study: partnered with children (40%), partnered without children (34%), and single-mother families (26%).

Three categories of gender presentation were documented among the participants in Moore's (2006) study. Femme or feminine women exhibited gender presentation consistent with what the literature has found for other femmes, including wearing dresses or form-fitting jeans, makeup, jewelry, and displaying a sense of femininity. Gender-blenders presented a style that combined femininity with masculinity. Moore noted that gender-blenders were different from women who are androgynous, as that identity would have de-emphasized femininity and masculinity rather than combining the two. Moore developed the term "transgressive" to describe masculine women who might have been labeled butch among White lesbian community or "stud" in a previous generation. Transgressives were thus labeled because they transgressed traditional notions of

femininity, they did not like the term butch, and the label was linguistically similar to the term “aggressive,” which many Black lesbians used to refer to masculine women (Moore).

Moore (2006) found that Black lesbians constructed their gender presentations after they came out and learned about the lesbian community. Gender presentation allowed lesbians to display a gender style that complemented the gender expression of their partner. That is, both lesbians in a Black or Latina couple rarely dressed in masculine style. While this phenomenon supported a constructed aspect of gender among Black and Latina lesbians, the participants in Moore’s study also reported feeling freedom within the lesbian community to be themselves. In fact, Black lesbians’ gender expression was found to be most meaningful within lesbian contexts as opposed to heterosexual contexts, probably because today’s society affords all women a great deal of freedom in the styles they express (Moore).

Moore (2006) noted the double transgression of having a lesbian sexual orientation and defying societal gender norms in the Black community where traditional gender roles are considered important. She drew attention to the ways femme, gender-blender, and transgressive identities became raced when women of color participated in them. Black and Latina lesbians who expressed masculinity risked confirming negative stereotypes about Black women’s sexuality. They were often accused of disrupting the image of “middle-class respectability that [Black women had] achieved through other symbols of their socioeconomic mobility” (Moore, p. 131). For this reason, some participants were reluctant to reveal their non-feminine gender presentation publicly. Transgressive gender presentations were the most harshly criticized of lesbian genders.

Middle-class lesbians, in particular, complained that their presence lowered the quality of Black lesbian social events (Moore).

Moore (2006) found that transgressive lesbian gender presentation was risky due to the danger of representing Black masculinity in a culture where Black and Latino men were associated with “violence and menace” (p. 132). Transgressives were subjected to police harassment as well as distrust from strangers. They resented the conflation of their identity with Black heterosexuality because it associated them with disrespectful treatment toward women. Some transgressives attempted to distance themselves from this misogynist ideology which was perceived to be a lower-class phenomenon. Expressing masculinity through female form represented a potential threat to Black and Latino men who questioned the meaning of their own masculinity and guarded male privilege from women. The lesbians in Moore’s study did not view themselves as threatening, however, because they considered themselves to be women surviving in a patriarchal society. They did not consciously link their lesbian gender to a political ideology such as feminism (Moore). Moore’s study demonstrated that lesbian genders may have different meanings among different racial/ethnic groups. Her study provided a new perspective, for this body of literature, on the complexity of multiple identities (i.e., sexual orientation, gender, and race) working in tandem. Her findings draw needed attention to the importance of including racial/ethnic minorities in research about lesbian gender.

#### *Discussion of butch and femme literature*

While more research has focused on butch than on femme gender, there remains much to learn about both identities and the role they may play in the formation of lesbian

attitudes toward transgender people. A few theorists have speculated about butch attitudes toward FTM transsexuals. No writings were found regarding femme perceptions of transgender. Furthermore, the intersection of gender with race, ethnicity, social class, age, and other factors have been severely understudied.

One of the problems with the body of literature presented here is that some of the research was conducted in isolation from other studies. For example, T. Lee's (2001) qualitative inquiry into butch and FTM identities, published in *Women's Studies International Forum*, was not cited by other major contributors to research on butch/femme identities (e.g., Levitt et al., 2003; Levitt & Hiestand, 2005; Levitt & Horne, 2002), whose work was published in *Journal of Constructivist Psychology*, *Sex Roles*, and *Journal of Lesbian Studies*. This occurrence highlights the need for increased communication across disciplines, particularly between psychology and women's studies. Bridging disciplines would help researchers take advantage of additional knowledge and build a cohesive body of research on the topic.

Publications in the major counseling psychology journals are glaringly absent from the present discussion. This is not surprising because, according to Phillips et al. (2003), LGB issues represented a mere 2% of the scholarship in counseling journals from 1990 to 1999. Most of those studies addressed the issues of gay and bisexual men and excluded LGB people of color. Morrow (2003) observed that while the White male paradigm may still be operating within counseling psychology journals, feminist publishing outlets, such as *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, have offered feminist scholars a receptive audience for their work and may have contributed to fewer publications within counseling psychology. The omission of articles from counseling journals concerning

butch and femme identities has impeded the progress of counseling psychology, not only toward understanding transgender bias, but also toward helping lesbian women develop positive gender identities themselves (see Levitt & Bigler, 2002).

Despite the limitations of butch/femme research, several topics from the present review establish a context for studying lesbian attitudes toward transgender people. First, the empirical literature suggests that the developmental experiences of butches and femmes do not include an awareness of transgender people. Thus, it may be useful to learn how much knowledge lesbians possess about transgender identity, how accurate that knowledge is, and at what point and by what means lesbians learn about transgender identity. This information might indicate potential areas for intervention. From the present analysis, for example, it could be inferred that lesbians' entry into the butch-femme system is accompanied by an initiation into that community's legacy of tension toward transgender people, particularly between butches and FTM transsexuals. Thus, one area of intervention could be educating butches about the similarities between their developmental experiences and those of FTMs so that understanding between the groups could be fostered.

The findings that butch and femme identities are experienced as having components that are both essential and constructed also seem relevant to the present discussion. Researchers could investigate how constructivist versus essentialist perspectives on gender impact lesbians' perceptions of transgender identity so that one or another aspect (or a combination of the two) could be underscored through interventions that combat transgender bias. In addition, it may be useful to learn whether lesbians view transsexuals and transgenderists differently, as their gender identities tend to be

conceived of differently within the transgender community. That butches and femmes view their own gender as both an innate aspect of themselves and socially constructed seems promising for their understanding of transgender identity as similarly complex.

The empirical literature regarding femme identity underscored two developmental experiences that add to this discussion. The first was that the femme aesthetic held meaning beyond stereotypical notions of heterosexual femininity. It may be informative to explore how femmes perceive MTF transsexuals' portrayal of femininity in order to learn whether this is a site for potential conflict. That femmes valued conscious expression of femininity in a way that maintained feminist ideals could impede their acceptance of MTFs. The second developmental experience was coming out for a second time as femme, which led to the effort to prove their lesbian identity. Femmes may be able to draw on this experience to understand coming out as transgender and the accompanying struggle to educate people about this newly revealed and little understood identity.

Perhaps the most notable theme in the butch/femme literature is that both groups attempted to establish themselves as truly gender transgressive. Femmes, who felt relegated to traditional heterosexual female status, fought to assert themselves as separate from butches and as different from heterosexual women, and thus, as gender subversive. Butches, in turn, who received little mention in transgender literature and whose masculine roles in relationship to femmes have been criticized by feminists, underscored their lives as plagued by discrimination, proving their gender non-conformity. It appears that asserting a transgressive identity is akin to seeking acknowledgment for one's feelings and experiences as an outsider and one's desire for belonging. Much could be

learned from the ways that butches and femmes experience themselves as outsiders and construct their lives in order to find community.

The present review revealed some contextual factors at work in the motivation of butch and femme lesbians' intolerance toward transgender people. Further research into this topic, as well as investigation of additional factors outside of the butch-femme system, would add to the present understanding of transgender bias by lesbians. Many questions remain. Whether the butch-femme system actually renders one group more or less visible, or ties femininity to masculinity; whether femmes get to claim lesbian identity without partnering with butches, or butches are allowed to claim transgender identity; whether transgender people will one day be invited into lesbian social spaces, or will even desire such an invitation, are yet unknown. As the mire of an insufficient vocabulary to describe gendered experiences encumbers this work, let us recall the words of Rubin (1992), who suggested, "Instead of fighting for immaculate classifications and impenetrable boundaries, let us strive to maintain a community that understands diversity as a gift, sees anomalies as precious, and treats all basic principles with a hefty dose of skepticism" (p. 477-478).

#### The Intersections of Transgender Theory, Queer Theory, Feminist Theory, and Gay and Lesbian Studies

The areas of study described in this section – transgender theory, queer theory, feminism, and gay and lesbian studies – each consider gender, power, and privilege in different ways. The intersections of these areas as they relate to the present research study may serve as a foundation for considering the multiple and often overlapping ways in

which individuals view gender. That is, individuals may identify or resonate with one or more of these theoretical positions at any one time, or may neither possess an awareness of nor affiliate with any of them. However, the areas described here represent the main contributions to both academic thought and political movements regarding LGBT people, and transgender people in particular.

Transgender theory, variously known as transgender studies, transgender rights, and the transgender liberation movement, grew out of feminism, queer theory, and the gay and lesbian rights movement in the late 1980s and early 1990s, creating a body of scholarship and political action that views transgender identity as non-disordered (Whittle, 2006; Wilchins, 2004). Transgender theory promotes gender diversity, arguing that individuals should be allowed to create and name their bodies in ways that are meaningful to them without limitations imposed by others (Whittle). Bolstering this perspective are questions of why it should matter that individuals experience and express their gender in different ways and what it is about the gender system that makes transgender phenomena stand out in the first place – and, for that matter, what keeps gender conformity invisible, unquestioned, and unanalyzed (Stryker, 2006). Transgender theory seeks to disrupt what appear to be natural and necessary connections between the physical body (biological sex) and gender (Stryker), or put another way, the assumptions that underlie the notion that “Female is to woman as woman is to feminine as feminine is attracted to Male” (Wilchins, p. 130).

Several perspectives complicate the struggle for transgender rights, even within the transgender movement itself. As a political movement concerned with opposing injustice and violence against the perception of nonconforming gender, transgender

theory relies in part on individuals coming out and refusing to fit into the categories man and woman (Lev, 2007). Privileging visibility in this way has consequences for who feels welcome to take part in transgender liberation.

Transsexuals who live in communities that emphasize the “imperative to pass convincingly as either a man or a woman” (Roen, 2001, p. 505) are often considered politically unaware for failing to acknowledge their (trans)gender histories. This remains true despite the fact that transgenderists and transsexuals alike experience periods and contexts in which openly crossing and passing occur; individuals are rarely afforded the luxury of maintaining either stance at all times (Roen). Furthermore, cross-dressers, who typically possess the awareness and means to participate at high levels of leadership in the transgender movement, tend to be unwelcome by transsexuals who view cross-dressing as a choice rather than a “real,” full-time identity (Wilchins, 2004). In actuality, many more gender nonconforming people exist than are involved in transgender rights or claim a transgender identity (Wilchins). Wilchins explained this phenomenon by observing that “for most people, crossing gender lines is still a source of shame...It’s hard to rally people to a cause with which they’re embarrassed to be associated” (p. 26).

Transgender theory has also been critiqued for failing to account for socioeconomic factors such as class, race, and education that impact whether transsexuals can convincingly pass and transgenderists can successfully come out (i.e., keep their jobs, families, and personal safety intact; Roen, 2001; Wilchins, 2004). The transgender rights movement has also begun to look more like a transsexual rights movement as transsexuals move forward with political action, gaining ground on local nondiscrimination laws and expanded Equal Employment Opportunity policies, and

increasing advocacy around hate crime laws, access to medical services, insurance reimbursement, and documentation laws – all issues that relate to changing sex (Wilchins). This seems to be an ironic turn of events, considering transgender theory's view of transsexuals, yet it also seems inevitable for a movement at odds with itself.

Queer theory came about in the 1990s, challenging the heterosexism that underlay conventional academic theory, in essence, queering theory (Halperin, 2003). As such, queer theory is “not a theory of anything in particular” (Berlant & Warner, 1995, p. 344). Rather, queer theory critiques the notion of identity categories as self-evident concepts (Jagose, 1996). Queer theory does not attempt to replace existing categories of gender, race, class, or sexual orientation. Instead, it deconstructs them, questioning “how they were created, what political ends they serve, what erasures have made them possible, and how they are able to present themselves as real, natural, and universal” (Wilchins, 2004, p. 124). In essence, queer theory questions the normative basis of identity and represents the non-normative in everything (Jagose).

One of the identity categories that queer theory deconstructs is gender. Queer theory applies itself to gender not by arguing that there is no gender, but by questioning the assumptions upon which the notion of gender is based - in a sense, queering gender (Hines, 2006). Transgender theory runs into problems with queer theory on this point because some transgender individuals do not experience their gender as an intentional queering of identity. Rather, they sense a distinct gender in themselves and conceive of gender as an authentic identity. By its deconstructive and critical nature, then, queer theory can be seen as homogenizing transgender as subversive, which simply does not hold true for all who claim it (Hines). Queer theory's perspective on gender has also been

interpreted by transgender theorists as an assertion that gender is not “real,” or does not exist. The violence and discrimination that transgender individuals experience, however, underscores the reality of gender for them, leaving transgender theory and queer theory to coexist in tension (Hines; Wilchins, 2004).

Another point at which queer theory and transgender theory intersect is in their mutual challenging of heteronormativity, including their disruption of the binary gender system (Halberstam, 2003). The two perspectives come into conflict, however, where transgender theorists view queer theory as focusing solely on gay and lesbian ways of challenging the gender system. By focusing on same-sex ways of queering the binary system, queer theory is seen as homonormative. That is, queer theory sometimes omits transgender experience by failing to acknowledge that there are non-homosexual ways to differ from heterosexist cultural norms (Halberstam).

Queer theory has also been accused of using transgender people – particularly drag performers – to support its view of identity as constructed. This argument stems from feminist/queer theorist Butler’s (1990, 1999) articulation of gender in *Gender Trouble*. According to Butler, when we see drag queens perform, we recognize that “woman” is being portrayed, but we know that the person portraying woman is male-bodied. Thus, we view the performance of woman as a copy of some original standard of what woman is and we view the performance as deceiving because the performer is male-bodied. Butler argued that this view of gender is problematic because there is no original gender that can be copied. That is, gender does not exist as an internal essence, but rather is formed through its expression. By describing gender as a performative and by using drag queens as an example, Butler’s meaning has been interpreted by transgender

theorists to be that gender is merely an act of imitation, and people wear it like a costume that can be put on or taken off at will. Butler has countered these arguments in order to clarify her original meaning. Her viewpoint is summarized by Stryker (2006) who explained that gender is not subject to verification or falsification; it is what the person doing it says it is. This is a difficult concept for a society that views sex as linked to gender. According to Stryker, however, the “biologically sexed body guarantees nothing” (p. 10).

Gay and lesbian studies emerged from the gay and lesbian liberation movement which formed mainly in opposition to movements such as feminism which silenced LGB voices. In comparison to queer theory, which deconstructs and destabilizes identity categories, gay and lesbian studies emphasizes the authenticity and stability of LGB identities in order to study ways in which LGB people have been disenfranchised and to struggle for LGB civil rights (Lovaas, Elia, & Yep, 2007). Queer theory thus exists in tension with gay and lesbian studies, in which complaints have surfaced that “the hard-won respectability...afforded by identifying oneself as lesbian or gay is lost in a term [i.e., queer] whose only specificity is its resistance to convention” (Jagose, 1996, p. 114). Queer theorist Jagose countered this argument by asserting that queer theory

is not a conspiracy to discredit lesbian and gay; it does not seek to devalue the indisputable gains made in their name. Its principal achievement is to draw attention to the assumptions that – intentionally or otherwise – inhere in the mobilisation [sic] of any identity category, including itself. (p. 126)

Gay and lesbian studies and queer theory may share some goals, but controversy still exists over what has come to be known as sexual identity politics.

Another kind of politics that often accompanies gay and lesbian studies, assimilationist politics, creates tension for the transgender movement. A successful political strategy early-on, assimilationist tactics emphasize the normality and similarity of LGB people to heterosexuals in an attempt to gain sympathy and support for LGB civil rights (Rugg, 1997; Wilchins, 2004). Because gender is such a controversial and visibly bothersome issue for the mainstream, assimilationist lesbians and gays have long excluded gender rights from their lobbying efforts (Wilchins). For example, in November, 2007, the federal Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA) was passed by the U.S. House of Representatives to ensure employment protection based on sexual orientation. Gender identity was removed from the bill in response to threats of continual defeat as long as language about gender was included (see <http://www.hrc.org/8190.htm>). While many LGB organizations did not approve of this practice, it established a hierarchy within the gay and lesbian movement whereby sexual orientation trumped gender identity in the fight for protected status. Exclusionary politics such as this baffle and infuriate transgender individuals who have often been at the forefront of the gay and lesbian rights movement (Wilchins).

Finally, feminist theory, which has undergone many transformations over the years, fights against devaluing femininity and the oppression of women in various forms (Heyes, 2003). The legacy of the early feminist movement, particularly second wave feminism, still informs many feminist values as they relate to gender expression. For example, the expression of masculinity is often considered anti-feminist, while the expression of femininity is seen as participating in one's own oppression (Heyes). For some time, feminists promoted androgyny as the strongest way to resist the social

constraints of sexist gender roles (Levitt & Hiestand, 2004). Later, it became popular to be woman-identified and to participate in events and communities that excluded men (Heyes).

Separatism, however, promoted a distrust of men and masculinity, which led to a distrust of transgender people. MTFs, for example, are considered suspect for failing to reject stereotyped signs of femininity, such as wearing makeup and dresses (Monro, 2000). MTFs are also distrusted due to their perceived history as men who benefited from male privilege (Morrow, 2003) and who presently appear to pretend to be women (Wilchins, 2004). Likewise, FTMs are perceived as accessing male privilege through their male gender expression and are viewed as former women who crossed into enemy territory by becoming men (Halberstam, 1998b). The Michigan Womyn's Music Festival serves as a contemporary example of a womyn-born-womyn space that requests transgender individuals not attend, regardless of their present gender identity or expression. Furthermore, the medical procedures in which many transsexuals participate are viewed by feminism as upholding the gender binary, as the outcome is either to become more physically male or more physically female. Thus, transsexualism is viewed as a conservative act of crossing from one sex to another (Johnson, 2005).

According to Heyes (2003), casting feminist theory and transgender theory as opposing movements is not necessary, for transgender individuals also engage in feminist consciousness. For example, some MTF transsexuals have changed medical requirements and refused certain medical procedures they view as anti-feminist. In addition, feminists who wish to include transgender individuals in their work hold a sympathetic view of them as simply trying to understand their gender and create a sense of cultural belonging

(Johnson, 2005). Feminism's supposed failure to disrupt the binary gender system, however, has left transgender activist Wilchins (2004) unsettled, writing, "Feminism may have torn down many gender boundaries. But by unconsciously basing itself on binary genders, it has actually solidified structures like male/female, man/woman, and masculine/feminine in new and unexpected ways" (p. 126).

Identity politics reemerge at the intersection of feminism and queer theory. Queer theory strikes at the artery of the feminist movement through its critique of woman as a stable identity. Butler (1990, 1999) also criticized feminism for building a political movement on the basis of an identity category that assumes unity where differences in race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and culture exist. Much like the gay and lesbian movement discussed above, feminists interpret queer as "a generic term [that] wipes out women again" (Bonwick, 1993 as cited in Jagose, 2004, p. 117). Ironically, by deconstructing gender, queer theory has failed to acknowledge the politics of gender that plague the lives of women, lesbians, and feminists. Yet, queer theorists would argue that rather than developing one's identity in opposition to a heteronormative society (i.e., identifying as woman or feminist in an effort to challenge sexism), individuals should resist heteronormativity by changing their external environment. By doing so, their perceptions of their own identity would also change, thus supporting the ideology that identity is socially constructed (Abes & Kasch, 2007).

## Conclusion

The topics discussed in this review of literature demonstrate the potential for multiple issues to impact lesbian students' attitudes toward transgender individuals.

According to the literature, it seems clear that the campus climate for lesbian and transgender students is in need of improvement. It is also apparent that transgender individuals bring a unique and diverse set of needs and concerns to the formation of gender identity and to the navigation of medical and psychological arenas. Other areas are not as clear, such as the extent to which familiarity with transgender concerns affects lesbians' attitudes toward transgender people. Furthermore, the potential importance of lesbians' awareness of their own developing gender identity and of ways they may experience their bodies as socially gendered has yet to be discovered. The literature suggests there may be some potential areas for empathy between lesbian and transgender people, such as shared experiences of harassment and discrimination, the defining of their bodies by a heterosexist society, and the development of identity in the midst of homophobia and transphobia. The purpose of reviewing each topic was to sensitize the researcher to concerns that research participants may raise during interviews and to inform the researcher of the literature regarding not only the research participants, but also the subject of inquiry, transgender people.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODS

#### Overview

The purpose of this qualitative study was to develop a grounded theory to describe lesbian students' perceptions of transgender (trans) individuals. Perceptions were defined as the opinions, attitudes, assumptions, and beliefs that lesbian students have about trans people. Trans individuals are people who identify as gender variant or whose gender expression is not congruent with social norms of gender.

This chapter details the methods and rationale for this qualitative investigation. The first section presents the research question investigated. The second section provides a description of the qualitative methods, and grounded theory in particular, used in the study. The appropriateness of these approaches to studying the research question and a rationale for studying the university population are also included in the second section. The third section details the procedures followed for participant recruitment and sample selection. The fourth section describes the data collection and analysis procedures. Finally, the fifth section contains an acknowledgement by the researcher of her background, experiences, and assumptions regarding the research question.

#### Research Question

The major research question for the present study was: What theory explains the perceptions lesbian students have about transgender individuals? In other words, what are

the opinions, attitudes, assumptions, and beliefs that lesbian students have about transgender individuals, and what are the underlying processes that influenced the formation of these perceptions? Qualitative research questions are designed to illuminate a single concept or experience (Creswell, 1998; Creswell, Hanson, Plano Clark, & Morales, 2007). They are typically written in an open-ended manner to facilitate the in-depth exploration of a phenomenon (Creswell; Haverkamp & Young, 2007).

### Qualitative Research and Grounded Theory

#### *Qualitative Research*

Qualitative inquiry is appropriate for investigating topics for which there is little or no previous research (Creswell, 1998; Morrow, 2007). Qualitative methods are suitable for answering questions about what is experienced and how it is experienced (Creswell), in addition to describing experience “as it is lived and constituted in awareness” (Polkinghorne, 2005, p. 138). Qualitative research methods were therefore fitting for the present study.

Qualitative methods are well suited to giving voice to the experiences of previously silenced peoples (Morrow, 2007). Qualitative studies also result in descriptive information that may be applied to the development of counseling and educational interventions relevant to the topic under study (Yeh & Inman, 2007). The experiences of lesbians are greatly underrepresented in counseling psychology scholarship, as are the concerns of transgender individuals. It was hoped that by learning more about lesbian perspectives on transgender people, the effectiveness of programs aimed at developing

transgender-affirmative attitudes and practices could be enhanced. It was also hoped that such understanding could inform counseling practice as it relates to lesbians' experiences of their own gender identity. Furthermore, the university campus is an educational and living environment where discrimination and harassment against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) students has been documented and where outreach and education concerning human differences, including sexual orientation and gender identity, commonly take place. The present study thus focused on the university population with the hope of contributing to efforts to improve the campus climate for LGBT students.

### *Grounded Theory*

Grounded theory was appropriate for theorizing about the attitudes of a sample of lesbian students toward transgender individuals and what underlying processes influenced their perceptions and views. The grounded theory method (Glaser, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) of qualitative research aims to “produce innovative theory that is ‘grounded’ in data collected from participants on the basis of...their lived experiences” (Fassinger, 2005, p. 157). The researcher ensures that the developing theory closely reflects participants' experiences by employing an iterative process of data analysis whereby theory-building follows from the data that emerge during the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Unlike deductive data analysis, in which the researcher attempts to fit data to a preexisting theory that the researcher hopes to verify, the iterative process allows novel ideas to emerge and reduces the likelihood that data are forced into a predetermined model (Elliott, Fischer, & Rennie, 1999; Glaser; Glaser & Strauss). Hence, the grounded

theory method is well suited for “creat[ing] new theory that is directly tied to the reality of individuals” (Rennie, Phillips, & Quartaro, 1988, p. 147).

A number of versions of grounded theory have been developed since the origination of the approach (see Fassinger, 2005, for further discussion). For this reason, researchers employing the grounded theory method have been urged to clarify for readers which version they are using (Cutcliffe, 2000; Kendall, 1999; Morrow, 2005). The present study utilized the constructivist grounded theory approach endorsed by Charmaz (2000) and Rennie (2000; Rennie et al., 1988), which Ponterotto (2005) considers the most accepted approach in counseling psychology today. Constructivist grounded theory draws upon both the systematic approach of grounded theory and the subjective intentionality of critical theory (i.e., including the researcher’s shoulds and oughts concerning social justice issues), making it appropriate for social justice inquiry (Charmaz, 2005). It was, therefore, suitable for the present study, which investigated attitudes toward a group against whom discrimination is frequently directed.

Constructivism “assumes the relativism of multiple social realities, recognizes the mutual creation of knowledge by the viewer and the viewed, and aims toward interpretive understanding of subjects’ meanings” (Charmaz, 2000, p. 510). Constructivist grounded theory was developed in response to the objectivist underpinnings of Glaser and Strauss’s (1967) original version of grounded theory. Glaser and Strauss emphasized the discovery or unearthing of existing theory by researchers who set aside their biases in order to avoid tainting the theory they discovered. In contrast, constructivists view true objectivity as impossible to achieve (Morrow, 2007). Constructivist grounded theorists consider themselves to be part of the process of generating or constructing theory with participants

(Charmaz; Elliott et al., 1999). Researchers' values, assumptions, and biases are therefore disclosed at the outset of the study and are processed throughout using reflective journaling and memo writing. These techniques aid the researcher in focusing on participant meaning and help the reader understand the interpretive lens used to co-construct findings (Elliott et al.; Jones, 2002).

## Participant Recruitment and Selection Procedures

### *Participant Eligibility*

Criteria for eligibility in the study were defined as individuals who indicated they (a) were currently enrolled as undergraduate (sophomore or above) or graduate students at a U.S. college or university; (b) identified as lesbian, queer, same-gender-loving, or another woman-identified sexual orientation; (c) did not identify as bisexual; (d) identified as cisgender or did not identify as transgender, and (e) had experience with transgender individuals or exposure to transgender issues. The rationale for each of the inclusion/exclusion criteria is discussed below.

The rationale for including students in higher education was to access research participants whose perspectives directly relate to the research question, i.e., addressing trans issues with lesbian university students. Both undergraduate and graduate students were invited to participate for two reasons. First, many universities offer LGBT programming to both their undergraduate and graduate populations, often conjointly. Second, it was hoped that by including both groups of students, a greater degree of diversity would be present in the sample (e.g., age, race, ethnicity, length of time in the

LGBT community) than if the sample were restricted to one of these groups. First-year undergraduate students were excluded from participation because they may have had less experience with the campus environment than more advanced students, and they may have had more in common with the high school youth population than the university population. Although participation was open to undergraduate and graduate students, all eight participants in this study were graduate students.

As Meyer and Wilson (2009) noted, no single correct definition of the LGB population exists. Thus, these authors recommended that researchers “define the population of interest on the basis of the study’s objectives and its underlying conceptual framework” (p. 24). For the present study, an identity definition (i.e., participants self-identified as lesbian, queer, or same-gender-loving) versus a behavioral definition of participants’ sexual orientation was chosen for several reasons. First, identity could be an important factor in one’s perceptions and attitudes toward trans individuals, both with respect to individual identity and identification with a lesbian, queer, or same-gender-loving community. Second, campus programming concerning LGBT issues traditionally relies on an identity definition of the LGBT population. Third, the constructivist grounded theory approach led this researcher to look to participants in an open-ended manner to self-identify rather than applying a measure of behavior to them. Indeed, the terms queer and same-gender-loving were used in addition to the term lesbian in an attempt to be inclusive of and appeal to a broad range of participants. Lesbians of color, for example, who are underrepresented in the literature, often identify as same-gender-loving, while the term queer is common among certain age groups and geographic regions.

The rationale for excluding women whose current identity was bisexual concerned the possibility that different factors related to sexual orientation may impact the views of bisexual versus lesbian women toward trans people. This criterion also ensured that the identity definition of lesbian sexual orientation described above did not also include those who identify as bisexual. Furthermore, in a study that sought to learn about lesbians' perceptions and views toward trans individuals, it was important that participants did not themselves identify as transgender. Finally, the rationale for including participants who had experience with trans individuals or exposure to trans issues was to ensure that participants had the main experience about which this study asked. Among the eight participants recruited for the study, three identified as lesbian, three as queer, one as queer/lesbian, and one as same-gender-loving. Two of the queer-identified women had previously identified as bisexual. One of the lesbian-identified women had previously identified as heterosexual and was divorced from a cis man.

### *Participant Recruitment*

Participants were recruited through several means. First, the Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals (Consortium) listserv provided one means of recruitment. The Consortium is a group of professionals who are committed to "achiev[ing] higher education environments in which lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students, faculty, staff, administrators, and alumni have equity in every respect" (Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals, 2009a). As leaders of LGBT resources on university campuses, Consortium members had unique access to potential participants and were likely to be familiar with lesbian undergraduate

and graduate students to whom they may have forwarded information about this study. In addition, as a national organization, the members of the Consortium listserv represent approximately 37 U.S. states and approximately 150 sites where campus LGBT resource centers, offices, or departments exist. Thus, the listserv offered potential access to participants nationwide. A national sample was preferred in order to maximize the diversity of experiences with and attitudes about transgender people that lesbians could contribute to this research project.

According to the Consortium directory, the 13 states that did not have LGBT resource centers, offices, or departments when this study began were primarily located in the North Central and South Central U.S. In order to recruit participants from these regions, a second means of participant recruitment was used, that is, emails to campus women's resource centers. Ten of thirteen states with no LGBT resource center had women's centers. The website CreativeFolk.com (see <http://www.creativefolk.com:80/directories.html>) provided a list of women's centers in the U.S. and links to the centers' websites. The researcher identified email addresses for approximately 20 women's centers in these 10 states. The general mission of university women's centers is to serve the educational and personal growth of a diversity of campus women through resources, support services, outreach, and advocacy. Lesbian students, faculty, and staff often access women's centers, particularly on campuses where no LGBT resource center exists.

In order to protect the privacy of lesbian students, recipients of the recruitment announcement were not asked to identify any potential participants to the researcher, but rather, were encouraged to relay information about the research study to those they

believed may be eligible. Permission to post the call for participants was granted by the Consortium listserv moderator, and the message was posted by a Consortium listserv member from the Western Michigan University Office of LGBT Student Services. Emails inviting participation were sent directly to the university women's centers.

After approximately seven months of recruiting participants, only three LQSGGL women eligible for the study had contacted the researcher and joined the study. Thus, the recruitment procedures were broadened to include the researcher's personal and professional contacts; community and campus departments, organizations, and events; other relevant listservs; and snowball sampling through referrals from current study participants or those who contacted the researcher about the study. These additional procedures were successful in generating sufficient responses by eligible participants to complete the study.

The Email to Consortium Listserv (Appendix A), Email to University Women's Centers (Appendix B), and correspondence subsequently sent through the broadened sampling and snowball sampling procedures described above (Appendices C and D) included the eligibility criteria for participation and a flyer requesting that interested persons call or email the researcher in order to learn more about the study. Upon receiving a response from a potential participant, the researcher listed the eligibility criteria and asked if the participant met the criteria (Appendices F and G). If so, the researcher answered any questions the person had and obtained the person's contact information so that hard copies of the Invitation to Participate in a Research Study (Appendix E), Informed Consent Form (Appendix I), Participant Background Questionnaire (Appendix J), and Participant Contact Information (Appendix K), along

with a cover letter of instructions (Appendix H) could be sent. A self-addressed, stamped envelope accompanied these documents so they could be returned by U.S. mail to the researcher.

The Invitation to Participate in a Research Study enumerates the components of participation: the completion of the Participant Background Questionnaire and Participant Contact Information and, if selected, two telephone interviews of approximately one to two hours each and a follow-up telephone participant check of approximately 30-60 minutes. It also informed potential participants that not all those who submitted the Informed Consent Form, Participant Background Questionnaire, and Participant Contact Information would be selected for participation in the phone interviews. Those ineligible to participate and those not selected to participate received an email indicating this, and all documents containing their names and contact information were destroyed. In order to begin building rapport with study participants, potential participants received a phone call periodically updating them about their status in the study (Appendix M).

The Participant Background Questionnaire requests demographic information and informed the researcher as to the kinds of experience the person had with trans information and/or the kinds of involvement the person had with trans individuals. The researcher used information from this questionnaire to inform sample selection. De-identified demographic information was also used to describe the sample in the final write-up of the study. At no time were participants' identities revealed or connected to their background information. Furthermore, the researcher kept all documentation concerning participant identity in a secure location.

### *Sample Selection*

The goal of qualitative sampling procedures is to collect data that are “sufficiently rich to bring refinement and clarity to understanding an experience” (Polkinghorne, 2005, p. 140). This is achieved by selecting participants who have experienced the phenomenon under investigation and who are able to richly describe and reflect upon their experiences. The grounded theory method, in particular, is characterized by two such types of sampling procedures. The first, purposeful sampling, involves choosing participants based on criteria rooted in the research question, namely, their experience with the phenomenon of interest (Cutcliffe, 2000; Jones, 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Polkinghorne). Potential participants indicated their experience with the phenomenon of interest on the Participant Background Questionnaire.

In the present study, the phenomenon of interest was perceptions of transgender people. Experience with this phenomenon was conceptualized in two ways, as noted above. First, participants could have had experience with trans information, such as reading about trans issues online or in a book or magazine, watching a TV show or movie that had a trans character, talking about trans people within one’s social group, or attending a workshop or educational session about gender identity. Second, participants could have had experience personally, academically, or professionally with trans people, such as through personal or social relationships; working on a class project with a trans peer; conducting research, counseling, or support groups with trans clients; or participating in LGBT groups of which trans people were a part. Thus, it was expected that individuals who had experience with trans information and/or who had experience

with trans people were likely to have formed opinions, attitudes, assumptions, or beliefs about trans individuals that could be investigated through this study.

An exact sample size in grounded theory is not possible to determine at the beginning of the study because there are no limits set on the number of participants that will be required to reach theoretical saturation (Cutcliffe, 2000). Thus, sample size varies among grounded theory studies. Creswell (1998) has recommended conducting 20 to 30 individual interviews, while Morrow (2005) has found 12 to be a sufficient sample size. In their grounded theory studies of butch and femme identity, Levitt et al. (2003) and Levitt and Hiestand (2004) included 12 butch and 12 femme participants. For each group, the authors found that theoretical saturation was reached with the ninth interview, as no new categories emerged through the last three transcripts. In addition, grounded theory studies published by T. Daniel and McLeod (2006) and Moerman and McLeod (2006) regarding person-centered counseling included six participants each. Based on the above research, the present study sought the participation of 8 to 10 LQSGSL students. The study was completed with eight participants and theoretical saturation was reached with the fifth participant interviewed.

Purposeful sampling is employed at the start of a grounded theory study, typically with the first and second interviewees, before initial hypotheses concerning the grounded theory have been formed (Cutcliffe, 2000). Purposeful sampling is conducted in an attempt to learn about a broad range of experiences in order to establish the foundation for theory-building. For the present study, the first three participants who contacted the researcher were found to have considerable exposure to trans information and experience with trans individuals and met eligibility criteria for the study. Subsequently, purposeful

sampling involved selecting participants who had different kinds of experience with trans people and information than the first three participants in order to establish a broader basis for the construction of the theory. Purposeful sampling also allowed the researcher to select participants who belonged to diverse demographic groups to balance those represented by the initial participants.

As the theory developed, the researcher used the second type of grounded theory sampling procedure, theoretical sampling, to select participants who reported having additional experiences which were missing from the current sample. Theoretical sampling involves the selection of participants based on the theoretical completeness of the emerging theory (Cutcliffe, 2000; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The researcher analyzed data from each interview before proceeding to the next interview. In this way, the theory was allowed to develop and guide further data collection. By selecting participants according to who may be able to fill gaps in the data, the researcher refines the theory and more fully develops analytic categories (Charmaz, 2000). The analytic categories are considered to be theoretically saturated when no new concepts emerge from the interviews, and thus data collection stops. In the present study, no new categories emerged from the last three participants interviewed.

Eight women who identified as lesbian, queer, same-gender-loving (LQSG), or a combination of these identities, were recruited as participants. They ranged in age from 23 to 55 years with a mean age of 29.75 and a standard deviation of 10.43. All participants were graduate students. Seven were working toward master's or doctoral degrees in a mental health field and one participant was studying a philanthropy-related business field. Regarding relationship status, three participants were single, four were

partnered, married, or in a domestic partnership to another LQSGl woman, and one was married to a trans man. Two participants identified as lower-middle class, four as middle class, and two as upper-middle class. In terms of race/ethnicity, four participants identified as White American, one Italian American, one Jewish American, one Hispanic, and one was of Indian and European ancestry. Upon joining the study, participants were enrolled in U.S. graduate programs in the West (n=3), Midwest (n=3), and East (n=2).

The LQSGl women who participated in this study reported having a great deal of experience with information about trans identity. Participants' primary source of trans-related information was the media, as all of the women had viewed websites, TV shows, books, movies, and documentaries that informed them about trans individuals. A number of participants also attended events such as pride parades, film festivals, and trans conferences where they encountered information about trans identity and sometimes saw or interacted with trans people. In addition, three participants reported learning about clients with gender concerns through class discussions or projects in their undergraduate or graduate programs.

Two of the eight participants reported having limited contact with trans people. One was informed after the fact by colleagues at work that she had just interacted with a trans man. Another participant noted that her best friend had begun to transition (FTM), but she otherwise had minimal contact with trans people. Six participants reported having considerable experience with trans individuals. One woman was partnered with a trans man, attended trans-positive conferences, and had many genderqueer and FTM friends. Several participants had trans colleagues, clients, and friends with whom they interacted daily. Most of the LQSGl women reported having more contact with trans men than with

trans women, although one participant reported seeing MTF clients in her mental health practicum and another participant reported working extensively with trans women at her trans-serving agency.

## Interviewing

Qualitative interviewing allows phenomena to be explored in-depth by focusing on the interviewer's topic and fitting questions to the participants' experience (Charmaz, 2006). In the present study, LQSG students were invited to participate in three individual telephone interviews with the researcher concerning their perceptions of transgender individuals. The third interview was a participant check.

### *Phone Interviewing*

Telephone interviews are considered an efficient, reliable, and cost-effective mode of qualitative data collection (Musselwhite, Cuff, McGregor, & King, 2006; Sturges & Hanrahan, 2004). Phone interviews have been used successfully in qualitative investigations with college students (Bubany, Krieshok, Black, & McKay, 2008), psychotherapists (L. M. Daniel, 2006; Dermer, 1998), and lesbian adolescents (Diamond, 2000). In their review of mode comparison literature concerning phone interviewing versus face-to-face interviewing, Sturges and Hanrahan reported finding phone interviews to be no better or worse than face-to-face interviews. Indeed, in their own study of visitors' and correctional officers' perceptions of visiting county jail inmates, the authors found no differences in the quantity, quality, nature, and depth of interview data they obtained through phone interviews in comparison to face-to-face interviews.

Sturges and Hanrahan (2004) cited support for using phone interviews for exploring sensitive or embarrassing topics, increasing participants' sense of anonymity, decreasing the impact of social desirability, and accessing hard-to-reach samples. They also noted that while phone interviewing does not allow the researcher to react to participants' visual cues, the researcher can remain sensitive to verbal cues such as hesitation, sighs, and hurried answers that may indicate the need for follow-up questions or prompts. The authors concluded that "telephone interviews make sense when the respondent group of interest owns telephones and uses them for both brief instrumental and longer expressive phone conversations" (p. 116).

In their review of literature concerning the use of telephone interviewing in clinical nursing research, Musselwhite et al. (2006) reported that phone interviews carry certain advantages over face-to-face interviews. Phone interviews are cost-effective because neither researcher nor participants must travel in order to meet. The researcher may therefore sample a greater demographic area than might be possible through in-person interviews. Phone interviews also save time, for travel is not an obstacle to the data collection process. Note-taking, too, may be conducted discreetly by the researcher during a phone interview in a way that is not disruptive or distracting to the participant. Phone interviews also diminish the effects of response bias on the part of the researcher, as participants are unable to see the researcher's facial expressions. Phone interviews may also increase the sense of anonymity that participants feel, which in turn may allow them to respond more freely than they would in person (Musselwhite et al.).

Musselwhite et al. (2006) also noted that phone interviews carry certain disadvantages relative to face-to-face interviews, which may be managed by the

researcher. First, the authors advised that researchers not use unsolicited calls to recruit participants, as these “cold” calls are perceived as telemarketing and thus may be rejected by potential participants. Second, respect for participants’ preferred calling times, especially given varying time zones and participant location (e.g., work, home) is important. Third, because body language and other visual cues are unavailable, the authors suggested that interview questions be read slowly and clearly in order to avoid miscommunication. The use of complicated questions was also discouraged for this reason. Finally, the absence of nonverbal communication and the presence of rapport between interviewer and participant may lead to participants offering extraneous information during the interview. Musselwhite et al. recommended asking participants to save any personal matters until the end of the interview and using polite and consistent redirection to the interview question to get participants back on track.

Phone interviews were chosen for the present study in order to allow the researcher to reach a national sample of LQSGSL students in a timely and cost-effective manner. Phone interviews are appropriate for use with college students, as virtually every student has access to a mobile phone and/or “land line” and therefore is accustomed to using telephones on a daily basis. In addition, the topic of this study may be viewed as potentially sensitive, as describing past or current perceptions of trans individuals or discussing gender issues in general may be a mildly emotional or embarrassing experience for participants. Because participants were recruited through referrals from friends, colleagues, listserv members, university staff, and informational flyers posted by these individuals, the researcher avoided the potential pitfalls of the cold calling technique noted above. Although the researcher redirected participants’ conversation to

the interview questions when needed, she also allowed time for relevant interaction to take place to build rapport, particularly at the beginning of the interviews.

Although there is no set length for qualitative interviews, Swanson (1986) recommended that interviews last a minimum of one hour. Seidman (2006) advised that an interview of less than 90 minutes seems too short to allow participants to reconstruct and reflect on their experiences, yet more than two hours seems a long time to spend on any one activity. For the present study, initial interviews averaged about 90 minutes in duration. Second interviews averaged approximately one hour. Two participants had very brief second interviews, having no new information to provide beyond the initial interview. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The researcher removed all identifying information from the transcripts prior to data analysis in order to ensure anonymity. All participants used pseudonyms for use in the final write-up of the study.

### *The Interview Guide*

A grounded theory study is characterized by a few broad, open-ended, non-judgmental questions that invite detailed discussion of the topic and encourage unanticipated stories to emerge (Charmaz, 2006). Constructivist grounded theorists, in particular, “emphasize eliciting the participant’s definitions of terms, situations, and events and try to tap his or her assumptions, implicit meanings, and tacit rules” (Charmaz, p. 32). An interview guide is often used to supply the subject areas that the researcher will explore with the interviewee (Patton, 2002). The questions in the Interview Guide (Appendix O) were designed to remain true to the character of grounded

theory inquiry. The questions begin broadly, asking participants to describe their general experience as LQSGW women on their campuses, and become more focused, asking participants to recall specific experiences they have had with trans people or topics. The questions are written in an open-ended manner to elicit participants' meanings (e.g., What does transgender mean to you?) and lived experiences (e.g., What have you observed or experienced between lesbian/queer/same-gender-loving women and transgender people?) without imposing the biases of the researcher. The questions are also written in a non-judgmental manner so that they apply to participants regardless of their perceptions of trans people.

The interview questions were also informed by the review of literature, which provided the researcher with background concerning potentially important subject areas to address. Examples include exploring participants' thoughts about gender in general (e.g., Has understanding gender been important to you...?), the degree to which participants thought about transgender people/issues prior to this study (e.g., To what extent had you thought about these issues before preparing for this interview?), and participants' awareness and knowledge of the lives of trans people (e.g., What would you say are some of the benefits/obstacles of being transgender?).

The main questions that were asked are:

- Tell me about your experience of being a lesbian, queer, or same-gender-loving woman on your campus.
- I'm interested in learning about lesbian/queer/same-gender-loving women's perceptions of transgender people. When I say that in a broad way, what comes to mind for you?

- What does transgender mean to you?
- Tell me about your exposure to transgender issues and/or experiences with transgender people.
- Has understanding gender been important to you? If so, how?
- What would you say are some of the benefits of being transgender? What would you say are some of the obstacles transgender people face?
- How have your perceptions of transgender people developed over time?
- What have you observed or experienced between lesbian/queer/same-gender-loving women and transgender people?
- To what extent had you thought about these issues before preparing for this interview?

Not included in the interview guide are the interview prompts. Prompts are questions or responses by the researcher that attempt to clarify ambiguous statements made by the interviewee (Kvale, 1996; Patton, 2002). This researcher used prompts such as, “Tell me more about that,” and “What was that like for you?” to encourage elaboration about a particular subject in order to deepen the interviewee’s level of response (Patton). Fassinger (2005) and Rennie (1995) recommended that, in order to avoid imposing the researcher’s views, prompts should be minimal and focus on encouraging elaboration more so than paraphrasing the content of participants’ responses.

### *Interview Procedure*

When a participant was selected for the study, the researcher called to schedule the first interview (Appendix L) and sent an email confirming the interview time

(Appendix N). An Interview Thank-you Email (Appendix P) was sent following the interview. The second interview was tentatively scheduled at the end of the first interview and was conducted following analysis of the first interview. Waiting until the first interview was analyzed enabled the researcher to identify any topics about which she should follow-up or clarify during the second interview. An email confirming the interview time or requesting a change, when data analysis took longer than expected, was sent in advance of the second interview. A thank-you email was sent following the second interview (Appendix Q).

Toward the end of the data analysis process, the researcher conducted a participant check (described in more detail below) that involved mailing each participant a summary of the initial categories or themes that had been identified for that person and a cover letter explaining the participant check procedure (Appendix R). Shortly after sending the letter and summary, the researcher contacted participants to schedule the participant check interview and sent an email confirming the interview time. Finally, a thank-you email was sent following the participant check interview (Appendix T).

### Data Analysis

Rennie (1992, 1995) created a data analysis procedure for use with grounded theory that is considered an efficient alternative to Glaser and Strauss's (1967) constant comparative analysis. In the original constant comparative procedure, two main steps take place. First, the researcher assigns one descriptive code to each line of data, staying close to the interviewees' original words. This process entails constantly comparing new codes with existing ones to determine if a previous code applies or if a new one must be

created. Second, the researcher conceptualizes more abstract categories that depict the relations among codes. This is accomplished through sorting and re-sorting the codes in order to view various relationships among them. Eventually, higher order categories produce a core category, or a major theme or process, under which the other categories are subsumed (Rennie, 2006).

Rennie's grounded theory analysis replaces line-by-line coding with the categorization of passages of text, which Rennie (2006) termed meaning units (MUs). MUs can be phrases, sentences, or paragraphs; the idea is that interviewees express one thought before moving on to another. Each thought or topic in a given interview becomes a MU, and a single interview may contain any number of MUs. For the current study, the researcher followed Rennie's grounded theory analysis procedure by recording the MUs from each interview in a table. The MUs were then linked to their sources, including the interview participant it came from (e.g., P1, P2...P8), and their sequence within the interview transcript (e.g., MU130). In the present example, the phrase P2MU130 would identify a MU from the second participant so that it could be traced back to its original position in the transcript.

Each meaning unit is assigned as many categories as apply to it through a process called open categorizing (Rennie, 2006). Open categorizing proceeds much like line-by-line coding. That is, the categories assigned to each new MU are compared to previous categories until no new categories emerge from the new data (i.e., theoretical saturation). The categories are conceptualized broadly in order to allow their description to be dense and rich with meaning. For the present study, the researcher created a Word document for each category and listed every MU that made up the category, along with its identifying

code (e.g., P2MU130 as described above). When the researcher wished to review a category, she easily read all the MUs that made up that category. Because MUs can become quite long, this researcher followed Rennie's suggestion of abbreviating the MUs when listing them under each category. The researcher returned to the original, lengthier, MU when preparing to write the results of the investigation. Twenty-three categories were identified through the open categorizing procedure: abuse, ally behavior/advocacy, appearance/visibility, attraction, campus climate, coming out, curiosity, family, intersex/DSD, language, levels of knowledge/experience, love, media/celebrities, medical, modes of learning, privileges/rights, professional identity, quality of interaction with trans people, regional differences, religion, stereotypes/categories, trans in relation to LGB, and what being trans means.

Rennie's (2006) analytic procedure concluded with the identification of a core category or process that could be richly described by the other, remaining categories. Rennie assured grounded theory analysts that "although our procedure entails moving progressively through text, it also calls upon the analyst to backtrack, thus covering the same ground covered by the resorting of codes" (p. 69). That is, as in Glaser and Strauss's method, a core category is identified and remaining categories lend to its description. According to Rennie, the two approaches are essentially "different routes to Rome. Both approaches stay close to the meaning of the text and both eventuate in a hierarchical structure of categories" (p. 69). This researcher identified the core category as understanding and developing a stance of advocacy, with sorting procedures resulting in six remaining descriptive categories and their properties: personal characteristics (personality, values, gender expression, and attraction), sociocultural context (religion,

family, coming out, regional context, and safety), campus climate (affirming, non-affirming, and neutral), learning about trans (modes of learning and content of learning), LQSGE experiences, and expressions of advocacy (attitudes and behaviors).

Throughout the research process, the researcher typically develops ideas, hunches, feelings, and insights that may serve a number of uses when systematically recorded as written memos (Charmaz, 2000; Fassinger, 2005; Rennie et al., 1988). According to Rennie et al., memos

raise the conceptual level of the research by encouraging the analyst to think beyond single incidents to themes and patterns in the data. They capture speculations about the properties of categories, or relationships among categories, or possible criteria for the selection of further data sources. They enable the researcher to preserve ideas that have potential value but which may be premature. They are useful if gaps in the relation of theory to data arise, for they provide a record of the researcher's ideas about the analysis and can be used to trace the development of a category. They are used to note thoughts about the similarity of the emerging theory to established theories or concepts. (p. 144)

By stimulating the researcher to consider potential core categories and relationships among categories, memos provide the conceptual material that forms the basis of the grounded theory (Rennie et al.). The present study made use of memo writing by tracking the development of and changes in meaning units and categorization as the study progressed.

## Researcher Reflexivity

Researcher reflexivity, or self-awareness, is a valuable tool for the constructed grounded theorist whose interpretive lens is made public in an attempt to ensure the co-construction of theory with participants (Morrow, 2007). This researcher attended to researcher reflexivity in the present study by using reflective journaling (Janesick, 2003; Kvale, 1996), peer auditing (Lincoln & Guba; Morrow, 2005), and participant checks (Fassinger, 2005; Jones, 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Morrow, 2005). First, following each phone interview, the researcher wrote a personal log documenting her immediate impressions about the preceding interaction. She reviewed this log as data collection and analysis proceeded.

Second, the researcher enlisted a recent graduate of a master's program in counseling who had experience with qualitative research and who was LGBT-affirming, to conduct a peer audit of the generation of the grounded theory. This auditor was a 26 year-old engaged heterosexual cis woman of Indian and Scandinavian ancestry. The peer auditor reviewed the researcher's stated background and beliefs related to the study (as noted below), interview transcripts, meaning unit tables, category documents, and analytic memos at several points during the data analysis process. The peer auditor examined these materials, as well as the resulting process model and its description, to ensure that the theory reflected participants' experiences rather than the researcher's biases.

Third, the researcher conducted a participant check. The purpose of the participant check was to provide the researcher with feedback that may have impacted the researcher's analytic lens. Lincoln and Guba (1985) caution that "one cannot expect an

inquiry to produce findings that everyone could or would accept. But everyone does have the right to provide input on the subject of what are proper outcomes, and the inquirer has an obligation to attend to those inputs and to honor them so far as possible” (p. 211). Seven of the eight participants completed a participant check interview, and one declined due to time constraints. The procedure involved preparing a summary of the researcher’s preliminary understanding of the categories or themes that the participant had described during the two individual interviews (Jones, 2002). Participant checks took place toward the end of the data analysis process. Summaries were mailed to participants along with the Participant Check Letter and a follow-up phone interview was scheduled. The researcher followed the Participant Check Interview Guide (Appendix S) to ask participants how well the summary described their lived experience and what further thoughts or experiences came to mind. Participants were then sent an email thanking them for their participation in the participant check interview. Feedback from the participant check informed the final analysis of the data. The processes of summarizing individual participants’ stories and hearing participants reflect on their stories facilitated a transition for the researcher from the content to the process of the LQSGl women’s experiences. This, in turn, assisted the researcher in recognizing the core category and building the process model.

### Rigor of the Study

Techniques to ensure the rigor, or trustworthiness, of qualitative inquiry are described in this section using Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) concepts of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These concepts are related in parallel

fashion to the quantitative criteria of internal validity, generalizability, reliability, and objectivity, but are more appropriate for assessing the rigor of qualitative research.

Credibility refers to how the researcher ensures the rigor of the study and how this is communicated to the reader (Morrow, 2005). In this study, researcher reflexivity via the reflective log, peer audit, and participant checks was used to increase the probability of credible results (Elliott et al., 1999; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Morrow). Transferability refers to the potential for qualitative research findings to be applied to comparable individuals in other contexts (Morrow, 2005). In this study, the researcher provided detailed information about the research context and de-identified participant characteristics so that the reader could judge the findings' potential for transferability (Elliott et al., 1999; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Morrow). In addition, rich or thick description in Chapter IV helps the reader determine the transferability of the theory to their own context. Dependability refers to the extent to which the process of inquiry and the findings, interpretations, and recommendations are supported by the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Morrow, 2005). In the present study, the researcher sought to achieve dependability by maintaining documentation of raw data and keeping a "detailed chronology of research activities and processes; influences on the data collection and analysis; emerging themes, categories, or models; and analytic memos" (Morrow, p. 252). The use of a peer auditor also lends to the study's dependability. Confirmability refers to the extent to which research findings represent the data rather than a pet theory of the researcher (Morrow, 2005). Confirmability acknowledges that qualitative research is never fully objective and there is no single way of interpreting an event or experience. Yet, this criterion of rigor assures the reader that findings are closely tied to the

participants' reported experiences. This is achieved through tying together the "data, analytic processes, and findings" (Morrow, p. 252) in such a way that the results are grounded in examples from the data and the theory resonates with readers (Elliott et al., 1999; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Participant checks of the preliminary summary and the peer auditor's review of the researcher's stated expectations, biases, and data analysis procedures provided confirmability for this study.

### Researcher's Background, Experience, and Assumptions

In qualitative inquiry, the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and is therefore called upon to own her perspective (Elliott et al., 1999). This involves describing the researcher's sociocultural background and disclosing the researcher's expectations and biases at the outset of the study (Yeh & Inman, 2007). Owning one's perspective is especially pertinent to constructivist grounded theory, which contends that "knowing always involves seeing or hearing from within particular individual, institutional, and other socioculturally embedded perspectives" (Henwood & Pidgeon, 2003, p. 135). As part of the process of owning her perspective, this researcher described her personal and professional background and disclosed the expectations and beliefs that she held at the start of this study, as indicated by the first-person narrative that follows. The results of this grounded theory investigation of the perceptions that LQSGl women students have of trans individuals are presented in the next chapter.

I am a White/European American cisgender lesbian woman in my thirties who has been a life-long resident of the Midwestern United States. I come from a small-town,

middle-class background and all members of my immediate family hold graduate degrees. I grew up in a household with a mother and a father who both worked full-time. My father was the principal caretaker of my sibling and me during our school years, with help from my elderly grandmother who also lived with us. My mother served as a strong role model for me as I observed her achievement within a male-dominated profession. I traveled internationally as a young adult, attended a small, private liberal arts college, earned a master's degree in counseling psychology, and am currently near the end of my doctoral program in counseling psychology. The majority of my individual counseling, career counseling, and student affairs experiences have involved the college and university student population in the Midwestern U.S.

At the age of 25, during my master's degree program, I acknowledged to myself and others my attraction to women. Thus, I have experienced the development of my sexual orientation identity in the context of my graduate studies. Although I am currently a member of several LGBT-related activist groups and have LGBT friends, I do not consider myself to be an insider to any specific lesbian community. Among the lesbians I have known, gender characteristics such as butch and femme have been considered relevant mainly to initial romantic attraction and have not necessarily been an important factor within established relationships. I have, however, observed these characteristics as useful points of connection for friendships among lesbians.

A pivotal experience concerning the development of my sexual orientation identity was a doctoral assistantship position I held coordinating my university's LGBT resource center. After taking a graduate course focused on counseling lesbian, gay, and bisexual clients, I received the remainder of my education about LGBT issues and culture

through on-the-job training (i.e., facilitating trainings for speaker panel and safe zone ally programs; interacting with undergraduate and graduate LGBT student organization members; meeting with students who questioned their sexual orientation) and by networking with LGBT and heterosexual ally community leaders.

My interest in transgender issues began while coordinating the campus resource center, when I encountered opportunities to learn about and meet transgender people. I recognized my own and the campus's need for transgender education and resources to serve transgender students. Thus, I consulted with a transgender community leader to develop the campus's first transgender-affirmative educational program. Through discussions with campus and community members about the transgender program, I noticed that much education was needed among lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals about transgender issues. This fact surprised me because I had assumed that I was among a minority of people within the LGB community who had little knowledge of transgender issues. I found, however, that LGB people held as many prejudices and misconceptions about gender variant individuals as did the heterosexual people I encountered. In some cases, these prejudices were strong and appeared to be related in some way to LGB people's identity as sexual minorities. Hence, my research topic stems from my desire to encourage other cisgender members of the LGB community to come to an understanding and affirmation of transgender individuals as I am striving to do; to make LGB communities more welcoming to transgender individuals.

Learning about transgender issues inevitably led me to confront my own gender identity in ways that were new to me. I became aware that since coming out as a lesbian, I had attempted to project a butch image because my lesbian friends and acquaintances

modeled this for me and appeared to privilege masculine over feminine ways of being lesbian. I realized that I am most comfortable and most fully myself as a feminine lesbian woman, an identity I have gradually learned to embrace. As I read accounts of others who feel constricted by gender categories, I am able to acknowledge the ways that these same categories have and do hurt me. They have become personal, and not just a problem to be overcome by the “other,” transgender people.

I enjoy discovering ways that others find power through their gender expression. One such experience occurred when working with a student who was transitioning from male to female. I found myself feeling embarrassed and annoyed by her glaring femininity. She delighted in her perfected hair, makeup, and nails, and her newfound ability to walk in high heels. I realized there is still a part of me that rejects such stereotypical displays of femininity as anti-feminist, patriarchal constructions keeping women “in their place.” However, I now see that any anger or resentment I may experience should be directed not toward the transitioning individual but toward the sociocultural system that renders such a display problematic in the first place. In addition, when I consider the freedom this person felt in expressing herself this way, I realize that it is not how we choose to express ourselves that matters, but rather that our expression is our choice and that it brings us satisfaction. It helps us feel at home in our bodies and in the world. In this, I find true power.

Through my personal and professional experiences and through my reading of relevant scholarly literature, I have developed the following beliefs related to the present study:

- Gender is, in large part, socially constructed. People's families, schools, communities, and other sociocultural systems play a part in shaping views about gender roles.
- There exists in mainstream U.S. culture an expectation that people with certain bodies should display certain behavior and appearance. Likewise, there is an expectation that people demonstrating certain behavior and appearance should have certain kinds of bodies. That the gendered meaning of bodies, behavior, and appearance should match is deeply embedded in U.S. social, political, and economic systems, creating inequality for those who do not conform.
- One way to create an environment in which individuals of all genders may feel free to express themselves is to challenge the binary gender system. To me, this means exposing people to the idea that not everyone identifies as a woman or a man and that even among those who do, there is great variance in bodies and gendered behavior.
- Society is, among other things, racist, classist, sexist, and heterosexist. Therefore, lesbians face multiple oppressions which relate closely to gender issues. Race, sexual orientation, and other identities cannot be disconnected from gender. Lesbians' experiences of these social forces may impact their perceptions of transgender individuals.
- Neither sexual orientation nor gender identity should be pathologized by mental health professionals. Furthermore, pathologizing diagnoses should not be required for individuals to gain access to medical procedures that assist with gender confirmation/transition.
- Transgender individuals may not desire to participate in the lesbian, gay, and bisexual community, particularly if they do not identify as LGB or if, in the past, they have

experienced negative reactions to their participation. The LGB community should, however, welcome the participation of transgender individuals because there are limited supportive environments for sexual and gender minorities and because some transgender people identify as LGB. Any animosity that arises due to differences in privileges or oppressions should be directed toward changing social systems rather than blaming one another.

- Women have the right to create women-only space where they feel safe from real or perceived threat by men. The definition of women-only, however, is debatable.
- When individuals feel comfortable with their own gender identity, they are better able to be open to ways that others express their gender identity. Closely examining one's own gender identity is an important step to take toward developing comfort with one's own gender, and subsequently, with the gender identities of others.
- Lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals experience discrimination and harassment that is often based on gender expression, while transgender individuals experience discrimination and harassment that is often based on real or perceived sexual orientation. With such a shared experience, lesbian and transgender individuals have an opportunity to connect with one another and be emboldened by one another's struggles.
- College and university campuses are places where lesbian and transgender students live and learn. Educators have a responsibility to ensure the safety of all students, and the campus environment provides a ripe opportunity for education about issues concerning sexual orientation and gender identity.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

In this chapter, I present my conceptualization of LQSGI participants' perceptions and attitudes toward trans people and the processes that influenced the formation of these views. First, I provide a description of each participant in order to give context for the findings. Next, I describe in detail the categories that emerged from the grounded theory analysis, beginning with the development of the core category, understanding and developing a stance of advocacy. I note some interesting differences among participants which add richness and scope to the findings and suggest some of the dimensions along which individual LQSGI women's experiences may vary. Finally, I present a model that depicts my understanding of the complexities involved in the process of understanding and developing a stance of advocacy. The process model demonstrates my conceptualization of the components of LQSGI students' attitudes toward trans people and their underlying processes that all research participants had in common.

It is important to note that these results are a product of summarizing and analyzing the data from interviews with these eight participants and may not be characteristic of other individuals or groups. The results may, however, be viewed as generalizable in the sense that the theory generated may be useful in understanding similar individuals in similar situations. Given the interpretive nature of qualitative research, the findings represent my understanding but not the only understanding of the phenomenon.

## Participants

In this section, brief descriptions are provided for each of the eight participants. In order to protect participants' confidentiality, pseudonyms take the place of participants' names and details related to programs of study and university names/locations are omitted. Although neither graduate students nor those studying in the mental health professions were specifically recruited for this study, all eight participants identified as graduate students with seven working toward master's and doctoral degrees in mental health fields and one working toward a master's degree in a philanthropy-related business program.

### *Alice*

Alice is a 28 year-old Hispanic lesbian woman who is working on a doctorate in a mental health field. Her bachelor's degree is from a Southern U.S. university and she attends a graduate program in the Midwest. She identifies as Catholic and upper-middle class. She describes her gender expression as femme/female/feminine/lipstick lesbian. She is married to a cis lesbian woman. Alice is out to most people among her family and friends and is out to everyone on her graduate campus. She learned about this study through a fellow graduate student in her program. Alice reported having had exposure to trans issues in her training program and through her trans friends. In her program, trans issues were discussed in order to help students develop an understanding of trans experience. Alice's best friend has just begun to transition F-to-M and she has educated herself through documentaries, articles, and websites.

*Jaime*

Jaime is a 27 year-old Italian American lesbian woman who is working on a master's degree in a mental health field. Her bachelor's degree is from a Midwestern university and she attends a graduate program in the Midwest. She has no religious affiliation and identifies as upper-middle class. She describes her gender expression as feminine and sometimes sporty. She is in a domestic partnership with a cis lesbian woman and they have two children. Jaime is out to everyone among her family, friends, and graduate campus. She learned about this study via an email from her graduate department. Jaime reported that the majority of her exposure to information about trans came from the media, including TV shows, documentaries, autobiographies, news reports, blogs, and websites. She has had one interaction with a trans man in a work setting, but did not realize he was trans until someone told her later.

*Bridget*

Bridget is a single 23 year-old White American same-gender-loving woman who is working on a master's degree in a mental health field. She graduated from a Jesuit Midwestern college and attends a graduate program in the West. She identifies as Catholic and lower-middle class. She describes her gender expression as "me." She is out to a select few family members, most of her friends, and everyone on her graduate campus. She learned about this study from a flyer posted at her campus multicultural center. Bridget reported having a great deal of experience with trans issues and people. She has seen movies and documentaries, attended guest lectures about trans identity, and hosted an educational program about challenging gender norms. She has interacted with

trans people at work, attended retreats that included trans people, and has trans-identified friends. She identifies as a trans ally and advocates for change, promoting trans-positive legislation and policies.

### *Samantha*

Samantha is a 26 year-old White American queer woman who is working on a master's degree in a philanthropy-related business field. Her bachelor's degree is from a private college in the Eastern U.S. and she attends a graduate program at the same school. She has no religious affiliation and identifies as lower-middle class. She describes her gender expression as femme. Samantha is married to a trans man (FTM). She is out to everyone among her family and friends and is out to a select few on her graduate campus. She learned about this study via a friend on Facebook. Samantha reported having considerable experience with trans people and issues. In addition to being married to a trans man, she has a roommate who is FTM and friends who identify as FTM and genderqueer. She is somewhat involved with local trans-positive events and has started attending transgender conferences. She has also been a consumer of media interpretations of trans and has learned about Gender Identity Disorder through her classes.

### *Jesse*

Jesse is a 55 year-old Jewish American/Caucasian lesbian woman who is working on a master's degree in a mental health field. Her bachelor's degree is from a university in the Western U.S. and she attends graduate school in the same western state. She identifies as Jewish and middle class. She describes her gender expression as high

femme. Jesse is married to a cis butch lesbian woman. Jesse is divorced from a cis man. She is out to everyone among her family, friends, and graduate campus. Jesse reported having a wealth of experience with trans individuals. She has attended numerous film festivals and pride parades and is an avid reader and researcher of gender identity issues. Jesse has held many jobs that involved having trans co-workers or clients, and she has advocated extensively in those environments for trans-affirming policies. Jesse has the most experience, out of all participants, with MTFs.

### *Cass*

Cass is a single 29 year-old White American queer woman who is working on a master's degree in a mental health field. Her bachelor's degree is from a Southern U.S. university and she attends graduate school at a small college in the East. She identifies as atheist and middle class. She describes her gender expression as androgynous and genderqueer. She is out to a select few family members and most people among her friends and graduate campus. She learned about this study from a flyer at her campus LGBT office. Cass reported having extensive exposure to trans people, particularly, FTMs, as her best friend and several dating partners went through the process of transitioning. She remains friends with all of them and has shared books, movies, and other media with them. She also learned a great deal about trans identity through her undergraduate courses.

*Jean*

Jean is a single 23 year-old White American queer woman who is working on a doctorate in a mental health field. Her bachelor's degree is from a Southern U.S. university and she attends graduate school at a Midwestern university. She identifies as spiritual and middle class. She describes her gender expression as androgynous. She is out to most of her family, everyone among her friends, and most people on her graduate campus. Jean reported that most of her exposure to trans issues has occurred through classes and her own reading. She interacted with a few trans people at an academic panel discussion. She may also have had some contact with trans individuals without her knowledge, as she spends a lot of time in the queer community.

*Isabelle*

Isabelle is a 27 year-old biracial (Indian and European) American queer/lesbian woman who is working on a doctorate in a mental health field. Her bachelor's degree is from a university in the Western U.S. and she attends graduate school in the same western state. She identifies as Sikh and middle class. She describes her gender expression as feminine. Isabelle is partnered with a cis gay woman. She is out to everyone among her family, friends, and graduate campus. Isabelle reported having extensive exposure to trans issues via the media, such as websites, documentaries, articles, and TV shows. Her experiences with trans people have included being around them in her city, working with trans women as clients, and socializing with trans colleagues outside of her work setting.

## The Category System

Using the grounded theory analysis described in Chapter III, I conceptualized a system of categories and their properties (sub-themes) that relate to the core category, understanding and developing a stance of advocacy (see Figure 1). The six categories shown in Figure 1 are those that remained after sorting and delimiting the original 23 categories. The categories and their sub-themes follow a hierarchical scheme so that the properties of any category are also the properties of the more inclusive categories. In my presentation of the category system, I relate categories to other categories and to the core category to convey a sense of the dynamic nature of LQSGl women's perceptions of trans people and the processes that underlie the formation of these perceptions.

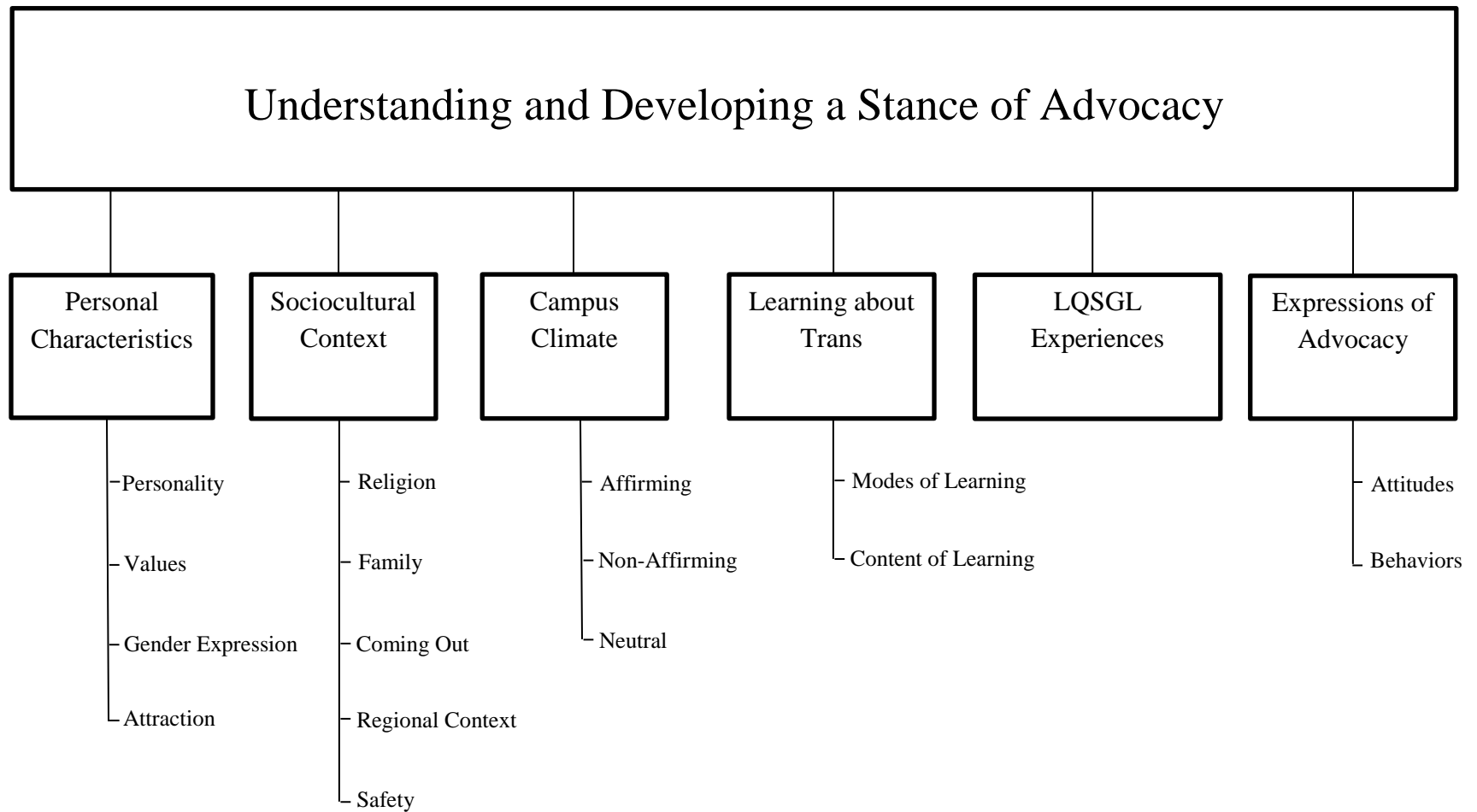
### *The Core Category: Understanding and Developing a Stance of Advocacy*

The LQSGl women I interviewed came to understand and develop a stance of advocacy toward trans people. Participants described viewing trans people as simply wanting to be themselves and as deserving of respect. They remarked on the unfairness of laws, limited access to services, and social sanctions that trans people experience. They hoped that communication between trans people and LQSGl women could improve in order to rectify rifts between the two communities. Many engaged in efforts to educate others about trans identity, promote trans-inclusive policies, and welcome trans individuals into their workplaces, universities, and communities. The LQSGl women's understanding of trans individuals was closely connected to their expressions of advocacy.

I used the term developing in the description of the core category in order to characterize the developmental process in which participants were engaged. That is, while advocacy was at the core of participants' experiences, the LQSGl women were in different developmental places with regard to their understandings of trans identity and their stances of advocacy. That is, while participants experienced themselves as advocates for trans individuals, they did not always express trans-positive views or actively engage in advocacy efforts. The process of understanding and developing a stance of advocacy is considered to be ongoing, as participants learn more about trans people and respond to others' reactions to their advocacy efforts.

I identified the core category through a number of analytic processes. First, I found that the original category, ally behavior/advocacy, was the most richly described among the 23 original categories. It was made up of the most meaning units and was endorsed by every participant. Furthermore, the remaining categories provided context for understanding it. Second, as I summarized participants' individual stories in preparation for the participant check interviews, I noticed that each one seemed to culminate with the theme of advocating in some way for trans individuals. Third, the process of summarizing participants' individual stories and the LQSGl women's responses to the participant check interviews led me to move from an understanding of the content of participants' stories to the complex process that participants experienced in order to arrive at their particular stance of advocacy. Cass described this aptly when she noted that "seeing [her] story written reminded [her] of how integrated the history of these things are in [her] life."

Figure 1  
Hierarchy of Categories



### *Personal Characteristics*

All LQSGP participants referred to ways their personal characteristics influenced how they came to learn about trans identity, what perceptions they have about trans people, and to what extent they engage in different types of trans advocacy behaviors. Sub-themes in this category include personality, values, gender expression, and attraction.

#### *Personality*

The first sub-theme in personal characteristics of LQSGP participants is personality. In reflecting on their engagement with trans people and with issues of gender identity, participants described personality characteristics that contributed to how and why they came to learn about trans issues. Jaime, for example, described how her curiosity motivated her to seek media representations of trans people. She sometimes watched specific television episodes in order to learn about trans people's experiences.

...it's just curiosity for me so I've always like if I see something...that's gonna be on or if I hear about something I'll record it. I tried to follow that Thomas Beatie, the pregnant man...story and then too, I don't know if like you watch...The L Word, they had the character that was transgendered.

Like Jaime, Jesse also indicated actively seeking information about trans identity due to her curiosity in addition to intellectual interest.

I'm also a curious and intellectual person...So, I – I wanna learn more and I wanna be able to discuss and – and I – you know – I mean, this is part of the

world, to me and – um, so I’m...actively trying to sort of – um, look for that kind of information.

Bridget, on the other hand, jokingly referred to herself as a magnet for anyone who is different.

People - like I know for me, when I look at a friend, I’m naturally just uh, attracted and drawn to people who are kind of different in every which way, shape, or form. You know. My mama used to say, “You have a stamp on your head. If something’s wrong with you, if something is special with you, people just come and they talk to you [laughter], and that’s the kind of friends you bring home.” ...I really feel like it’s tattooed on my head.

By attracting people who are different, Bridget befriended trans individuals. While she welcomed the experience, she felt somewhat obligated to learn about trans identity as a result.

For some participants, their personality characteristics related not only to learning about trans identity, but also to developing positive perceptions of trans people and trans advocacy behaviors. For example, Alice drew on her natural openness and empathy to explain her motivation for watching documentaries about trans people and, along with her partner, supporting positive media depictions of trans people. She also connected her empathy and openness to her professional identity in the mental health field, recognizing that her personality is a good fit for understanding and working with others, including trans people. Cass, who was often the recipient of people’s off-hand negative comments about trans individuals, complained, “...for some reason people – I guess because I’m

quiet, [people] feel like it's okay to say anything to me." By receiving such unsolicited remarks, Cass felt the need to learn how to stand up for trans people in appropriate ways.

Through reflecting on her interest in gender issues, Isabelle recalled that she has always felt drawn to feminine energy, even as a young child.

I – actually all of my life, I have been like this. Like my mom says that even at the age of two, she knew that I had lesbian tendencies because I always wanted to be with women and I always gravitated towards women and was completely uninterested in being around men...So, I think a lot of it is just innate but that's just my kind of characteristic as a person is that I – I prefer female energy.

This preference led Isabelle to develop an interest in the experiences of FTMs.

I think because it's empowering that women have historically always been disempowered, so to be able to play with something like your gender and to pass as a man...in a man's world, like that's freaking awesome to be able to pull that off! ...Like as powerful as it can get, in my opinion.

In contrast, Jaime struggled to articulate why she rarely interrupts LGBT-related bias. At first she seemed unbothered by people's prejudiced comments. Then she acknowledged that even she sometimes says, "That's so gay," and she doesn't want to sound like a hypocrite by correcting others. Upon further reflection, she stated that perhaps as a middle child, she prefers to avoid conflict and thus avoids confronting others.

I guess to me it must be...like wasting my time to correct someone when I really don't – it really doesn't offend me personally. And you know, depending on the person too - they really care if they're um - if they're an ignorant person or if they're you know uneducated on things or...you know if they just don't realize

that their actions affect other people, like it to me it's just not that important um enough in situations to speak up and say things sometimes...Yeah, I'm – you know it's kind of also maybe like the middle child syndrome like I just want everybody to get along...Yeah, I just want everybody to be okay...And um, I'm not going to call people out on stuff if it might make them uncomfortable.

### *Values*

The second sub-theme in personal characteristics of LQSGP participants is values. Several participants identified personal values that impacted their interaction with trans-related information and their acceptance of trans identity. Bridget, for example, reported feeling strongly social justice-oriented. She stated the importance of standing for something and teaching others about it.

...you have that knowledge and you have that power so you can't claim ignorance. You know, you can't just be like, "Oh, oh I didn't know what it was." Yes, you did...or at least if you're not comfortable sharing, know what you stand for and know what you will accept and what you will tolerate and really what you won't...So it's okay to have questions. Or it's okay to say – um, "Alright, I didn't agree with any of that but I kinda identify with point like X."...You know, "I'll – I'll – I'll claim point X." Or you know, "I'll stand for that." Or "I'll talk about that." Or even, "I'll acknowledge it within myself." ...Because sometimes that's – that's - the hardest step is seeing what's right in front of you... Like dealing with the person in the mirror.

Not surprisingly, Bridget was one of the most vocal trans advocates among all participants. In response to questions about campus climate, she also described her value of developing professional competency with all kinds of people, including trans people.

...if we want to be [mental health professionals] right now, and I'm speaking of like the fellow students in my [graduate program] you have to know about all people. You know, it doesn't mean you have to love it, embrace it, and run with it, but you have to know a little bit about everybody, so even if you get somebody who's like – "I'm this," and you have no idea what that means, how to even wrap your fingers around it, you know that there are some resources you can use.

For Jesse, moving around the world and across the U.S. growing up taught her to adapt to and value differences. She recalled her own discomfort when relatives teased her about the latest accent she had picked up, and generalized this to others' experiences of being noticed for their differences.

Isabelle, who felt naturally drawn to feminine energy as previously noted, talked about valuing women's empowerment. Pushing gender boundaries by transitioning female-to-male represented for her the ultimate women's empowerment.

The idea of like women, like pushing boundaries of gender...is just so awesome to me. So, like it was kind of that also sparked my interest of wanting to know more about it and wanting to know what else it's like but I was very one-sided. I was more interested in what it's like to go from F-to-M than M-to-F...I think I'm – I'm extremely woman-centered like I literally have one guy friend, that's it...So, I – I prefer to surround myself with women at all times and just be in the company of women. So, for me it was – it was a woman's issue, for a woman to transition

was more interesting for me than for a man to transition. Plus like the fact that there's so much less – um, resources out there for F-to-M pissed me off. So, I wanted to know more about it.

### *Gender expression*

The third sub-theme in personal characteristics of LQSGP participants is gender expression. Many participants recalled their histories as tomboys and their ability to connect the social sanctions they experienced as children or teens to the experiences of trans people. For example, Cass, who as an adult identifies her gender expression as androgynous/genderqueer, talked about being the unwitting object of rescue by heterosexual feminine girls who wanted to help her appear more attractive to boys.

I had some girly friends in high school who were good friends, and had good intentions but it's always been this like, always growing up it was always girls who were trying to like help me...Um, to their benefit. [Laughter] Not their benefit but like what they thought would be helpful...which would be to hold me down and put make up on me... it's always like, "Oh but you'd be so pretty," and like, "blah, blah, blah," and even when I thought I was straight I just wasn't comfortable that way...

Jaime, who also identified as a tomboy, told a heartbreaking story of avoiding restroom use during a class field trip due to being mistaken for a boy in the girls' bathroom line.

I was in 2nd grade and I had quite the horrible haircut and I was also, you know I'm a tomboy ...and I have jeans and a t-shirt on and that's what I was wearing and I was at the [CITY] Zoo for a fieldtrip for school and you know, knowing me,

and just being a little kid and I was like okay this is an emergency situation I need to go to the bathroom. [Laughter]...And of course you know it's like a fieldtrip day at the zoo...so I, I get in line and the girl behind me goes ya know, "This is the girl's bathroom," and I just looked at her and said, "I know" – And then I felt...I got sad about it and so like I, I got out of line and I don't know how I made it all the way back home...

Bridget, on the other hand, seemed unfazed by being addressed as a boy in her jeans, jersey, gym shoes, and short hair. "...people would be like, 'Excuse me, son.' ...Oh, okay. All right, whatever. If you want to think I'm a boy, you think I'm a boy. That's okay. You want to think I'm a girl, I'm a girl..." Rather than feeling sanctioned by her gender expression, Bridget felt free to be herself. This mirrored the attitude she expressed as an adult when she was mistaken for a drag queen wearing breast forms by none other than drag queens at a local club.

I've had drag queens walk up to me and this is one of my proudest moments I've got, so to speak, and they look at me and they go, "Where did you get them?" They're mine...Thank you for saying that I look good enough to be a drag queen. Thank you. [Laughter] But I promise you they're mine. And I've gotten that— oh, my god. Yeah, I am a real girl...They walked up to me and kind of felt me up.

Bridget transformed a potentially embarrassing situation into a humorous opportunity to engage in conversation with trans people about gender, bodies, and people's assumptions.

Even Jesse, who identifies as high femme, experienced difficulty related to her gender expression. Growing up in the 1960-1970s, she had no awareness of sexual orientation other than heterosexuality. Later, the feminist model of the androgynous

lesbian that proliferated during the late 1970s and early 1980s proved to be inadequate. She could not identify with a model in which “lesbians all have to look the same and wear ugly clothes.” Having learned of FTM celebrity Chaz Bono’s story, Jesse now understands what it might have been like for Chaz to identify first as a lesbian because it was the only identity model available to him, and only later come out as trans.

### *Attraction*

The fourth sub-theme in personal characteristics of LQSGl participants is attraction. Three participants noted the fluidity of their sexual/romantic attractions which reflected their openness to different bodies and their understandings of the spectrum of gender identities. Two of these participants also experienced stigma among cis LQSGl women for identifying at some point as bisexual.

Cass and Jean initially came out as bisexual and only later came out as queer. For Cass, attraction was initially “more [about] the person” than about gender, though over time her “attractions have been more to women than men.” She also dated a couple – a trans man and a cis woman – who had an open relationship. Jean identified as bisexual until quite recently, explaining that

I don’t really care what their plumbing is like...it doesn’t really matter to me. I’m much more interested in who they are as a person...And the qualities that I look for in a person tend to mean that I date more lesbian women...but if I found [those qualities] in a trans identified individual, then sure [I’d date that person].

Furthermore, Jean attributed her development of trans advocacy to her first-hand experience of discrimination at the hands of LQSGl women.

I think that a lot of the reason that I sort of feel the way I do about the trans community is because of my experience of having identified as a bisexual individual in the queer community. And how – like mean people were about that, you know, that I was a fence-sitter that I had to decide which I was. I had to, you know, pick an allegiance and um the more that I've read about the trans community and um how they're treated even by the rest of the queer community, I feel like there are some definite parallels there. That, you know, you should pick a gender and then you have to commit to that gender and God forbid that you want – that you feel most comfortable being somewhere in-between.

When Samantha started college, she had just broken up with her (cis male) fiancé. She told him the relationship just didn't feel right. When she met the butch lesbian across the hall on move-in day, mistaking her for someone's little brother, they started dating. Samantha fell in love and realized why dating her fiancé had not made sense. Samantha eventually married a trans man.

I've realized that I'm attracted toward the masculine identity um but have never - and have been in love with um, female-identified women and um, male-identified female-bodied people um, but have never - and have had a really good time with bio-guys but have never fallen in love with them.

At the time of the participant check interview, Samantha reported that she and her husband had started divorce proceedings for reasons unrelated to her husband's trans identity. As she struggled with this life change, she sought sexual relationships with cis men. She described them as “fun and easy” and said “it only gets sticky when they like

[her] too much.” As she noted in her original interviews, she is not emotionally attracted to cis men.

### *Sociocultural Context*

Sociocultural context refers to the social and cultural systems participants identified as shaping their values and their lived experiences, which in turn impacted their relationships with trans identity and trans individuals. Sub-themes in this category include religion, family, coming out, regional context, and sexual abuse.

#### *Religion*

The first sub-theme in sociocultural context of LQSGl participants is religion. Three participants described how their upbringing in religious families and their personal religious beliefs opened them to liberal ideas or impacted their desire to serve others and treat people with fairness. Isabelle, for example, talked about how she finds Sikhism liberating, particularly in light of the religious conservatism that breeds internalized oppression among many members of the LQSGl community.

...it doesn't really impact me just because I'm – I'm not Christian and I'm not Catholic, none of those. I'm actually Sikh. So, for me like I – thankfully, I've never had to deal with – with the religious aspects of what it means to be in the queer community. Because like in – in Indian culture, like it's very taboo to be same-sex oriented but it's not like – like there isn't damnation that goes along with it...It's just something that you just don't talk about. You can do it. You just

don't talk about it. [Laughter]...Yeah, it's – it's a very kind of liberating religion. I'm very thankful for it.

Similarly, Bridget described how growing up in a progressive Catholic church taught her the importance of accepting all people.

That's who I am. I, you know, I'm a practicing Catholic...The Catholic Church I was raised in...It's a very open church. It's a very, I guess, progressive Catholic Church. Um, you see people of all different walks of life. You see all different ages. There are people...who have their partners who come in to mass and they just – you know who they are and they're accepted. You know?...They teach Sunday school...Yes, so we know that gays can be Catholic, too...Kind of just we try to create a welcoming environment for anybody.

Bridget later attended a Jesuit college, remarking that because of “the Jesuit ideal – servers helping others,” she wanted to learn how she could serve trans people.

Inclusiveness and fairness were concepts Jesse learned growing up in her Jewish family. She found that gaining information about trans people, beyond the initial stereotypes, helped her develop the attitude of acceptance in which she and her family believe.

I think when I was younger, and I was sort of like well, politically - to be politically correct in our community we had to be sort of open to transgender people and I was sort of like...I want to be ni[ce] – I want to understand but I don't get it. I don't really get it and now I think... you know, I think in the last ten years or so I...much more get it...

### *Family*

The second sub-theme in sociocultural context of LQSGP participants is family. The theme of family came up in several ways. First, participants who identified as tomboys received very clear messages and punishments from their families about gender role expectations. Bridget, for example, remembered how her mother dressed her as a young child and the battles they waged over Bridget's appearance when she was old enough to dress herself.

Every picture of me from the time I was born [until] about seven years old, I'm in dresses with my hair done, complete like Little Miss America pageant. I could kill my mother for this crap kind of thing. Um, you know, you curled your hair every day before you went to school. You wore outfits, things that matched, your little shoes, you had your little earrings in, and it was very - a pretty, pretty princess world. Um, and then when I began to develop and to come into my own, I was kind of like - I'm not comfortable in these clothes. That doesn't mean I'm not comfortable in my gender identity.

When Bridget began shopping in the boys' department, wearing "red, black, or blue" instead of pink and pastels, she described how her "mother would roll her eyes and get, 'Can you please wear some makeup?' 'Oh, my god! Can you please grow your hair out?'" Sadly, when Bridget came out to her mother as lesbian in her senior year of college, she was told to pack her belongings. Her mother stopped speaking to her. Even now, when she is allowed to return home, there is an implicit silencing of her lesbian identity.

A second way the sub-theme of family came up for LQSGP participants was in the way some families viewed LQSGP identity as abnormal or conflated sexual orientation with gender identity. For these participants, their parents seemed to search for explanations for what led their daughters to transgress the norm of being attracted to cis men. In an attempt to make sense of her lesbian identity, Jaime's father wondered if she disliked him. This led Jaime to wonder if she disliked men in general, but she eventually realized she was simply attracted to women. Jaime also recalled having an awkward conversation with her mother, who had read the intersex-themed novel *Middlesex*, and wondered if Jaime felt she was a man instead of a woman.

They didn't really understand um, what it was like for me to be a lesbian...my mom would say the weirdest things. She's like, "Well, do you feel comfortable being a woman?" "Do you like – do you like women?" I'm like, "Of course, I like women." [Laughter]. She's like, "No. Like do you like being a woman?" And...she read the book *Middlesex* and then was just really...She was like, "Everything good down there?"

Cass, who was teased by classmates for her tomboy identity, recalled that her gender expression was also a point of contention within her family. Its impact was especially evident in her decision to delay telling her parents that a close friend was transitioning female-to-male. She worried that she would be perceived as trans as well, and she was not prepared to have that discussion.

...[my friend] didn't know my family well, but they had met and I didn't tell my parents um for a long time...I think partly cause they knew we were so close and because my being you know like a tomboy or whatever had always been an issue

when I was a child. I felt like, in a selfish way I felt like his transitioning [laughter] reflected on me like in their eyes, it would be like, “Oh what does that mean you are?” ...I knew that would be their first question and it was, ...but um I had to be in the place where I felt like I could handle that I guess.

Third, in recalling how they first learned about trans people or what led them to become involved in trans issues, some participants recalled that their parents did not discuss LGBT identity and they were not exposed to LGBT people in their neighborhoods growing up. Jaime and Cass lived in the suburbs of major cities. Jaime remembers knowing about gay-owned restaurants, but said nobody talked about what that meant. They were simply good places to eat. Cass knew of one gay couple in her neighborhood. When the couple moved into the city, her parents said, “They’ll be more comfortable there.”

### *Coming out*

The third sub-theme in sociocultural context of LQSGP participants is coming out. Most participants described the coming out experience as launching them toward learning about trans issues/people. For some, discovering LGBT community meant learning about trans identity for the first time. Others found that their involvement in LGBT community deepened their understanding of trans identity, when they had previously relied on the media for more stereotyped depictions of trans people. The personal characteristics of curiosity and academic interest also fueled some participants to learn more about trans people once they gained awareness of trans identity.

Although Isabelle identified as bisexual at a young age, she described coming out as queer in graduate school as a time of exploration of the LGBT community.

I – didn't have a community yet. So, I was like trying to see that part of myself by researching all LGBT issues...And so, I just thought to be like well-rounded that I should know about trans issues as well.

Similarly, Jaime, who came out as lesbian in college, bumped into trans men when she started spending time with the LQSGl community in her area. Alice, who vaguely recollected how she first learned about trans people, found that trans became more real to her when she joined in LGBT community activities.

The sub-theme of coming out was experienced by three LQSGl participants as delayed. Such delays were described as providing participants with some insight into similar kinds experiences trans people may have in coming out. Such comparisons will be explored further under the category, using LQSGl experiences to understand trans. Lacking a model of lesbian identity led Jesse to assume she was heterosexual and marry a man. Later, when she discovered the possibility of identifying as lesbian, her coming out was delayed by the inadequacy of the models available to her. As described above, the 1970s and 1980s portrayed androgyny as the lesbian archetype, and Jesse did not find her femininity reflected in this image. For Bridget, coming out to herself was not nearly as difficult as coming out to her family, which she delayed for several years, fearing rejection. Her fears were confirmed when her mother kicked her out and cut off communication with her. Although Cass identified as a tomboy for many years, she did not come out until starting college. Cass reflected that her parents' avoidance of topics related to sexuality and attraction may have contributed to this delay.

...my family and I never talked about sexuality very much...one thing my mom had said when I was older was, she was like, “You know, I feel like I didn’t do a very good job talking about um basically that whole matter,” like, whether it’s everything from puberty on. I think she was a little scared. Um. So it was something that I delayed for a long time. Partly because I didn’t date very much, and so I justified it by [laughter] saying, “Well, if I was dating someone, then I would tell them...”

Coming out is an ongoing issue for Jaime. Wearing a ring and having the visible status of motherhood have led many people to assume she is married to a man. She is often asked what her husband does for a living. Whether and how she comes out depends on who she is talking to. Sometimes she describes her wife’s job but avoids using pronouns when doing so. Other times, she uses her wife’s clearly feminine name to implicitly come out. Once in a while she corrects people and states that she has a wife, not a husband.

Samantha, whose husband is trans, described her decision to come out to others as related to respecting her partner’s needs.

So if somebody...who doesn’t know that my husband is trans, um, but hears me do a lot of trans advocacy and then I come out to them as queer, they often...put two and two together and assume that he’s trans. ...we have a thing where I leave it up to him to out himself. It’s not fair for me to out anybody else....So it’s, um, difficult for me sometimes to...acknowledge my queerness knowing that it has an effect on...how much people know about him.

Jean's parents responded positively to her coming out as queer when she was a teenager. Her attempt at further understanding her experience in therapy, however, was less than ideal, and it fueled her passion for LGBTQ youth advocacy.

...when I was in high school I came out to my parents and um they had no idea what to do with that...And they had asked you know, "Do you want to go and see a therapist? Not that we think that there's something wrong with you, but we don't know how to help you." [Laughter] And I sort of said, "Yeah, okay." So we – my mom found a therapist in our network and we went and she was supposed to be a child and adolescent psychologist and she was really a child psychologist. I sat in a tiny chair and...it was awful. A terrible experience. And that was what originally got me interested in working with um LGBTQ youth because it kind of killed me that we lived in a mid-sized city and she couldn't find someone that was either specifically LGBTQ affirming or even LGBTQ affirming and worked with youth.

#### *Regional context*

The fourth sub-theme in sociocultural context of LQSGP participants is regional context. Participants who grew up in one region of the country and attended college and/or graduate school in a different region talked about noticing differences in the ways people communicated LGBT bias and the extent to which gender and sexual minorities were visible. Such regional differences underscored participants' own visibility as LQSGP women, impacted their sense of comfort in their communities, and influenced how active they became in the LGBT community.

Starting her first field placement in a public school system out East was anxiety-provoking for Cass, who moved from the south, where “you don’t have gays in the school system” because “you’re not out about it.” A classmate assured her that coming out would not be a problem at the school. Cass had learned to be vigilant due to her visible difference from “mainstream conservative southerners.” She remembered travelling with friends one night through a rural area in the south. She and her friends gladly humored a gas station clerk who assumed, based on their appearance, they came from a rock concert.

...I still have this memory of this one gas station that was like dark and there were very racist um signs about cars like outside and we were like, “Oh God!” and I just remember like the door shutting and we were all just like “We need to get out of here!” and the guy was actually like totally cool and just like – thought we came from some concert and, we were like, yeah it was great...

The people Cass encountered in the east tended to publicly suppress any negative opinions they may have had about LGBT people, whereas the norm in the south seemed to be to more freely speak one’s mind.

The east is a more liberal environment so people aren’t going to say things that are homophobic in public or vote that way. They generally have the view that gay people should get married, because it’s the right thing to do, but that doesn’t mean they love gay people.

In contrast, Jean attended a progressive southern university for her bachelor’s degree, but found herself representing LQSGI women in her Midwestern graduate program.

I went from being one of many, many queer identified people to being one of like four. So I went from – you know, not really having to talk about my sexual identity if I didn't want to, if it wasn't relevant, to sort of being like the educator of what it means to be in the queer community for everyone I go to school with...It was really a strange adjustment and in some ways it's really exhausting...

Likewise, Alice and her partner had such a negative experience in the Midwest that once Alice finished her graduate coursework, they moved back to the South to rejoin their strong group of LQSGl friends in their progressive southern city.

### *Safety*

The fifth sub-theme in sociocultural context of LQSGl participants is safety. This sub-theme was endorsed by Isabelle, who experienced sexual abuse by a male family member as a teenager. It was followed by years of emotional manipulation. Her experience greatly impacted her sense of safety among male-bodied people.

I was sexually abused by a man...So, I automatically like have a little bit more trepidation around men...So, I think it's just – it's so much more comfortable for me like I don't have to think about anything when I'm with other women whereas with men, I automatically have this kind of dialogue going in my head of needing to be more aware and hyper-vigilant.

Although Isabelle was the only participant who talked about safety, she likely represents many more LQSGl women. In fact, the theme of cis women feeling unsafe in the presence of male-bodied people is one of the primary defenses for adhering to the

“womyn-born-womyn” admissions policy of the controversial Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival.

### *Campus Climate*

Participants experienced their campuses as affirming, non-affirming, or neutral toward LGBT students, with some experiencing a combination between college and graduate school. The campus climate appeared to impact how participants felt about themselves as LQSGl women, to what extent they learned about and interacted with trans people, and how vocal they were in advocating for LGBT people.

#### *Affirming*

The first sub-theme in campus climate is affirming. Affirming campuses were described as having out and visible LGBT faculty and students, positively addressing LGBT issues in class, affirming participants’ discussions about their lives as LQSGl women, and/or offering a student pride group or other LGBT-related activities. Participants finding their campus climate to be affirming talked about positively developing their sexual orientation, meeting their social and emotional needs through LGBT or LQSGl community activities, and learning about trans and queer issues through their course work.

Cass, whose undergraduate campus was diverse and included many LQSGl women, felt free to explore her queer identity and to openly date women and trans men. Unlike most other participants, Cass reported having at least one FTM classmate and finding a strong queer presence on campus and in the surrounding community. She

worked with queer and trans co-workers and customers through her job at the local food co-op and had friends and roommates transition female-to-male. She also became active in a queer burlesque troupe and in a mentoring program for girls whose parents identified as queer.

Jesse, who attended college decades ago, was delighted to live in a city and attend a graduate program where diversity and inclusion are the norm rather than the exception.

...LGBT...is an area that's very much people are...encouraged to be um, open, inclusive... I don't know anybody who's not...out to some degree or another ...so ...we have some staff that probably identify as LGBT and...it's something that people just really automatic[ally] are pretty much...accepting of it. If they're not...they're instructed to be because the...department is...very...welcoming of diversity and...the feeling is you know, to be in this program, you need... to accept...everybody.

Jesse felt free to talk about her wife and to share her knowledge of LGBT history in class, particularly when the professor and students were younger than her. In fact, Jesse was able to use her lesbian identity as a way to help her classmates overcome their age-related stereotypes about her. Because she attended an urban commuter campus and had already established her life outside of school, she and her wife joined LGBT groups in the surrounding community.

Jean's undergraduate campus experience was a positive one. In fact, she felt sufficiently supported by the affirming campus community and did not need to participate in her campus's pride group. Alice also attended an affirming undergraduate institution,

but her reason for not participating in LGBT activities was different. Alice did not come out as lesbian until after graduation.

...in undergrad, I was not as out as I am now. I was a little bit scared to participate in things but right after undergrad, we – we still lived here for a few years after...So I went to some of the rallies that they had and um some of the vocational um, kind of talks that they did, and movies, and...I wasn't out really at all, um and so I didn't really participate a ton and what was – I knew it was going on because they have a very strong presence on campus but I was not really a part of it.

### *Non-affirming*

The second sub-theme in campus climate is non-affirming. Non-affirming campuses were described as having few out LGBT faculty and students, dismissing the relevance of LGBT issues to student learning, and overreacting to situations involving LGBT students because campus personnel lacked training. Those finding the climate to be non-affirming talked about withdrawing from social activities, feeling emotionally distressed, and having to find dating partners via the internet. On a more positive note, participants also provided LGBT trainings formally or informally to campus groups, sent LGBT-related materials to their professors to supplement what was taught in class, and spoke up in class more often about LGBT issues.

Bridget developed her voice as the “token gay kid” at her Jesuit college. She wrote a paper on Gender Identity Disorder for her adolescent development class despite her professor's rejection of the topic as irrelevant to the course. She became active in

working with the campus pride group to invite the first trans person in the history of the college to speak. The pride group overcame initial objections by the administration that the program was irrelevant to students' lives by expanding the program to include alumni and other campus offices, presenting an educational series about defying gender norms.

Samantha, who described her own set of difficulties attending a non-affirming college in the East, recalled a progression of events that resulted in rooming with her girlfriend. The situation sparked panic for administrators.

So the Dean of Students called our Resident Assistant, the student who's in charge of our floor and said, "There's a situation on your floor," and the RA said, "Uh, what, what situation? Did somebody come to you with something they didn't tell me first?" She was like, "No, no, no, there is a lesbian situation on your floor." [laughter] The way I heard the story, she's like whispering the word lesbian. ...so the student's like, "What do you mean there's a lesbian situation on my floor?" And she was like, "Well, [Samantha] and [her girlfriend] are living together.

"Yes, and..."

"Well, what are we going to do if they break up?"

"Well, then we'll treat it like any other roommate situation where they don't get along anymore and don't want to live together."

"Oh, is that it?"

"Yes."

"Okay."

I don't know, after apparently dealing with student issues for like 50 years, [the Dean of Students] hadn't figured out that it wasn't really an issue at all.

Samantha now provides LGBT trainings to various campus groups as a graduate student at the same college.

Alice, Jean, and Cass experienced their graduate institutions as non-affirming. Alice reported asking her clinical supervisor how to handle the issue of coming out to clients as she entered her first mental health practicum. Her professor stated that because lesbian identity is visible to clients, there really was no need for Alice to say anything. In addition to feeling angry about her professor's assumption, Alice was confused, as her gender presentation is feminine and thus does not fulfill stereotypes about lesbian appearance.

Jean described feeling isolated in graduate school with very few other openly LGBT students and faculty in her large program. Despite her department's focus on diversity, Jean expressed disappointment with the diversity curriculum.

Like I said I went to a very – well, we weren't terribly racially diverse but we went – I went to a campus that was very focused on diversity in undergrad... I've done a lot of learning around this and I was expecting, you know, it's grad school; it should be more advanced. And it was really kind of remedial, but a lot of people in my classes needed it... Which also was sort of scary.

Finally, Cass, whose classes did not address LGBT issues, recounted her surprise when a professor noted that a trans person had applied to the program.

...there is a trans identified person in our program who just started this year...

who I don't know but like actually through something I said in class the teacher was like, "Oh yeah. Someone who applied next year is trans." Which I – I mean that doesn't give away their information but it was still like...I know this might not be the best comparison but it's not like you'd say..."Oh, like a Black person applied." Or, "Oh, like a gay person applied." Like you just - I don't know if someone would say that...in that same context.

Cass recognized that her professor's statement, while potentially well-meaning, actually highlighted his view of the trans student as a novelty.

### *Neutral*

The third sub-theme in campus climate, endorsed by Jaime alone, is neutral. She noted that her graduate program did not house a very active LGBT community, in part, because graduate students at her institution attend classes but do not necessarily spend a lot of time on campus or in the department. As a result, Jaime brought up topics in class and openly talked about her partner and children without negative repercussions. On the other hand, she found few LGBT students with whom she could share her graduate experience.

### *Learning About Trans*

In order to qualify for participation in this study, participants were required to have some kind of contact with trans people or information about trans identity. By responding to questions about their experiences with trans people/issues, the theme of learning about trans emerged as a category. Few participants were able to identify any

one event that directly led them to learn or seek information about trans identity. Rather, they encountered trans people and issues through a combination of curiosity (and thus self-motivation), coming out as a sexual minority person, and happenstance. Furthermore, all participants described starting from a place of positivity or neutrality toward trans people. As their knowledge and experience grew, they reported gaining a deeper understanding of and comfort with trans identity. Sub-themes that arose from discussing those experiences include modes of learning and content of learning.

### *Modes of learning*

The first sub-theme in learning about trans is modes of learning. Every participant spoke of learning about trans identity from media such as books, television, movies, blogs, websites, radio shows, news articles, and celebrities. For example, Cass discussed how she learned about trans people through a TV talk show she watched with her friend growing up.

...if anything you saw, it was on Jerry Springer. [Laughter] So it wasn't like in the most like, educational or positive way but it was really...I remember it always being - I mean basically, like, a freak show. Like basically, like look at this person who thinks they're this or... I remember only seeing um male-to-female transsexuals. Like never seeing um female-to-male but um it would always be like you know, "Bob thinks Susie's his girlfriend but Susie's got something to tell Bob." You know, it was always like one of those things and I think I want to [say] like Phil Donahue or there was another one...where it's always... that deceptive, like transsexuals are deceptive.

Jean described her excitement upon hearing a well-known trans writer/activist speak at a conference that her university hosted.

Kate Bornstein came to speak as the keynote speaker and I got to see her speak. And it was really, really interesting. I'd read the Gender Outlaw book before... And there's one line that she talked about that really stuck out for me... when she was going through the process of trying to transition and everybody was asking her all these questions about, you know, like what happened in your past that made you want to transition... and she was like, "Really, I just wanted to be a pretty girl." And that line just always sort of stuck with me because I feel like so much of it is about... what's wrong with you that makes you want to not be the gender that you are. When really it's not about not wanting to be who you are, it's about wanting to become who you are.

Six of the eight participants also reported learning about trans identity from trans people in their lives. They described the majority of communications as positive, as illustrated through participants' interactions with trans partners, friends, co-workers, clients, classmates, and even friends-of-friends. Bridget, for example, recalled a pleasant exchange of questions and answers with her FTM friend about their respective identities and viewpoints.

I was talking to my friend... who is um, a transgendered male... but he would just sit there and if I had any questions, he'd answer 'em. If he had questions, I'd answer 'em. Just kind of like, oh, okay. Oh, all right... Like we would just go there and this could be about any topic where he'd be like, "Why do you women feel like this and that?" I was like, "Well, why do you men feel like this?"

[Laughter] You know. We could be open, we could be honest, we acknowledge each other's biases, where we are coming from, things like that.

Jesse, who worked at a non-profit agency helping people 50+ to find meaningful volunteer and life experiences, recounted her involvement with a trans woman certified as a shochet (a ritual person in the Jewish tradition who inspects the way animals are killed). When a local rabbi requested the agency refer a shochet, Jesse immediately thought of the trans woman, even though the role of shochet is strictly reserved for men. The woman responded by saying,

“Yeah, I’d be interested in talking about it but he’s gonna say that I’m not allowed to do that...not because I’m M-to-F, but because I’m considered a woman now.” So, it was a very peculiar, interesting odd thing because here was a very obscure, a hard-to-find job skill that she had that technically, in her background...It’s sort of like...there are people who say, when you’re transgender, “It doesn’t matter what you say. You’re – you’re still...the gender that you were born with,” but [not in this situation]...it’s very odd.

Jaime reported having only one direct encounter with a trans person. Jean had no direct experience with trans individuals until the participant check interview, when she reported working with her first trans client in a mental health setting.

I have had the opportunity to work with an FTM client and a ton of trans youth in the youth program. I really like my individual client, who has just started transitioning. He’s getting his first prescription for [testosterone], learning how to take shots, coming out to family, etc. This client has really brought home to me

that even though I don't have a lot of expertise in trans issues, trans clients are just like other clients who need support and understanding.

Four LQSGP participants experienced negative interactions with trans people. These interactions were related to feeling dismissed as a cis person and reacting to the appearance and/or personality of the MTFs they encountered. Bridget, who considers herself an out and proud trans advocate, described having her ally motives questioned by trans individuals.

...I've kind of had um, touching on like the not-so-smoothly, "Well, this doesn't apply to you," and..."You don't know what it feels like. You don't understand my struggle." You know. "You are one of them. You conform to gender roles...It doesn't even – it doesn't apply to you, why do you care? ... or are you just saying this to look good for me?"

Samantha, who interacted with MTFs primarily at trans conferences, and Jesse, who communicated with MTFs as colleagues, clients, and social peers, reflected on having been interrupted by MTFs or observing MTFs communicate in ways participants labeled as masculine. For example, Samantha reflected that

Trans women... have come from a place where as men, they were respected, um, on sight. They're given authority because they're male. People think they have great ideas because they're male. They grew up with male privilege...People who have transitioned as adults. So...they've experienced male privilege and their view of the world is um different than that of bio-women because bio-women have never experienced male privilege and know that they don't um, they don't live life the same way. They don't expect the same things of the world...

So as women, [MTFs] act as though they expect all of the male privilege they have previously received. So um they're loud. They speak – not that there's anything wrong with any woman being loud but they're very outspoken. They're um, um, they speak over other people, which is a very masculine way of communicating.

When asked if she would be willing to engage MTFs in dialogue about male privilege, Samantha said she would not because “when you question someone's privilege, they're always very quick to defend it.” While Jesse also acknowledged finding some MTFs to be “obnoxious” and typically “very tall or very large or both,” she presented a more nuanced understanding of MTFs, reasoning that sometimes the behavior is about personality regardless of trans status.

Finally, Isabelle, who is strongly drawn to feminine energy, described her discomfort with MTFs in the therapy room due to sensing that their femininity was not genuine.

F-to-M is like inherently more comfortable for me than M-to-F...to me, [with MTFs] it didn't feel like a genuine feminine energy. It was kind of like – like they were doing their interpretation of what it means to be feminine...rather than inherently embodying femininity...it felt very much like – like really flamboyant gay guys when they like just are very effeminate, very like flamboyant and have a particular vernacular in which they speak...like they would make their voice more high-pitched and would have kind of like a slang tone to it...Well, like RuPaul. That's my example. Of how when, like the way that RuPaul will speak of like

overly feminized voice of like the way that you pronounce your words and how high-pitched your voice is – things like that.

### *Content of learning*

The second sub-theme in learning about trans is content of learning. Participants spoke about their own perceptions of trans as well as what they picked up from observations and conversations with other LQSGW women. Thus, sub-themes within content of learning include personal perceptions of trans and others' perceptions of trans.

*Personal perceptions of trans.* The first sub-theme in content of learning is personal perceptions of trans. When asked what comes to mind regarding LQSGW women's perceptions of trans people, Bridget said, "Love. I know that's [a] one-word answer but [laughter] I love them." Participants spoke with ease about what trans identity means to them. In doing so, they overwhelmingly referred to what they view as people being themselves or becoming their true selves. Bridget, for example, stated, "Being trans means being you and whatever that looks like, feels like, sounds like, smells like, acts like, and sleeps with." Jean, in turn, reflected on the various ways trans people identify and the range of changes trans people make to bring their bodies in line with their gender identity.

...it's been sort of interesting to see how really while there are some trans individuals that want to transition completely, there are some that don't. And for them being trans means just getting top surgery or just doing hormone replacement or just identifying as not really having a gender, as being genderqueer and it's – it's been kind of cool to see that it isn't just, you know,

black and white. You're going from A to B or B to A. That it's a – there's really a lot of gradation in between.

All participants expressed awareness of the obstacles trans people face, referring to institutional disparities in health care, employment, housing, and re-documentation as well as more personal obstacles such as family rejection, social isolation, and coming out to partners. A number of participants also referred to the standards of beauty by which they understand trans individuals are often judged. Samantha, for example, explained how she views trans men and trans women as receiving different reactions from others based on Western cultural gender norms in relation to standards of beauty.

...because transition takes such a long process and does not happen overnight. Um, trans men for a longer period of time um get viewed as women and people use female pronouns for them because um in my experience, it's um – it's okay for a woman to be a tomboy and it's okay for a woman to wear man's clothing...they get away with it easier. Um, whereas, for a trans woman...that doesn't happen, you know. You... if you as a female-identified um biological male person are comfortable in male clothing, nobody is using female pronouns for you...you're going to have to wear really feminine clothing. Um, but then, if you have a lack of access to facial feminization surgery [and] top surgery...people are like, "who is the dude in the dress?" You know. So...you're more obvious, you stick out more to people, um, in public settings...that in itself, leads to a range of experience...anywhere from being stared at more to being harassed or...on the receiving end of some range of violence.

Participants also described learning that the various terms under the umbrella of trans mean different things to different people and may vary between academic, personal, and community use. Cass, for example, attempted to make sense of the complexities of the terms transgender and transsexual and what they mean in different contexts.

I feel like transgender can be so many different things whether it just, you know...I think it can be separate and...I guess I feel like in, say, like literature or something when transgender is used, I feel like it can encompass transsexual but it can also be separate, if that makes...sense?... I guess you know when people say like LGBT, you know, it's usually considered transgendered, but I think when you say the transgender community...I would think that that would encompass transsexuals, you know...So I feel like, you know, when people talk about it or when they talk about, you know, adding in transgender protections, like I feel like that, in that sense that would include transsexual people. Um, but I guess I feel like when people say, maybe if they're talking specifically about transsexuals or people who are transsexual, I feel like there might be differences as far as people who maybe either feel included in the transgender community or who identify as transgendered that's part of their identity or if it's more solidly transsexual...I guess it's a self-perception...but I feel if you're specifically talking about transsexuals, then you might not be talking about people who... haven't done physical or social...[transitions].

Cass, Samantha, and Jesse also reported learning about the tensions of cross-dressers and intersex people (those with disorders of sex development) related to their inclusion in or exclusion from trans communities.

The differing costs of surgical procedures for FTMs versus MTFs and the sense of deception that some trans people feel when they do not wish to disclose their gender histories were also noted. Participants who identified benefits to being trans, when asked, referred to the valuable self-exploration in which many trans people engage as they come to understand their gender. Alice, for example, imagined that “successfully navigating being transgender would help with....dealing with other stressful life events.”

*Others’ perceptions of trans.* The second sub-theme in content of learning is others’ perceptions of trans. Through multiple modes of learning described above, participants gained a wealth of information about how other LQSGl women view trans. The majority of participants identified negative perceptions of trans they either witnessed or heard about from others. These included the need for LQSGl women to advocate for their own rights before extending their advocacy to trans rights; believing trans men take the easy way out by fitting into the male box rather than struggling as butch lesbians; feeling pressure to be progressive but not feeling comfortable dating trans people; restricting admission to the Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival to “womyn-born-womyn”; and feeling more comfortable with variation in sexual orientation than variation in gender identity. Cass commented on the impact of seeing trans men in relationships with femme lesbians in her semi-traditional butch-femme LQSGl community and how those relationships were introduced and perceived.

So I think the impact of having transgender-identified men – it just kinda had, it was just interesting because for some people it was a novelty to have – um, you know, it could be like, “Oh, [this is] my boyfriend.” Um, it was almost like “Hee, hee. [laughter]” Like cuz he’s not really a boy, um, but it was still – like I know it

sounds like cheesy but like for some people it was very cool to have [a trans man as a partner]... and there was definitely people who were not comfortable with it, um, who felt that once people identified as men, then they were the people that they didn't want to associate with because that was why they were in this community.

Participants also alluded to more general perceptions of trans identity by gay, bi, and heterosexual cis people, such as assuming all trans people want and undergo full gender confirming surgeries; calling trans people "It," or inappropriate pronouns when uncertain of (or openly rejecting) their identity; believing that LGBT community centers should serve the whole community, but feeling uncomfortable supporting trans people who don't pass well; believing there is no reason to identify as a woman if one is not attractive and no reason to identify as a man if one is not tall; and assuming that all FTMs were once lesbian-identified. Furthermore, Alice, who had just started the process of having children with her partner, noticed that questions about gender start in utero with, "What are you having? A boy or a girl?"

LQSGP participants did observe positive perceptions of trans among others. During a class discussion about Gender Identity Disorder in young children, Jesse observed her classmates express sadness upon hearing that some children are not allowed to freely express their gender. Alice, who was active in the local drag community through her partner, observed that some MTF drag performers felt accepted by the LQSGP community. LQSGP women in Isabelle and Bridget's social circles recognized that trans people are often marginalized by the LQSGP and LGBT communities. Finally, Jesse recalled a time when gay men in her LGBT travel organization responded positively to a

trans woman. Jesse was unsure, however, if the woman's gender history was clear to them and whether that would have made a difference in their positive regard.

... there was a couple who, um, there was an M-to-F with...a lesbian partner...who had... transitioned a long time ago and she passed really well. She passed – in fact, she passed so well that my – um, my wife did not know that – that she was M-to-F. I somehow did. ...And I think that people were more comfortable with them – um, but I also don't know how many of the men knew she was an M-to-F.

### *LQSGL Experiences*

Participants frequently applied their knowledge of sexual orientation and their lived experiences as LQSGL women to what they imagined could be true for trans identity and trans individuals discovering and living out their gender identities. For example, Bridget recognized that trans people's coming out stories are just as varied as those of LQSGL women. She also noted that there are multiple images of being trans, just as there are many representations of being LQSGL. For this reason, Bridget complained when her co-workers tried to make her their "little Ellen DeGeneres" just because she is a White American and "likes girls." Alice expressed her belief that gender identity is no more a choice than is sexual orientation. She also suggested that her own experiences of stigma may have helped her be more sensitive to the stigma that trans individuals experience. Samantha referred to the long list of rights LGB and trans people are denied. When asked to comment on the obstacles some trans people face, she replied,

“How long of a list do you want?” and referred to a publication she read which reported on

disparities in terms of health care, housing, jobs, um...and how there’s this huge disparity for trans folks across the board but if you’re talking even more specifically about trans people of color that the number – like the disparity is so much greater...And then increases for people who are poor...and I don’t know if the report says this but then like people with disabilities.

She also observed that the students on her campus are more educated about lesbian than trans identity, potentially making trans students’ experiences more difficult than those of lesbians.

Jean, who identified as bisexual before coming out as queer, drew on her negative experience with lesbians who viewed her as a fence-sitter to understand how it might feel as a trans person to be expected to pick a clear gender and stick with that gender.

Likewise, Jesse, who identified as heterosexual before coming out as lesbian, recalled how difficult it was to come out without a model of lesbian identity that reflected her experience. She recognized that many trans people delay their coming out for the same reason. She also referred to understanding trans people’s need to be accurately identified, much like she refers to her partner as her wife because they are legally married and that status is important to her. Both Jesse and Jaime noted aspects of visibility that impact people’s acceptance of trans individuals. Jaime identified her own privilege in being able to hide her sexual orientation when necessary, which is not always possible for trans people. Jesse, on the other hand, referred to how “the invisible identity [of people struggling with gender identity]...really resonates” with her because of her own, often

invisible identities as Jewish, Baby Boomer, vegetarian, and lesbian. Jaime and Jean expressed curiosity about how trans individuals define their sexual orientation and whether they have a sexual orientation coming out like LQSGl women do. Jaime noted:

...that's one of the things that I've always kind of compared...the two against, is ...where do [trans people] see themselves [sexual] orientation wise? I've always thought like I know lesbians and obviously they're homosexuals and they – you know they see themselves as a woman in love with a woman, but...when it's a transgender relationship... do they still – they'd use that same terminology like would they still consider it...‘cause...you don't go to your parents and say, “Mom, Dad, um I want you to know that I'm a heterosexual.” ...So I wonder if now they see themselves that way if they would need to like declare that or how it would be for them...so I've always kind of compared – I guess when thinking about lesbian issues I think that um transgender individuals with their orientation would kind of...feel the need to define it, like I've felt the need to define mine.

Isabelle used her experience as a woman “in a man's world” to imagine what it might feel like to transition from female to male. Conversely, Cass, Jean, and Jaime drew on messages from the trans community to more firmly establish their senses of self as LQSGl women. Through Leslie Feinberg's experience with female-bodied masculinity, Cass realized she did not have to give up her tomboy gender expression in order to identify as a woman. Jean discovered that being attracted to girls did not make her the wrong gender and Jaime found that she did not have to dislike men in order to love women.

### *Expressions of Advocacy*

All LQSGl participants expressed their support of trans people, though to varying degrees and in different ways. Sub-themes in this category include attitudes and behaviors.

#### *Attitudes*

The first sub-theme in expressions of advocacy is attitudes. Participants' attitudes in support of trans people were evident throughout their interviews. In addition, the researcher asked what participants think would be the ideal relationship between trans individuals and LQSGl women, and how that ideal could be realized. Every participant referred to a standard of respect and support between the two groups. Participants articulated a variety of thoughts about how that could come to fruition.

Bridget and Cass explicitly referred to themselves as allies. Bridget, who stated her love for trans individuals, envisioned LQSGl women and trans people

learning to work with one another using the power and the resources that each group...[has], you know, what are strengths of one community can help the other community and what are weaknesses of one can be balanced out and be worked through kinda very much like...a sibling relationship. Maybe you don't ideally and perfectly and always project that you like one another... but there's such a deep love and commitment and sense of family and...togetherness that you work to overcome that and hopefully you bring out the good in both people because if one group advances, hopefully you can advance the other...

Bridget wondered why accepting trans people couldn't be about love and dignity instead of appearance, which often leads to rejection for trans people. She also said she claims an ally identity because she learns from her trans friends, not simply because she has trans friends. Cass, on the other hand, communicated timidity about standing up for trans people because as a cis woman she feels uncertain about her right to teach others about trans. She did, however, assert the importance of establishing intentional communication between trans people and LQSGl women. She imagined that LQSGl women could increase their understanding of how trans men experience the LQSGl community and trans men could gain an appreciation for the impact their presence in the community has on LQSGl women.

Samantha, Alice, and Jaime commented on the courage and strength it must take for trans people to be true to themselves in a biased society. Furthermore, Samantha, whose husband is a trans man, suggested LQSGl women meet more trans people in order to realize that the two groups have a lot in common in the struggle for equality.

I would really like to see more lesbians stand and be allies for the trans community. I don't think it happens enough. I think it should happen more. Um...because trans folks have minimal, if any...um...legal protections...and there are shared issues, so...um...you know, I know a trans guy who was going off on his Facebook the other day about the implications of DOMA [Defense of Marriage Act] on his tax returns...um...because his partner is also a trans man, and so...they're married gay men and...so they run into the same federal tax issue that a lesbian couple does...[Y]ou're probably less likely to stand up for a cause you're not... you don't think that you're related to, and that...you don't think

affects your life. ...and so if you don't know any trans folks, why are you going to try [to stand up for them].

For her part, Alice reported feeling like an “anomaly” for thinking trans identity is simple and clear when others find it confusing. She reported wanting LQSGW women and trans people to understand and accept one another. She identified the Human Rights Campaign, local LGB(T) community groups, and institutions of higher education as needing to do more to include trans people in their agendas, programming, and facilities (i.e., gender neutral restrooms). Alice stated that even if people are not aware of it, gender is part of everyone's world. Jaime also discussed the importance of accepting trans people and described the role of respect in accomplishing this.

I don't know like through communication or like I don't know. I don't even think it would need to be communicated. I think that's just a human being type thing. You know you're respectful towards other people regardless of your differences, and if it's someone that's in your life and they're a significant person in your life. I guess even if you have like a co-worker or something that you have that you would be respectful and still value their opinion as if someone else's opinion. You don't have to necessarily agree with it or agree with their lifestyle, but as long as you can accept them as who they are in their personality versus their, you know, versus their gender... it's [what's] important.

Unlike Alice, who focused on the significance of gender, Jaime underplayed gender to highlight the importance of accepting people for their personality and humanness.

A number of participants voiced their dedication to self-awareness around trans issues. Cass, for example, who previously dated a trans man, considered to what extent

her androgynous appearance and queer identity might impact her FTM partner's ability to be regarded as a man (versus a trans man), particularly in the LQSG community that she frequented. Cass also reported feeling protective of trans individuals, having learned from trans friends of potentially life-threatening bias incidents. Samantha's self-awareness, on the other hand, led her to interact with her FTM husband differently in queer space than she would ordinarily because they are perceived as a straight couple. Although it often felt unfair, Samantha resisted public displays of affection in order to respect the safety of queer clubs and avoid appearing to be "that creepy straight couple [who] are just here to check out the scene and gawk at the queer folks." For Jesse, self-awareness meant acknowledging her own biases, such as in the following example.

I mean, I even have my... little biases was this – this – um, person that – um was at my old agency who was , um, who was [F-to-M] and, um, was a really, really, really good cook and I kept thinking, "Why does he persist in cooking? Doesn't he feel like that makes him like a feminine stereotype?" [Laughter] I mean. And naturally, there are lots of men and lots of gay men...that cook but I just kept thinking, you know, why does he emphasize this, you know, it seems, it seems like he wouldn't want to. [Laughter] It seems like he would want to do something else.

Jesse, who had more experience interacting with trans women than any other participant, reported empathizing and sympathizing with MTFs who have difficulty passing. Jesse spoke extensively about Western standards of beauty, wishing they could be eliminated so that trans people – particularly trans women – could be more accepted. She does not expect that to happen, however, so she advocates for LQSG women to "know and meet

[trans people] and see that they're real people, you know, they're not weird. They're not, you know, they're not odd or off-the-wall in some way."

Jean's attitude of advocacy emerged in two question-statements she theoretically posed to the LQSGl community and her lesbian friends. In the first, Jean wonders why LQSGl women discriminate against trans people.

I don't quite understand how someone who has been discriminated against because of their sexual identity can then turn around and be discriminatory against someone else because of their gender identity. Like, I guess it's two different things. It's two different pieces of who you are, but, you know, people have been telling you all of your life that you're unnatural for loving someone of the same gender and you're going to turn around and tell someone that they're unnatural because they don't feel like they fit in their body? That's, that's just not nice, and there's no reason for it.

In the second question-statement, Jean highlights the binary categories of men and women in wondering whether her friends would be open to dating trans people.

So it's always been very fascinating to me to see how gender and gender presentation play into who people choose to date and how they choose to identify. And like you know. I don't think I've ever asked any of my lesbian friends, but I've always been very curious like, you know, would you date a trans woman if you date women. Or if not and if you wouldn't why wouldn't you? Because what's the difference between a trans woman and a cis woman. I don't know. It's very interesting to me because there's so much variation and yet we still are so tied to the idea that there are men and there are women.

Jean expressed her wish that the LQSG community resist the sense that LGBT people must compete against one another for limited resources. Instead, she would like the LQSG community to work toward making gains for all people under the LGBT umbrella. She also realizes that many LQSG women are not personally acquainted with trans people. She suggests trans immersion programs to improve LQSG women's understanding of trans individuals.

Isabelle presented a perspective on attitudes of advocacy that is different from the other participants. She talked about how her loss of safety around male-bodied people and valuing of feminine energy led her to advocate for trans men. She did not express overt bias against trans women, but rather indicated more interest in the experiences of FTMs, primarily because she sees them as struggling against women's historical disempowerment. She reported feeling comfortable with the concept of the gender spectrum and wanting trans people to be more included under the LGBT umbrella. Isabelle noted that "gay men take up like a huge portion of education and... support for the gay male community whereas in comparison, it's like the trans community, perhaps just because it is a smaller community, it doesn't have as much of that." In order to achieve increased inclusion, Isabelle suggested that trans people be invited to already existing LGBT community centers so that they can begin to express their needs and concerns, and eventually create their own spaces.

So in order for the trans communities to kind of grow and flourish, I feel like that there would need to be kind of like they hook-up with either a gay center or a lesbian center. So that way if a trans individual can't find trans resources, they can

go to like lesbian center and find out about trans issues. So almost like the trans communities would be like sister centers to these gay and lesbian centers.

### *Behaviors*

The second sub-theme in expressions of advocacy is behaviors. Participants engaged in a range of behaviors that demonstrated their support for trans people. Some advocacy behaviors were quite visible. For example, Samantha, Bridget, and Alice provided training about LGBT issues to undergraduate campus groups. Jesse educated cis clients at a non-profit agency about using trans-affirming language and adhering to trans-affirming policies.

I was doing intake of new clients, um, the intake form we had, ...a list of...I don't know, like ten different [laughter] gender identification[s] and then there was, um, there was "drag king," on there. There was "M-to-F." There was "questioning" on there. There was "queer" on there. So, you could...identify with any of those but...one was supposed to say, you know, "Do you identify with any of the following?" and read all the different variations of that. And people would look at you and say, "What's drag king?" You know. [Laughter] ...so – then, you'd be like, explaining to somebody...I enjoy that. [Laughter] I enjoy educating people and I enjoy educating people about inclusivity.

Jean also visibly advocated for trans people by supporting trans youth through her practicum at her local LGBT community center. As described previously, a number of participants also advocated for trans issues in their classes by writing about Gender Identity Disorder in adolescents, voicing concern about the practice of limiting children's

gender expression, and discussing the needs of the trans population in reference to clinical issues and interventions. In addition, Jesse intentionally used correct names and pronouns for the trans clients in her job skills classes, modeling appropriate behavior for the cis class members. Bridget served as a judge for her campus's student drag contest and Cass performed in drag at a local bar during college. For Samantha, voicing her support for trans people at a conference landed her on the board of directors of a trans-serving organization. She also successfully advocated for trans-friendly protections while working in the diversity office of a health care organization.

Other advocacy behaviors that were less visible, but no less important, included broadening personal language to include people of all genders, housing an FTM friend who could not safely return to his rural home, resisting office jokes that involve gender stereotypes, and researching the needs of the local trans community. A number of participants also reported sending their professors LGBT-related materials to supplement assigned readings that fell short of including these populations. Furthermore, Jean chose her graduate program based on its relationship with a practicum site that could offer her direct experience with trans youth. Jesse frequently had informal conversations with people about why trans individuals should be treated fairly. Samantha ended a partner relationship because of her partner's transphobia.

...so one of the first people that I started talking to about [trans issues] was [my husband] before he transitioned and before he was male identified um and his reaction was totally transphobic. Um. Which was actually turned into this huge issue in our relationship and we ended up breaking up. Because I was like, I – these people are part of your community whether you like it or not and the fact

that you are so close minded about this is a real issue for me and I cannot be with someone who so harshly judges people of their own community. Like that's not cool with me. Um and so you know, it's easy to see now that it was his own like, internalized transphobia.

Nearly every participant endorsed educating themselves as an important aspect of their stance of advocacy. Even when participants were too busy to be involved in LGBT activities as graduate students, they continued to reach out for information by asking questions when unsure of people's pronouns, consuming media to enhance their learning, and verifying the accuracy of what they learned with trans people.

### The Process Model

The LQSGl women I interviewed were involved in the process of understanding and developing a stance of advocacy toward trans people. All of the categories and their properties discussed above play a fundamental role in the process of understanding and developing a stance of advocacy. Figure 2 shows a schematic representation of the process model. The main components of the model are similar for each participant. The properties of each component are more or less emphasized depending on individual experiences.

I discerned that the process of understanding and developing a stance of advocacy begins when one learns about trans people, trans issues, and/or trans identity. Before beginning to examine this aspect of the model, however, it is important to discuss the role that personal characteristics, sociocultural context, and campus climate played in relation to participants' learning about trans-related information. First, participants' personality,

values, gender expression, and attraction influenced the timing of and ways in which LQSGl women encountered trans information. These factors also affected their initial openness to trans identity and their ability to connect with the experiences of trans people. For example, Jaime's natural curiosity and Bridget's social justice orientation propelled them to seek information about trans identity. Cass's punishments for her tomboy gender expression and Jean's stigmatized bisexual identity helped them to empathize with the bias incidents faced by some trans people.

Second, the sociocultural context of religion, family, coming out, regional context, and safety played a role in participants' openness to differences and desire to treat trans people with respect. Sociocultural factors also influenced the messages participants received growing up about gender norms and the sense of safety they felt in response to gendered bodies. For example, the Judaic teachings of fairness and inclusivity facilitated Jesse's openness to differences and new ideas. Cass's lack of exposure to LGBT people growing up and Isabelle's desire to know more about the LGBT community upon coming out influenced their interest in acquiring knowledge about trans people. Isabelle's experience of sexual abuse directed her to learn about FTMs and feel less comfortable with MTFs.

Third, participants' experiences of the campus climate as affirming, non-affirming, or neutral toward LGBT people affected to what extent they learned about and interacted with trans people and how they felt about themselves as LQSGl women. Several participants who experienced their campuses as non-affirming or neutral limited their coming out, felt isolated and emotionally distressed, and withdrew from social activities. These experiences seemed to increase their understanding of what trans

students may experience on non-affirming campuses. Some participants also reduced their LGBT advocacy behaviors while attending non-affirming campuses because they did not feel safe. Others demonstrated resiliency by taking action against bias. For example, Bridget's non-affirming campus influenced her to develop a voice for advocacy. Participants who attended affirming campuses interacted with trans people in their classes and clinical training, spoke up in class about trans issues, and felt free to explore their identity. Affirming campuses enabled Cass to positively develop her sexual orientation and Isabelle to learn about LGBT issues through her coursework.

As stated above, learning about trans issues is the first process in which LQSGl women engage as they move toward understanding and developing a stance of advocacy. This process involved contact with various media representations of trans identity and personal interactions with a range of trans individuals such as co-workers, roommates, friends, and partners. The openness, empathy, and voice that participants developed prior to learning about trans issues served to influence how they processed what they learned. For example, Cass, who grew up as a tomboy and identifies as androgynous/genderqueer, did not internalize negativity about trans people despite seeing MTFs depicted on television as a "freak show." Bridget, who adopted the attitude of serving others from her Catholic upbringing, used what she learned about trans-related bias as a springboard for speaking out against social injustice.

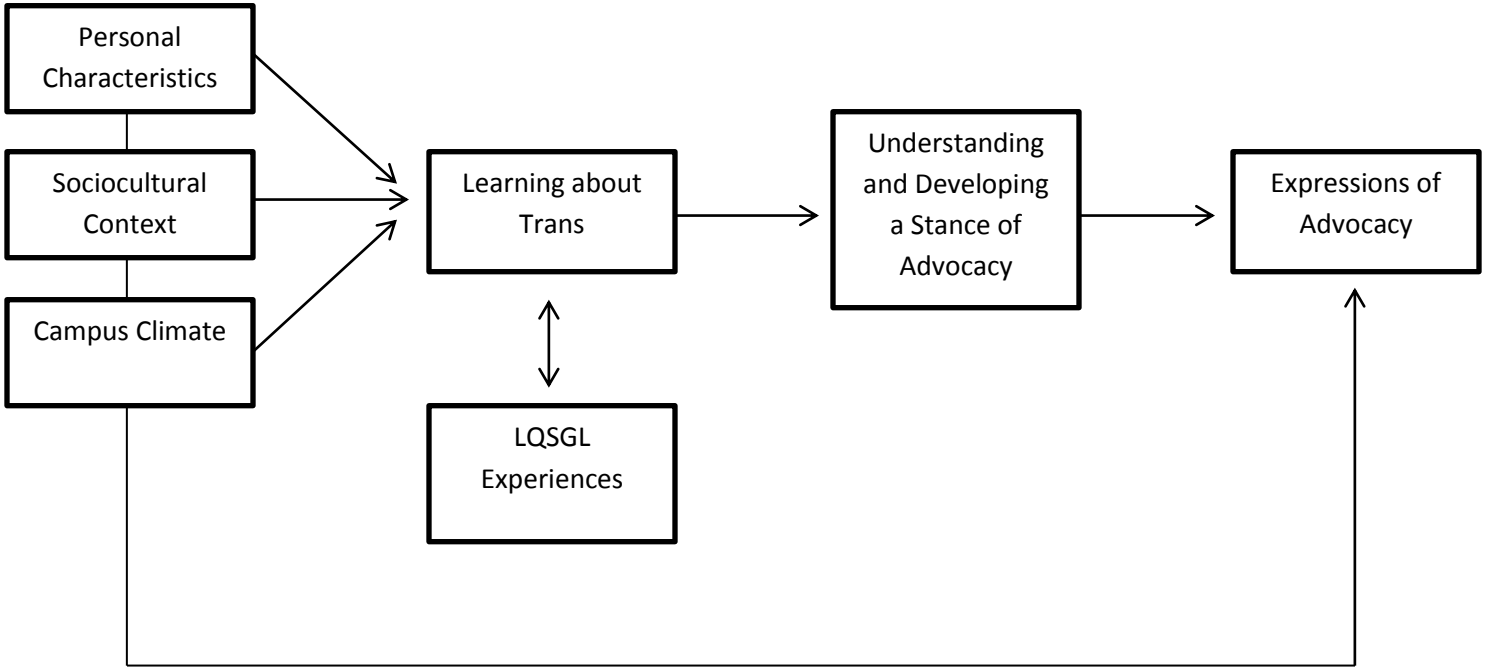
The next aspect of the model is LQSGl experiences. Participants drew upon their lived experiences as LQSGl women to connect with and internalize what they learned about gender identity. Participants who recognized the existence of multiple images of LQSGl women, whose own coming out was delayed due to lacking sufficient models of

LQSGl identity formation, and who identified the many rights denied to LQSGl women understood that the same could be true for trans individuals. Alice applied her experience of not choosing her sexual orientation to understand that trans people also do not choose their gender identity. Jesse related trans people's desire to be identified accurately to her own desire to be recognized as legally married to her wife. In addition, participants who initially came out as bisexual experienced bias from lesbian women and supposed that trans individuals may experience similar bias in LQSGl communities. The interaction also worked in the reverse direction, as some LQSGl participants gained awareness about their own gender expression as they learned about trans identity. For example, by attending a talk by trans activist Leslie Feinberg, Cass learned that she did not have to give up her masculine/tomboy gender expression in order to identify as a woman.

The consequence of understanding and developing a stance of advocacy was to engage in some form of expression of advocacy. These expressions were conveyed through attitudes such as empathy for trans experience, recognition of trans people's courage, and the desire to foster respect and communication between trans people and LQSGl women. Expressions of advocacy were also communicated through behaviors such as informal conversations promoting fairness, educating oneself about trans issues, using gender appropriate language, and providing education and training about trans identity. The scope of participants' attitudes and the range of their behaviors varied from person to person and were influenced by the personal characteristics, sociocultural context, and campus climate described above. For example, Jaime, who preferred to maintain harmony in relationships as a middle child, did not interrupt bias incidents, but expressed the attitude that trans people should be treated with respect. Samantha, on the

other hand, who was attracted to masculinity in women and female-bodied men, married a trans man. Alice, who felt isolated on her graduate campus, withdrew from visible advocacy behaviors until she could relocate and reestablish her support system.

Figure 2  
Schematic Representation of The Process Model



## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

The goal of this study was to construct a theory that describes lesbian, queer, and same-gender-loving (LQSG) women students' perceptions of transgender (trans) individuals and the processes underlying the formation of these perceptions. Eight LQSG graduate students who reported having experience with trans individuals and/or trans-related information were interviewed. Grounded theory procedures were used to develop a process model to represent the resulting core category, understanding and developing a stance of advocacy, along with the development and the consequences of this core category. By way of review, contextual factors for the core category included personal characteristics (personality, values, gender expression, and attraction), sociocultural context (religion, family, coming out, regional context, and safety), campus climate (affirming, non-affirming, and neutral), learning about trans (modes of learning and content of learning), and LQSG experiences. The result of understanding and developing a stance of advocacy was to engage in expressions of advocacy (attitudes and behaviors).

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the results presented in the previous chapter in light of relevant literature, implications for practice, and recommendations for future research. The chapter consists of five sections. The first section includes a brief summary of the process model, using an example of a prototypical participant to illustrate the model. The second section is organized by the psychology and sexual minority research literature reviewed in Chapter II that pertains to the current findings. The third section presents implications of the findings for counseling professionals and

professionals in higher education. In the fourth section, strengths and limitations of the study are considered. In the fifth and final section, recommendations for future research are suggested.

### Summary of the Process Model

The process of understanding and developing a stance of advocacy was influenced by a number of factors and resulted in various expressions of advocacy. Participants' personal characteristics, sociocultural context, and campus climate prepared them, in various ways, to approach learning about trans identity. As they encountered trans issues and became involved with trans individuals, they drew on their own experiences as lesbian/queer/same-gender-loving women to internalize and make meaning of what they learned. Some also developed clearer understandings of themselves as gendered beings through learning about trans identity and the gender spectrum. Participants expressed advocacy in a range of ways, from providing free housing to a trans friend who experienced family rejection to believing that every person deserves the right to be who they truly are. A prototype of an individual participant's journey through the process model is described below in order to illustrate how the process model may work from beginning to end. In order to protect the confidentiality of the LQSGGL women who participated in the study, the prototype includes characteristics and experiences representative of a number of participants rather than the potentially identifiable story of a single participant.

A queer-identified graduate student in a social work program describes herself as naturally empathic and values social justice. She recalls that she was sometimes

mistaken for a boy growing up because of how she dressed and played, and at times her parents discouraged her from participating in activities they viewed as masculine. In her pre-teen years, she wondered if she was supposed to be a boy instead of a girl because she was attracted to girls. Growing up in her Christian family in the South, there were few opportunities to learn about LGBT identity. When she did encounter LGBT people, she was not always aware that they identified as such. Through her family and church she learned the importance of helping others and loving all people.

When she entered college in the South, she had her first relationship with a woman, came out as queer, and joined her campus's pride group. While the people and ideas she encountered seemed new to her, she realized that she had heard about LGBT people at various times growing up. She noticed that a few genderqueer students attended the pride group, and she thought she should learn more about this new community of hers. She began reading websites and blogs to learn more about LGBT people. She also took courses in women's studies and sociology, where she learned about the gender spectrum and better understood the messages about masculinity and femininity that she received growing up. While she found pockets of affirming students on campus, most of the students in her residence hall asked if she had a boyfriend and made homophobic remarks, so she spent most of her time with peers from class and otherwise kept quiet.

She decided to enter a social work program in the West. The campus was more affirming and she met trans men and genderqueer students in her classes as well as at the queer women's clubs she and her friends frequented. Encountering

trans women was more rare. When she did see trans women, she overheard other queer women make negative remarks about their overly-feminized appearance. She felt this was unfair, and determined to keep learning and become an affirming mental health provider for LGBT clients. She also reflected on her gendered experiences as a child, the stigma she experienced on her undergraduate campus, and the relative privilege of having an identity that was not always visible to others. She related these experiences to what she saw trans women, trans men, and genderqueer students experience. She described viewing trans people as simply wanting to be themselves and deserving respect. She was very aware of the unfairness of laws, limited access to services, and social sanctions that trans people experience. She hoped that communication between trans people and LQSGGL women could improve. She largely kept her advocacy hidden from her parents, as their religious and political views had never supported LGBT identity. On campus, however, she was quite vocal. She raised issues in her social work classes about LGBT issues in general, wrote papers about the need for affirmative therapy for trans clients, and found a practicum site where she could work with trans youth. She actively engaged in efforts to educate others about trans people.

### Current Findings in the Context of Psychology and Sexual Minority Research Literature

A number of areas of the psychology and sexual minority literature reviewed in Chapter II provide context for the results of this study. In particular, the literature on stances of professional organizations toward practice with trans clients; campus climate for LGBT students; gender identity and sexual orientation; models of lesbian identity formation; the

socially gendered body; and the intersections of trans theory, queer theory, feminist theory, and gay and lesbian studies seem especially relevant to current findings. Similarities and differences between relevant research and the experiences of women in this study are noted, along with possible new findings not noted in prior research. Furthermore, an area of the literature not explored in Chapter II, development of sexual minority allies, will be presented as relevant to the current study's results.

### *Stances of Professional Organizations Toward Practice with Trans Clients*

Seven of the eight women who participated in this study were graduate students in mental health fields. According to the literature, professional organizations representing psychologists, social workers, counselors, and psychiatrists all publish ethical codes of conduct, statements of non-discrimination, and/or competencies for working with trans clients. While graduate programs may differ in the degree to which trans issues are taught and non-discrimination policies are discussed, it would not be unusual for individuals studying in these professions to become aware of trans people as a population deserving of their awareness and respectful treatment.

Mental health disciplines are also likely to attract individuals who already possess interest in helping others and some openness to diversity. In fact, several of the LQSGl women in this study noted that they felt drawn to the mental health field because of their natural empathy and desire to serve others. Furthermore, they described their curiosity, openness, and identity as mental health professionals as contributing to their interest in learning about trans people. Participants also cited values such as maintaining professional competency, having a social justice orientation, appreciating differences, and valuing women's empowerment as related to understanding and developing a stance of advocacy. In addition, several participants shared how their upbringing in religious families and their personal religious beliefs led them to value differences and impacted their desire to serve others and treat people with fairness.

Interestingly, the one participant enrolled in a business program was focused on philanthropy, a field that would likely also attract individuals interested in serving others.

An aspect of the campus climate literature that may relate to participants' identities as mental health professionals is Brown et al.'s (2004) finding that faculty in the soft sciences reported more interest in LGBT workshops, higher relevance of LGBT topics to their field, and more positive attitudes toward LGBT issues than faculty in the hard sciences. While the LQSGl women who volunteered to be interviewed for this study were graduate students rather than faculty, it seems likely that they responded to the call for participation in large part because of their professional identities and the personal characteristics and sociocultural contexts that influenced their choice in graduate programs.

### *Campus Climate for LGBT Students*

Every participant reported experiencing a non-affirming or neutral campus climate at some point in their higher education experience, either on their undergraduate or graduate campus. As a result, many of the LQSGl women recalled limiting the extent to which they came out to others, feeling isolated and emotionally distressed, and withdrawing from social activities. These experiences seem consistent with Rankin (2005) and Herek's (1993) observations that students at homophobic or transphobic campuses may be prevented from fully participating in campus activities and/or may hide their sexual orientation from others. Participants' experiences with non-affirming or neutral campus climates seemed to increase their understanding of what trans people may experience in non-affirming settings.

Some participants responded to a non-affirming campus climate by reducing their LGBT advocacy behaviors because they did not feel safe. Although these participants disclosed their sexual identity to varying degrees on campus, this seems similar to Gortmaker and Brown's (2006) finding that closeted students participated less in social and political activities

within the lesbian and gay community than did students who were out on campus. On the other hand, several participants described developing their voice for advocacy in response to the non-affirming campus climate. In this case, LQSGl women provided LGBT trainings to the campus community, spoke up in class about trans issues, sent trans-related materials to professors, and collaborated with pride groups to develop gender identity programming on campus. These LQSGl women appeared to engage in resilient behaviors in reaction to their campuses' non-affirming climates.

Nearly every participant reported attending an affirming campus at some point in their higher education experience. These participants felt free to explore their identity, practiced advocacy behaviors by speaking up in class, and interacted with trans individuals as colleagues or clients through their classes and clinical training experiences. This seems consistent with the implied message in the literature that students experiencing an affirming campus climate are likely to participate more fully in campus activities. The campus climate literature could more specifically address how LGBT students' advocacy behaviors are impacted by affirming campus climates.

### *Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation*

Coming out as LQSGl was accompanied by confusion among some participants and their families about participants' gender. Because attraction to women was viewed as a masculine attribute, some participants' parents wondered if their daughters disliked men for some reason or felt they were men, while one participant thought she must be the wrong gender. Parents' conflation of gender identity and sexual orientation led one participant to delay disclosure of her FTM friend's trans identity because she felt certain they would assume she was trans too. These experiences seem similar to Gainor's (2000) observation that stereotypes about LGB people are

often based on gender expression or gender appropriate behavior, and thus people sometimes confuse the two.

Participants who expressed themselves as tomboys during childhood and adolescence were consistently chided by their parents. Brown and Rounsley (1996) suggested that heterosexual caregivers may discourage gender nonconforming behavior in an effort to prevent their children from becoming LGB. It is unclear what motivated LQSGP participants' parents to react in such negative ways to their daughters' expressions of masculinity and/or androgyny. It is possible that these parents feared their daughters may eventually identify as lesbians. Or, in the case of one parent who read about disorders of sex development/intersex, parents may have been concerned that their daughters felt they were actually boys.

A common theme among the LQSGP participants was their awareness that like them, trans individuals go through a coming out process. Participants used their own coming out experiences to recognize that just as LGB people have varied coming out stories, so too do trans people. Some participants recalled their own emotional responses to coming out and imagined that trans individuals may have similar emotional reactions. In fact, Brown and Rounsley (1996) pointed to this commonality by asserting that coming out to self and others is a key developmental task for both groups. The LQSGP participants in this study appeared to use coming out as a way to connect their experiences of discovering and disclosing sexual orientation to potentially similar experiences of trans individuals regarding gender identity. Brown and Rounsley also stated that coming out as trans can elicit a more negative response from others than coming out as LGB. Likewise, the women who participated in this study acknowledged that coming out as trans is often less understood and less accepted, particularly because of trans people's visibility as they transition.

Finally, some participants recalled feeling unsupported in their own therapy, in classes, or in their clinical training because of their sexual orientation. While these participants did not explicitly refer to the DSM, they conveyed their determination to become affirming LGBT

therapists themselves. This finding seems to support the idea that LQSGl women may find commonality with trans people through their shared history of assumed pathology (APA, 2000; Lev, 2007).

### *Models of Lesbian Identity Formation*

Among the many models of lesbian identity formation reviewed in Chapter II, Eliason's (1996a) model of lesbian identity assumption appears to have the most relevance to this study's findings. The model is composed of four cycles: pre-identity, emerging identities, experiences/recognition of oppression or invalidation, and re-evaluation/evolution of identities. Cycle one, pre-identity, is characterized by a lack of awareness that lesbian identity exists and resulting feelings of difference from others. Several LQSGl participants in this study recalled that their coming out was delayed in part by living in areas where LGBT people were not visible and growing up in families where LGBT identity was not discussed. It was not until they discovered LQSGl identities that their feelings of difference made sense.

Cycle two, emerging identities, is characterized by comparing oneself to dominant cultural stereotypes about lesbians and questioning the validity of those images. LQSGl participants shared the importance of having models of lesbian identity that accurately reflected their own senses of self in order to come out. Stereotypes emphasizing androgyny, for example, were not useful for one participant who identified strongly as femme. Furthermore, participants who first came out as bisexual did not necessarily gain exposure to models of queer identity, which they later adopted as more accurate than lesbian or bisexual identity. Interestingly, Ponse (1978) and Rust (1992), in their nonlinear accounts of lesbian identity formation, seemed to accurately reflect the

experiences of the previously bisexual-identified women in this study. That is, the women perceived the lesbian community as holding bisexual women in low esteem, viewing them as fence-sitters and wanting them to choose a side.

The third cycle, experiences/recognition of oppression or invalidation, is characterized by an increase in the significance of lesbian identity as individuals recognize discrimination, harassment, social exclusion, and visibility based on sexual orientation. By learning about gender-related bias, LQSGl participants in the current study developed an understanding of the ways trans individuals experience oppression and formed stronger advocacy beliefs and/or behaviors. This third cycle also appears to reflect the present study's category, LQSGl experiences, as participants applied their lived experiences as LQSGl women to what they imagined to be true for trans identity and trans individuals coming out to themselves and others.

Cycle four, re-evaluation/evolution of identities, is characterized by the development of new meaning in one's identity as one experiences the world and learns more about lesbian identity. LQSGl participants in this study recalled that spending more time in LQSGl communities helped to normalize their experiences of difference and isolation. Interestingly, participants also began to encounter trans individuals and information about trans identity. An area not explored in the literature is that LQSGl communities in different cities and regions of the country may include, to a greater or lesser degree, trans individuals (as well as bisexuals and gay men) in addition to LQSGl women. In response to learning about trans identity, several LQSGl participants reported discovering that their attraction to women or their tomboy gender expression still allowed them to identify as women. While Eliason noted the potential for social forces to impact

lesbians' racial, ethnic, and other forms of identity during this cycle, it does not appear the author imagined the impact of learning about trans identity on LQSGl women's understandings of their own gender identity and gender expression.

### *The Socially Gendered Body*

Most LQSGl participants referred in some way to the bodies of trans individuals. Some of the women commented that MTFs tend to appear larger, broader, and/or taller than cis women, implying that because of the permanent effects of testosterone, trans women cannot reverse the biological height and body shape differences that occur for females and males. Participants who described some trans women as "unattractive" also reported knowing trans women who "passed well." It seemed that the more feminine trans women appeared, the more attractive they were perceived to be, and hence, they passed better or were more accurately regarded as women. Thus, participants seemed to apply Western cultural standards of beauty to the trans individuals they encountered. One participant even remarked that full acceptance of trans people will be impossible as long as these beauty standards exist. For the most part, literature about bodies as socially gendered focused on women's experience of having specific genitals (Braun & Wilkinson, 2005) and the breast development of (mostly heterosexual) women in the context of attracting men (J. Lee, 1997; Millstead & Frith, 2003). The literature does not appear to have explored the unique ways trans bodies may present as socially gendered.

Several LQSGl participants also discussed their sexual and romantic attraction to people having different bodies, whether those were cis lesbians, female-bodied men, or masculine-identified queer women. These participants referred to people's personalities as more important to them than their bodies. One participant even commented that she isn't sure what the actual difference is between cis women and trans women, implying that genitals are not the sole

defining feature of women. Research about bodies as socially gendered does not seem to reflect this particular experience of LQSGGL women.

When mistaken for a drag queen at a local club, one participant referred to her own body's size and shape to prove that nothing can be taken for granted when relating a person's appearance to their identity. Interestingly, the remaining LQSGGL participants did not directly reference their own bodies or specific body-related aspects of attraction, except perhaps for one LQSGGL woman who referred to feeling unsafe around male-bodied people due to her experience of sexual abuse. Kelly's (2007) discussion of body silence, in which lesbian women, influenced by the dominant heterosexual culture and the lesbian subculture, felt uncomfortable speaking to others about their bodies, may be one explanation of this phenomenon.

*The Intersections of Trans Theory, Queer Theory, Feminist Theory, and Gay and Lesbian Studies*

One of the participants in this study reported reacting to trans men and trans women in specific ways because of her history of sexual abuse by a male family member. She became keenly interested in the experiences of trans men, whom she viewed as taking the ultimate stand against patriarchy by passing as a man "in a man's world." She also felt unsafe in the presence of male-bodied people (i.e., trans women) and perceived trans women as presenting a false femininity in their voice pitch, use of slang terminology, and general mannerisms, much like the famous American author and drag queen, RuPaul. Certainly this participant is not the only lesbian woman to have experienced violence perpetrated by a man, and her adoption of a woman-centered orientation can be viewed as an understandable response to her loss of safety. This perspective seems to be consistent with feminist theory. It may, however, be challenged

by the larger discourse of trans theory and queer theory. These competing perspectives are discussed next.

Some feminist theorists promote practices such as separatism that oppose the oppression of women and the devaluing of femininity (Heyes, 2003). They would likely support an individual who sets gendered boundaries to ensure her own safety. Queer theorists, on the other hand, may take issue with the separatist stance, as it assumes the inevitability of identity categories (i.e., male and female) and supports the view that people's (male) bodies somehow determine their oppressive behaviors (Lovaas et al., 2007). The circular narrative continues with feminists critiquing queer theorists for their erasure of women and their accompanying experiences of oppression (Bonwick, 1993 as cited in Jagose, 2004). Transgender theory contributes to the discussion by noting that trans individuals often identify a distinct gender in themselves. Thus, trans men do not necessarily experience their gender transition as related to struggling against patriarchy for the empowerment of women (Hines, 2006).

The perception that trans women present a kind of false femininity has been discussed in the literature. Transgender theorist Wilchins (2004) acknowledged that MTFs are often seen as pretending to be women. Feminist/queer theorist Butler (1990, 1999), argued that because gender is socially constructed, there is no original model of femininity to copy. Rather, what we perceive as false femininity in the presentation of a trans woman, for example, is an illusion based on the knowledge that the performer of femininity is male-bodied and thus must be compared to some original (which, according to Butler, does not exist).

A common theme among LQSGl participants in the current study was discussion of the degree to which trans people were able to pass, or be regarded as their true gender. Some participants noticed trans people, particularly MTFs, in their social circles who passed better than others, while other participants heard second-hand accounts from LQSGl friends about MTFs who stood out as more visibly trans. At times this visibility was viewed as embarrassing or problematic by LGB people. Gay and lesbian studies addresses an aspect of this phenomenon related to the lesbian and gay rights movement whereby the normality and similarity of LGB people to heterosexuals is emphasized in an attempt to gain sympathy and support for LGB civil rights (Rugg, 1997; Wilchins, 2004). Also known as assimilationist politics, this perspective can make it difficult for trans people to be accepted into LGB communities when they are viewed as looking odd or different and the goal is to fit in.

The theme of male privilege came up as several participants recounted their perceptions of trans women as “obnoxious” and attributed MTFs’ behavior of talking loudly and interrupting others to the male privilege they experienced as men prior to transition. This is similar to what Morrow (2003) observed when acknowledging the distrust some women have of MTFs due to their perceived history of benefiting from male privilege. Likewise, participants in this study described several occasions when women in their LQSGl communities rejected the company of trans men, viewing them as having accessed male privilege through their male gender expression (Halberstam, 1998b) and thus no longer members of a women’s community. On the other hand, when trans men were welcomed into LQSGl community, particularly as the partners of queer women, participants questioned the extent to which the FTMs were accepted as real men.

### *Development of Sexual Minority Allies*

The present study did not specifically seek trans allies for participation so that LQSG women with a range of perceptions of trans people could be recruited. Yet, the group of women who participated in this study emerged as trans allies. In light of this fact, and of the process model developed, it is interesting to discuss the present findings in the context of the ally development literature. In particular, Broido (2000) and Duhigg, Rostosky, Gray, and Wimsatt's (2010) research on the development of heterosexuals into sexual minority allies show remarkable similarities to the experiences of LQSG women students' understanding and development of a stance of advocacy toward trans individuals. The two models are discussed below in relation to the current study's findings.

Duhigg et al. (2010) conducted a qualitative exploration of how 12 heterosexual participants developed as allies to sexual minorities. The authors analyzed data using consensual qualitative research methods and presented a model of the development of heterosexual allies that includes six domains: early family modeling, recognition of oppression and privilege, response to recognition, impact of values and attitudes, others' reaction to ally work, and rewards from ally work. Each domain is considered below in association with the results of the present study.

The first domain, early family modeling, is characterized by participants' families modeling affirmative views toward humanity or prejudice toward different groups of people (Duhigg et al., 2010). The authors noted that ally development "evolved in spite of – or, perhaps, even because of – the negative modeling some of the participants observed" (p. 6). This domain is quite similar to the current study's sub-theme, family, as

LQSGl women described positive and negative experiences in their families surrounding sexual orientation and gender identity, as well as other sociocultural contexts, that shaped their perceptions of trans people. In addition, the LQSGl women in the present study formed positive perceptions of trans individuals in spite of receiving negative messages about trans people from the media and other LGB people in their lives.

In the second domain, recognition of oppression and privilege, participants recognized the oppression of sexual minorities and the privileges of their own heterosexual identity by forming interpersonal connections with LGBT people (Duhigg et al., 2010). The second domain was also characterized by recognition of the oppression of additional groups, such as women and people with disabilities. Importantly, it was the participants who held these oppressed identities who reported awareness of additional bias. That is, the participants in Duhigg et al.'s study used their own experiences of discrimination to relate to the experiences of LGBT people. Similarly, the LQSGl women in the current study drew upon their own experiences as LQSGl women to understand and relate to the experiences of trans individuals. Furthermore, LQSGl participants recognized numerous ways in which trans people often have more difficulty than LGB people due to stigma and discrimination, essentially owning their privilege as cis women. Finally, much like the heterosexual participants in Duhigg et al.'s study, the LQSGl participants in the present study learned a great deal from their interpersonal relationships with trans friends, colleagues, and clients.

The third domain of Duhigg et al.'s (2010) model of sexual minority ally development is response to recognition. This domain was characterized by participants' emotional responses to recognizing privilege and oppression, including guilt, anger, and

sorrow; feeling urged to use their privilege to oppose injustice; and feeling it would be unacceptable to not respond to derogatory remarks about sexual minorities. Similar responses to the recognition of trans-related oppression and gender privilege were found in the LQSGl participants in the current study. Participants expressed their stances of advocacy through more or less visible advocacy behaviors and communicated their feelings about fairness and respect for trans people. Interestingly, not all LQSGl women reported feeling urged to act or respond to bias against trans people. Perhaps a combination of personality (i.e., not wanting to create conflict) and environmental factors (i.e., feeling unsafe as LQSGl women at non-affirming campuses) influenced the current study's participants in ways that were different for Duhigg et al.'s heterosexual students.

Duhigg et al.'s (2010) fourth domain, impact of values and attitudes, describes how "participants reported that the experience of recognizing and responding to privilege or oppression was shaped by and further solidified their core values and attitudes" (p. 8). For example, heterosexual participants cited the experiences of not choosing their sexual orientation, personally valuing diversity, and being impacted by their religious or spiritual beliefs to love and serve others when considering LGBT identity. Furthermore, engaging in activism facilitated participants' development of new understandings of LGBT identity.

This fourth domain has numerous commonalities with the experiences of LQSGl women in the current study (Duhigg et al., 2010). First, LQSGl participants drew on their lived experiences as LQSGl women to better understand the experiences of trans individuals. For example, they related the sanctions they received for masculine gender expression to potential sanctions for trans people's violation of gender norms. They

related their lack of choice about sexual orientation to the lack of choice for trans individuals regarding gender identity. They also likened the struggles of coming out as LQSGl to the struggles some individuals experience coming out as trans. Second, like the heterosexual allies described above, LQSGl participants cited personal values such as having a social justice orientation, developing professional competency, and empowering women, as shaping their perceptions of trans people. Third, religious beliefs were a shared characteristic for both groups, as several LQSGl women reported growing up with religions that promoted fairness, equality, and service to others. Finally, the process model depicted in Figure 2 shows an interaction between learning about trans and LQSGl experiences. This suggests that much like the heterosexual allies in Duhigg et al.'s study, whose engagement with activism promoted new understandings of LGBT identity, the participants in the current study seemed to come to new understandings of trans identity as they processed what they learned in light of their own experiences as LQSGl women.

The fifth domain in Duhigg et al.'s (2010) model of heterosexual ally development, reactions to ally work from others, is characterized by a wide range of reactions to participants' ally work. These included positive and negative reactions from participants' local communities and the LGBT community. Positive responses came primarily from the heterosexual participants' partners and also from appreciative members of the LGBT community. In addition, several participants in Duhigg et al.'s study "experienced negative reactions from the LGBT community, specifically suspicion about their ally work" (p. 9). The authors discussed the role of outsider status in creating difficulties with trust between the heterosexual participants and the LGBT community.

Likewise, one of the current study's participants reported receiving a negative reaction from trans individuals in response to her advocacy efforts. She felt her motives for advocacy were questioned and her status as a cis woman was used to suggest that gender identity issues did not pertain to her. LQSGP participants also experienced positive reactions to their advocacy efforts, for example, being invited by campus organizations to provide LGBT trainings and performing drag alongside trans individuals.

Finally, Duhigg et al. (2010) described a sixth domain, rewards from ally work. Rewards are characterized as participants feeling that they were making a difference and positively affecting society, enjoying friendships and connections they made with others through their ally work, receiving personal and professional recognition for their ally work, and having general positive feelings about self. While the LQSGP participants in the current study did not describe receiving formal recognition for their advocacy efforts, they did report appreciating their relationships with trans friends and the opportunity to work with trans colleagues and clients. Rewards from advocacy work was not explicitly mentioned by the participants in the present study, though the congruence between participants' advocacy attitudes and behaviors, their personal sense of doing the right thing by treating others fairly, and the importance of fulfilling their professional obligations by helping others, seemed quite clear.

Broido (2000) conducted a phenomenological study that explored how six traditionally-aged White heterosexual undergraduate students (three women and three men) became social justice allies in the areas of racism, heterosexism, and for men, sexism. Similar to the present study of LQSGP women's perceptions of trans individuals, Broido found that "all participants entered college attitudinally congruent with the aims

of social justice work” (p. 7). Broido found three major components that led to the students’ ally actions: increased information on social justice issues, engagement in meaning-making processes, and self-confidence. These components appear to relate closely to the results of the current study.

Broido’s (2000) first major component, increased information on social justice issues, is characterized by participants gaining information about racism, heterosexism, and sexism. Similar to the present study, participants learned about these forces through meeting members of the target population, having a diverse group of friends, traveling, engaging in classroom discussions, and doing independent reading. Participants learned about the impact and continued existence of oppression, the experiences of target group members, and the common dynamics of and connections between different forms of oppression. Broido’s description of this major component of her theory seems very similar to the category learning about trans (with modes of learning and content of learning sub-themes) in the present study. Interestingly, the significant role of the internet and television/film media that was integral to LQSG women’s contact with trans-related information was not cited in Broido’s study. It seems that in the span of more than a decade since the study was published, the proliferation of these types of media and students’ access to them has been profound.

Broido’s (2000) second major component, engagement in meaning-making processes, is characterized by participants “transform[ing] information into knowledge” (p. 10). They accomplished this by discussing what they learned with others, thinking about the information (self-reflection), and using it to take the perspective of the target groups. Further, Broido explained that participants “used their precollege values and the

information they had acquired as the content for these meaning-making processes” (p. 10). This finding seems to resonate with how the LQSGl participants in the current study approached learning about trans people/information from perspectives informed by their personal characteristics, sociocultural contexts, and campus climate experiences. Participants then drew upon their experiences as LQSGl women to engage with what they learned about trans people. In this way, participants in the current study also participated in a process of meaning-making, or in Broido’s parlance, they transformed information about trans people into knowledge.

The third major component of Broido’s (2000) theory, self-confidence, is defined as “comfort with one’s identity and internal loci of worth and approval” (p. 12). Broido described college students’ development of self-confidence in terms of the leadership roles they assumed in high school and early college and the importance of these in feeling prepared to speak up against discrimination. She also referred to the role self-confidence played in allowing her participants to acknowledge their various privileged statuses. Discussion of self-confidence was not a major theme of the present research, perhaps because the LQSGl participants were considerably older than the students in Broido’s study. In addition, LQSGl participants may have already developed some level of self-confidence through having navigated college and graduate school as sexual minority women, among other potential oppressed identities.

Broido (2000) did, however, refer to an aspect of confidence throughout her study which may relate to LQSGl women’s advocacy behaviors. Broido defined this as “the development of the participants’ confidence in, and clarity of, their positions on social justice issues and the development of confidence in their knowledge base” (p. 12). While

all the LQSGl participants in the current study developed a stance of advocacy toward trans individuals, they varied in the degree to which they felt comfortable engaging in more or less visible advocacy behaviors. The process model for understanding and developing a stance of advocacy suggests that expressions of advocacy were influenced in part by the personal characteristics, sociocultural contexts, and campus climate of the participants. That is, one who strongly valued social justice may have advocated for trans ally training on her campus in spite of experiencing her campus as non-affirming. Another participant, who was more reserved and quiet but who felt equally as positive toward trans people may have advocated in more subtle ways, such as through clinical work with trans clients. It is also possible that exploration of participants' confidence, as defined here by Broido, may help elucidate additional reasons for such differences in expressions of advocacy.

An additional area of interest in the ally development literature related to the present study is Stone's (2009) inquiry into how 32 Midwestern lesbian and gay activists who were involved in LGBT politics over a 10 year period became allies to transgender people. Using a framework of approximating experiences (Hogan & Netzer, 1993 as cited in Stone; Feagin & Vera, 1995 as cited in Stone), Stone found that borrowed approximations, or empathizing with transgender discrimination, and overlapping approximations, or linking trans oppression to their own oppression, played strong roles in lesbian activists becoming transgender allies. These concepts seem similar to this study's categories of personal characteristics (i.e., empathy) and LQSGl experiences. Furthermore, Stone found that the lesbian activists' overlapping approximations often intersected with global approximations, or their connection to political orientations such

as feminism and social justice orientations. Interestingly, similar political orientations were found to impact the attitudes of LQSGl women in the present study.

### Implications for Counseling Professionals and Professionals in Higher Education

There are a number of implications for counseling professionals and professionals in higher education that can be gleaned from the current exploration of LQSGl women's perceptions of trans individuals.

Many LQSGl participants in this study reported that they did not have access to accurate models of LQSGl identity formation during their exploration of sexual orientation. In particular, existing models of lesbian identity formation did not adequately discuss the role of gender expression or allow for fluidity in attraction (i.e., to female-identified male-bodied people). Furthermore, participants reported that their awareness of the range of gendered expressions that are possible for lesbian women was limited to stereotypes from the media and other sources. Thus, clients who enter therapy with the aim of exploring their sexual orientation may benefit from learning about the array of identity labels, possibilities for attraction, and range of gender expressions that are open to them. Clinicians could initiate such discussions by helping clients explore their psychosocial histories for family and cultural messages, religious or spiritual beliefs, and personal values that may have influenced their current views about gender identity and sexual orientation. In addition, clinicians could acknowledge the role that the campus climate may play in clients' concerns about coming out. In addition to considering clients' family and cultural systems, clinicians could explore the impact that coming out may have for clients in their particular campus environments.

The LQSGl women who participated in the present study were graduate students primarily in mental health fields who reported being attracted to their professions due, in part, to their openness to diversity and interest in serving others. Their ethical codes and contact with trans individuals through course work and clinical training seemed to further deepen their understanding of and commitment to advocacy for trans people. Such awareness and values may not be common among some other areas of study. As professionals in higher education consider the most effective ways to develop and implement trans ally trainings and related programs, they may wish to consider Brown et al.'s (2004) recommendation that such programs be tailored to specific campus groups. These authors suggested that because various campus groups they surveyed had different levels of knowledge, interest, and attitudes about LGBT people, it may be helpful to tailor LGBT programming to groups that share common interests or attitudes toward diversity. For example, professionals could consider the various ways third-year engineering majors, graduate students studying philosophy, and first-year residents of a diversity themed living-learning hall may consider the relevance of gender identity to themselves and their areas of study, recognize their own privileged and oppressed identities, and access empathy in order to better appreciate trans students' experiences.

Consistent with the campus climate literature many of the LQSGl women in the present study who attended non-affirming campuses shared their experiences of social withdrawal and emotional pain. Interestingly, a number of LQSGl women in this study whose campuses were non-affirming demonstrated resilience by channeling their reactions to the negative campus climate into social justice work. At times, their work was met with resistance from campus administrators. When possible, professionals in

higher education – particularly those who are aware of working in neutral or non-affirming campus environments – may consider assisting students by providing mentorship, leadership training, and consultation on university policy to facilitate constructive and effective student responses to bias.

### Study Strengths and Limitations

#### *Strengths*

Transgender issues are an emerging area of research within counseling psychology. As such, the present study is one of the first to explore how individuals form their attitudes toward trans people. This study fills a gap in the existing literature by empirically investigating LQSGl women students' perceptions of trans individuals and the processes underlying the formation of those perceptions. The use of the grounded theory method of qualitative inquiry allowed the theory to be constructed directly from the reports of participants. Hence, the resulting theory is said to be grounded in the lived experiences of this sample of LQSGl women. Furthermore, participants were selected from different regions of the United States and identified as having a variety of demographic characteristics. The use of a peer auditor strengthened the credibility of the study, as did the participant check interviews, which permitted LQSGl women to make corrections to the summary of their personal story and further reflect on their experiences and perspectives. The use of an identity definition of lesbian that included terms such as queer and same-gender-loving resulted in attracting women with a broad range of experiences in relation to the research question. While the participation by graduate

students in mental health related fields was a limitation in some ways, this shared characteristic of the LQSGl participants was also a strength. It allowed the researcher to construct categories that related specifically to a sample of graduate students in mental health related fields, revealing contexts and characteristics that could be unique to this population and which may not have emerged in a different sample of LQSGl women. Finally, the results of this research lay essential groundwork for a myriad of potential future studies related to LQSGl women's perceptions of trans individuals and to the role of gender in LQSGl women's understandings of their own identities.

### *Limitations*

While grounded theory methods served as a strength for this study, the nature of qualitative research is such that generalizability of findings is not the main goal. Thus, the results of this study of eight LQSGl women's perceptions of trans individuals must be evaluated carefully to determine its applicability to other, similar groups. The small sample size is a limitation, as the experiences of these LQSGl women are descriptive of this sample but are not necessarily representative of the entire population. The study was additionally limited by the sample's shared characteristic of graduate studies in mental health related professions. That is, the voluntary nature of the study and mental health professionals' interest in contributing to research concerning social justice issues may have impacted who responded to the call for participants and the finding of advocacy toward trans individuals.

### Recommendations for Future Research

Because this is one of the first empirical investigations of LQSGWL women's perceptions of trans individuals, the possibilities for future research are numerous, and only a few are discussed here. First, there are several areas of the psychology and sexual minority research literature – the campus climate for LGBT students, models of lesbian identity formation, the socially gendered body, and the development of heterosexuals into sexual minority allies – that hold promise for future research related to the present topic. The literature on campus climate for LGBT students has understandably focused on characterizing aspects of the campus environment that LGBT students experience as non-affirming and the negative consequences these experiences have on LGBT students in terms of their academic, social, and personal success. Given that some of the LQSGWL participants in the present study who experienced non-affirming campus climates actually increased their campus advocacy behaviors, the literature in this area could acknowledge the resiliency of such students by investigating the impact of the campus climate on LGBT students' advocacy behaviors.

Gender expression, either as masculine/tomboy or as femme, played a role in the ability of several participants in this study to recognize their sexual orientation and understand their gender identity. Unfortunately, existing models of lesbian identity formation include gender only to the extent that they acknowledge potential feelings of difference from other girls/women due to same-sex attraction and view same-sex desire as non-traditional gender behavior (McCarn & Fassinger, 1996). Researchers could develop new models that consider the role gender expression may play in the discovery of one's sexual orientation. Furthermore, new identity formation models could be made

available for those who identify outside of the standard lesbian label, such as queer and same-gender-loving. By incorporating the diversity of identity terminology and attractions that exist, these models may serve a broader audience. This seems preferable to requiring LQSGl women to choose between squeezing into a model that does not quite fit and dismissing the possibility of LQSGl identity all together.

The current research about bodies as socially gendered is extremely limited. The experiences of LQSGl women are scarcely included and those of trans individuals are completely absent. Several of the LQSGl participants in the current study referred to the bodies of others in terms of attraction. They described being woman-centered, not seeing any difference between cis and trans women, and not caring about the “plumbing” of their partner(s). In addition to incorporating the experiences of LQSGl women and trans people into the literature on bodies as socially gendered, researchers could more fully explore LQSGl women’s perspectives on what is important to them about their own bodies, their partners’ bodies, and trans bodies. It is possible that more information about how LQSGl women view trans individuals could be gained from such exploration. Kelly’s (2007) notion of body silence may be a helpful tool for researchers interested in broaching this topic with a population that may have qualms about body-related talk.

Research from Broido’s (2000) investigation of the development of heterosexuals into social justice allies revealed that self-confidence was a major theme in participants’ decisions to speak up against discrimination. While all the LQSGl women who participated in the present study engaged in trans advocacy attitudes and behaviors, several participants were less visible in their support of trans people or less willing to interrupt bias. In addition to conceptualizing these results in terms of personal

characteristics, sociocultural context, and campus climate, it is possible that an exploration of participants' self-confidence as related to trans advocacy may shed light on additional reasons that some LQSGl women did not take (further) action as advocates for trans people. Additionally, an important aspect of the process model, understanding and developing a stance of advocacy, was the ability of LQSGl women to empathize with trans individuals based on their own experiences coming out as sexual minorities. Research related to ally development could further explore the role of empathy in forming an ally identity.

There are three additional findings of the current study that seem to warrant further investigation. First, a number of LQSGl participants observed that LQSGl women who partner with trans men must negotiate their visibility – as perceived heterosexual or queer couples – within queer space. Likewise, LQSGl women who frequent these spaces must navigate their own potential reactions to the presence of trans men. Research focused on the women and trans men in these communities could help researchers better understand how each group experiences the other and identify areas for potential education or intervention. Research could also be broadened to investigate LQSGl women's attitudes toward trans men more generally. Second, and relatedly, the LQSGl women's attitudes toward trans women involved comments related to their appearance and references to how trans women communicated due to having experienced male privilege. It appears that further investigation into LQSGl women's attitudes toward trans women is warranted. In addition, future research could also focus on how and why trans women and trans men may be perceived differently by LQSGl women and in what contexts.

Third, the interviews in which LQSGl women participated for the present study included asking what participants thought would be the ideal relationship between LQSGl women and trans people and how that ideal could be realized. It seems important to bring trans voices into the conversation by investigating what trans individuals experience in relation to LQSGl women, how they feel about inclusion in or exclusion from LQSGl and LGB communities, and how they would like any changes to be implemented. Trans individuals who wish to be more included in LGB activities could provide ideas about making such settings more gender-inclusive and welcoming to trans people. Trans individuals could also comment on how LQSGl women could be more respectful while interacting in trans spaces.

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## Appendix A

Recruitment Materials: Email to Consortium Listserv

Hello! My name is Bonnie Benson and I am a lesbian doctoral candidate in Counseling Psychology at Western Michigan University. I am currently conducting research that explores lesbian students' perceptions of transgender people. I am looking for undergraduate or graduate lesbian/queer/same-gender-loving women to participate in my IRB-approved dissertation under the supervision of Dr. Patrick H. Munley. I am writing to request that you share the information below and/or the attached flyer with students who may be eligible to join this research study.

In order to be eligible to participate, a student must:

1. Be currently enrolled as a **sophomore, junior, senior, or graduate student** at a U.S. college or university,
2. Identify her sexual orientation as **lesbian, queer, same-gender-loving**, or otherwise woman-identified
3. **Not** identify as **bisexual, heterosexual, transgender, or transsexual**, and
4. Have had **exposure to transgender information OR experience with transgender people** personally, socially, academically, or professionally in order to be able to respond to questions about transgender people/issues.

Interested students may contact me by email at [bonnie.benson@wmich.edu](mailto:bonnie.benson@wmich.edu) or by phone at [Phone number] for more detailed information about the study.

Participation involves completing an informational background questionnaire and three audio-taped phone interviews (approximately 6 hours total) that I will conduct. The results may provide valuable information about the opinions, attitudes, and beliefs that lesbian students have about transgender people. I expect the results to be applicable to interventions aimed at improving the campus climate for LGBTQ students.

I welcome participation from students who have a range of perspectives about transgender people and who are diverse with respect to geographic region, age, race, ethnicity, ability status, religious/spiritual affiliation, socioeconomic class, and gender expression (i.e., androgynous, butch, femme, other).

This study is voluntary for research purposes. If you have any questions or comments, please contact me, Bonnie Benson, or my advisor, Dr. Patrick Munley (contact information below). Please do not hit "reply" to this message because you may reply to the entire listserv. To contact me directly send a separate email to [bonnie.benson@wmich.edu](mailto:bonnie.benson@wmich.edu)

Thank you.

Bonnie M. Benson, M.Ed.  
Western Michigan University  
[Phone Number]  
[bonnie.benson@wmich.edu](mailto:bonnie.benson@wmich.edu)

Patrick H. Munley, Ph.D., Advisor  
Western Michigan University  
(269) 387-5120  
[patrick.munley@wmich.edu](mailto:patrick.munley@wmich.edu)

## Appendix B

Recruitment Materials: Email to University Women's Centers

To: (University Women's Center)

Hello (Name when relevant),

My name is Bonnie Benson and I am a lesbian doctoral candidate in Counseling Psychology at Western Michigan University. I am currently conducting research that explores lesbian students' perceptions of transgender people. I am looking for undergraduate or graduate lesbian/queer/same-gender-loving women to participate in my IRB-approved dissertation under the supervision of Dr. Patrick H. Munley. I am writing to request that you share the information below and/or the attached flyer with students who may be eligible to join this research study.

**I am specifically contacting you in an effort to recruit participants in your region where no LGBTQ resource center exists.** I greatly appreciate your assistance.

In order to be eligible to participate, a student must:

1. Be currently enrolled as a **sophomore, junior, senior, or graduate student** at a U.S. college or university,
2. Identify her sexual orientation as **lesbian, queer, same-gender-loving**, or otherwise woman-identified
3. **Not** identify as **bisexual, heterosexual, transgender, or transsexual**, and
4. Have had **exposure to transgender information OR experience with transgender people** personally, socially, academically, or professionally in order to be able to respond to questions about transgender people/issues.

Interested students may contact me by email at [bonnie.benson@wmich.edu](mailto:bonnie.benson@wmich.edu) or by phone at [Phone Number] for more detailed information about the study.

Participation involves completing an informational background questionnaire and three audio-taped phone interviews (approximately 6 hours total) that I will conduct. The results may provide valuable information about the opinions, attitudes, and beliefs that lesbian students have about transgender people. I expect the results to be applicable to interventions aimed at improving the campus climate for LGBTQ students.

I welcome participation from students who have a range of perspectives about transgender people and who are diverse with respect to geographic region, age, race, ethnicity, ability status, religious/spiritual affiliation, socioeconomic class, and gender expression (i.e., androgynous, butch, femme, other).

This study is voluntary for research purposes. If you have any questions or comments, please contact me, Bonnie Benson, or my advisor, Dr. Patrick Munley (contact information below).

Thank you.

Bonnie M. Benson, M.Ed.  
Western Michigan University  
[Phone Number]  
[bonnie.benson@wmich.edu](mailto:bonnie.benson@wmich.edu)

Patrick H. Munley, Ph.D., Advisor  
Western Michigan University  
(269) 387-5120  
[patrick.munley@wmich.edu](mailto:patrick.munley@wmich.edu)

## Appendix C

### Recruitment Materials: Email to Referred Participants

Email script:

Hello (Name), My name is Bonnie Benson and I am a lesbian doctoral candidate in Counseling Psychology at Western Michigan University. I am currently conducting research that explores lesbian students' perceptions of transgender people. You were suggested as a potential participant for this research study by another study participant or by someone who contacted me about participating in the study. I am looking for undergraduate or graduate lesbian/queer/same-gender-loving women to participate in my IRB-approved dissertation under the supervision of Dr. Patrick H. Munley. I am writing to request your participation.

## Appendix D

### Recruitment Materials: Phone Script for Referred Participants

Phone script:

Hello, this is Bonnie Benson from Western Michigan University. (Ask to speak to the referral or leave a message.) ...Hi (Name), I'm a lesbian doctoral candidate in Counseling Psychology at Western Michigan University. I am currently looking for undergraduate or graduate women who are able to provide information about lesbian students' perceptions of transgender people. You were suggested as a potential participant for my research study by another study participant or by someone who contacted me about participating in the study. (If applicable: I sent you an email but wanted to follow-up by phone.) I'm wondering if you might be interested. (If leaving a message, provide my contact information.)

## Appendix E

### Recruitment Materials: Invitation to Participate in a Research Study

## Invitation to Participate in a Research Study

Hello!

I am a lesbian doctoral student at Western Michigan University and I invite you to participate in a research study designed to investigate how lesbian/queer/same-gender-loving students view transgender people. This research is part of my dissertation under the supervision of Dr. Patrick H. Munley in the Counselor Education and Counseling Psychology Department at Western Michigan University. My hope is that the results will provide valuable information about the opinions, attitudes, and beliefs that lesbian/queer/same-gender-loving students have about transgender people. I expect the results to be applicable to interventions aimed at improving the campus climate for LGBTQ students. The study involves completing an informational background questionnaire, two 1 to 2 hour individual phone interviews, and a follow-up phone interview of about 30-60 minutes. In all, participation in this study is expected to take approximately 6 hours over a period of approximately 12 months. I will conduct all phone interviews.

You may be eligible to participate if you are a currently enrolled undergraduate sophomore, junior, or senior, or a graduate student at a U.S. college or university; identify your sexual orientation as lesbian, queer, same-gender-loving, or otherwise woman-identified; do not consider yourself to be bisexual, heterosexual, transgender, or transsexual; and have had exposure to transgender information **OR** experience with transgender people in order to be able to talk about your views about transgender people. Examples of exposure to transgender information could include watching a TV show or movie about a transgender person, reading about transgender issues online or in a magazine, or talking to people about transgender issues. Examples of experience with transgender people could include having transgender friends, dating a transgender person, working on a class project with a transgender classmate, interacting in a residence hall or campus organization with transgender peers, conducting research, teaching, counseling, or support groups with transgender participants, or being part of LGBTQ campus or community groups in which transgender people are members.

I welcome participation from lesbian/queer/same-gender-loving women who have a range of perspectives about transgender people and who are diverse with respect to geographic region, age, race, ethnicity, ability status, religious/spiritual affiliation, socioeconomic class, and gender expression (i.e., androgynous, butch, femme, other).

I present a description of the research study below for your review and consideration. If you are interested in participating, or have further questions, please contact me by email at [bonnie.benson@wmich.edu](mailto:bonnie.benson@wmich.edu) or by phone at [Phone Number] to receive further information.

If you choose to participate in the research study, I will send you via U.S. mail 5 documents. First, I will enclose a copy of this letter for your records. Second, I will include a background questionnaire that takes about 15 minutes to complete. This questionnaire requests demographic information and a description of your exposure to

transgender information and/or experience with transgender people. The information you provide will be used to select a diverse sample of lesbian/queer/same-gender-loving students for the study. Third, I will include a contact sheet for you to complete so that your name, address, phone, and email can be kept separate from your demographic information. Fourth, I will include two copies of the Informed Consent form. This is a form for you to sign indicating your understanding that participation in the study is completely voluntary, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty, and you agree to be interviewed and audio-taped by me. You may keep one copy for your records and return the signed copy, along with the background questionnaire, in the postage paid envelope I will provide.

If you are selected from among those who returned a background questionnaire, contact sheet, and consent form, I will notify you by phone. If you are not selected to participate in the study, I will notify you by email.

The initial interview will be approximately 1 to 2 hours in length, and will be scheduled at a mutually convenient time. At the end of the first interview, I will tentatively schedule the second interview, which will take place within approximately 4 to 8 weeks. I will email you to confirm the time of the second interview and/or to reschedule if needed. The second interview will last approximately 1 to 2 hours. When I have completed the interviews with most participants, I will mail you a brief summary of my findings, along with some questions for you to consider. The follow-up phone interview will be scheduled shortly thereafter, and will be approximately 30 to 60 minutes in length. I will call you to schedule the follow-up interview. This follow-up phone interview will focus on how well you believe the summary fits with your experience and any additional comments you have about the summary.

All information collected is confidential. Demographic information you provide will be used for selection purposes. No information that is specific to you will be connected to your responses, and you may select a pseudonym for use throughout the study.

Thank you for your time and consideration!

Sincerely,

Bonnie M. Benson, M.Ed.  
Western Michigan University  
[Phone Number]  
[bonnie.benson@wmich.edu](mailto:bonnie.benson@wmich.edu)

Advisor: Patrick H. Munley, Ph.D.  
Western Michigan University  
(269) 387-5120  
[patrick.munley@wmich.edu](mailto:patrick.munley@wmich.edu)

## Appendix F

Recruitment Materials: Email Response to Inquiries Regarding Participation

Hello (Name),

Thank you for your interest in my study about lesbian/queer/same-gender-loving students' perceptions of transgender individuals. In order to be eligible to participate, you must meet the following criteria:

1. Be currently enrolled as a **sophomore, junior, senior, or graduate student** at a U.S. college or university,
2. Identify your sexual orientation as **lesbian, queer, same-gender-loving**, or otherwise woman-identified,
3. **Not** identify as **bisexual, heterosexual, transgender, or transsexual**, and
4. Have had **exposure to transgender information OR experience with transgender people** personally, socially, academically, or professionally in order to be able to respond to questions about transgender people/issues.

If you meet the above criteria, then you may be eligible to participate. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have about the study. *If questions have been posed, respond here. Or, if the person requests general information about the study, attach the Invitation to Participate in a Research Study which describes the elements of participation.*

Once your questions have been answered, if you are still interested, please provide your full name and mailing address so that I can send you more information, including a brief background questionnaire, contact sheet, and a consent form for participating in the study.

In addition to corresponding via email, please feel free to call me at the number below with any questions.

Thank you for your interest!  
Bonnie

Bonnie M. Benson, M.Ed.  
Western Michigan University  
[Phone Number]  
[bonnie.benson@wmich.edu](mailto:bonnie.benson@wmich.edu)

## Appendix G

Recruitment Materials: Phone Script for Inquiries Regarding Participation

### Phone Script for Inquiries Regarding Participation

This script is meant to serve as a guide for responding to calls from potential participants. The researcher's responses will vary depending on the questions posed by the caller. *Italics indicate instructions the researcher will follow, while regular text indicates approximate wording that the researcher will use.*

1. Hello. Yes, this is Bonnie. ***OR If the caller has left a message, return the call:*** Hello, this is Bonnie Benson from Western Michigan University. *Ask to speak to the person who left the message.*
2. Thank you for your interest in my study about lesbian/queer/same-gender-loving students' perceptions of transgender individuals. I understand you may have some questions, and I would be happy to answer them. But first, I would like to read you the criteria for being eligible to participate in the study. When I'm finished reading, I'll ask you if you meet these criteria, and we can go from there. Okay?
3. In order to be eligible to participate in this study, you must:
  - Be currently enrolled as a **sophomore, junior, senior, or graduate student** at a U.S. college or university,
  - Identify your sexual orientation as **lesbian, queer, same-gender-loving**, or otherwise woman-identified
  - **Not** identify as **bisexual, heterosexual, transgender, or transsexual**, and
  - Have had **exposure to transgender information OR experience with transgender people** personally, socially, academically, or professionally in order to be able to respond to questions about transgender people/issues.
4. Do you meet the above criteria? *If no, thank the caller for her interest in the study and end the call. If yes, continue.*
5. That's great. Now, I am happy to answer any questions you have about the study at this time. *When all questions have been answered, continue.*
6. The next step is for me to send you more information about the study, including a brief background questionnaire, contact sheet, and a consent form for participating in the study. Could I please have your full name and mailing address so I can mail you this information? *Obtain name and mailing address.*
7. Thank you. I really appreciate your interest in the study. I'll get this information out in the mail, so look for it in the next few days. Thanks again. Goodbye.

## Appendix H

Recruitment Materials: Cover Letter for Potential Participant Information Packet

Bonnie M. Benson  
[Address]

---

(Date)

(Name)  
(Address)

Hello (Name),

Thank you for your interest in my dissertation research about lesbian/queer/same-gender-loving students' perceptions of transgender individuals. Enclosed, please find five documents. Two are for you to keep, and, if you choose to participate, three are for you to fill out and return to me in the self-addressed, stamped envelope provided.

First, I have enclosed a copy of the *Invitation to Participate in a Research Study* which describes all of the elements of participation. Please read this and keep it for your records.

Second, I have enclosed the *Participant Background Questionnaire* which requests demographic information and a description of your exposure to transgender information and/or experience with transgender people. The information you provide will be used to select a diverse sample of lesbian/queer/same-gender-loving students for the study. The questionnaire will take about 15 minutes to complete. Please print clearly and answer the questions as completely as possible.

Third, I have enclosed the *Participant Contact Information* form which requests general contact information such as address, phone, and email where you can be reached throughout the study. Please complete this form and return it to me.

Fourth, I have enclosed two copies of the *Informed Consent*. This is a form for you to sign indicating your understanding that participation in the study is completely voluntary, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty, and you agree to be interviewed and audio-taped by me. You may keep one copy for your records and return the signed copy to me.

If you are selected from among those who returned a background questionnaire, contact sheet, and consent form, I will notify you by phone. Please note that you may be selected within a few weeks or within a few months. Therefore, I may contact you by phone several times to let you know that you are still being considered for participation. If you are no longer considered for participation in the study, I will notify you by email.

I am excited about this research and I appreciate your taking the time to consider participation. Please feel free to call or email me with any questions or concerns.

Regards,

Bonnie M. Benson, M.Ed.  
Western Michigan University  
[Phone Number]  
[bonnie.benson@wmich.edu](mailto:bonnie.benson@wmich.edu)

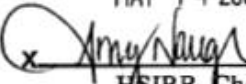
Advisor: Patrick H. Munley, Ph.D.  
Western Michigan University  
(269) 387-5120  
[patrick.munley@wmich.edu](mailto:patrick.munley@wmich.edu)

## Appendix I

### Informed Consent Form

WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY  
H. S. I. R. B.  
Approved for use for one year from this date:

MAY 14 2009

  
HSIRB Chair

**Western Michigan University  
Department of Counselor Education and Counseling Psychology**

**Principal Investigator:** Patrick H. Munley, Ph.D.  
**Student Investigator:** Bonnie M. Benson, M.Ed.  
**Title of Study:** Lesbian Students' Perceptions of Transgender Individuals

You are invited to participate in a research project titled "*Lesbian Students' Perceptions of Transgender Individuals*." This project will serve as Bonnie M. Benson's dissertation research for the requirements of the Ph.D. This consent document explains the purpose of this research project and goes over all of the time commitments, the procedures used in the study, and the risks and benefits of participating in this research project. Please read this consent form carefully and completely and please ask any questions if you need more clarification.

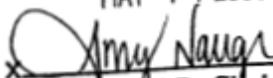
The purpose of this study is to learn about the opinions, attitudes, and beliefs that lesbian students have about transgender people. So far, no investigation has asked for lesbian students to share their perspectives about transgender people. We expect the results to be applicable to interventions aimed at improving the campus climate for sexual minority students.

You are considered to be eligible for participation in this study if you (a) are currently enrolled as an undergraduate (sophomore or above) or graduate student at a U.S. college or university; (b) identify as lesbian, queer, same-gender-loving, or another woman-identified sexual orientation; (c) do not identify as bisexual, heterosexual, transgender or transsexual, and (e) have had experience with transgender individuals and/or exposure to information about transgender issues.

From beginning to end, this study is expected to take approximately 6 hours of your time over a period of approximately 12 months. Participation in this study involves completion of a background questionnaire, contact sheet, two individual phone interviews, and a follow-up participant check phone interview. The background questionnaire contains demographic information that will be used to select a diverse sample of lesbian students for interviews. Completion of this form is expected to take approximately 15 minutes. The contact sheet contains your name and contact information, which will be kept separate from all other information you provide. Participants will be selected over a period of 6 to 8 months. You will be informed by phone periodically that you are still under consideration for participation in the interviews. You will receive an email if you are no longer under consideration for participation in the interviews. The first two phone interviews will be approximately 1 to 2 hours in length, and will be scheduled about 4 to 8 weeks apart. Interviews will be conducted by Bonnie M. Benson and will be audio-taped and transcribed. Toward the end of the data analysis process, you will complete a participant check interview of approximately 30 to 60 minutes in length. In preparation for the participant check interview, you will be mailed a summary of the study's findings thus far, along with some questions to consider for the interview.

WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY  
H. S. I. R. B.  
Approved for use for one year from this date:

MAY 14 2009

  
HSIRB Chair

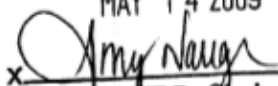
All information collected from you is confidential. That means that your name will not appear on any papers on which information is recorded. The forms will all be coded, and Bonnie M. Benson will keep a separate master list with the names of participants and corresponding code numbers. Once the data are collected and analyzed, the master list will be destroyed. The contact sheet will likewise be destroyed at the completion of the study. The signed informed consent documents, demographic questionnaires, and the original transcripts will be retained for at least seven years in a secure area in University Archives. Informed consent documents will be stored separately from the data so that your name will not be linked to your information. The tapes of the interviews will be destroyed after the data collection phase of the study has concluded and the transcripts have been completed and checked for accuracy. All names will be deleted from the transcripts and will be replaced by false names. All other identifying information will be made unidentifiable. For example, a reference to a person will be described by their role and a reference to a specific location will be described as a general location. In this way, no written information could be traced to any individual. Also, any reports that are published or presented will be carefully checked and steps similar to those mentioned above will be taken to minimize the possibility that any information can identify individuals.

Expected risks of participation include disclosure of sensitive information and mild discomfort associated with recalling or revealing information about experiences related to obtaining information about transgender issues or interacting with transgender individuals. Protections for such risks include taking breaks as needed and checking in during the interviews. In the event that you express feelings of discomfort greater than expected, you will be offered referral information for counseling resources.

Potential costs associated with participation in this study include minimal fees or minutes incurred by returning the researcher's phone calls, your time, and any inconvenience related to scheduling and completing interviews. Protections for such costs include the option to ask questions of the researcher via email, the researcher initiating interview phone calls, and established procedures for sending confirmation emails and periodic phone calls related to participation in the study. There are no other costs associated with participating in this study, and you will receive no compensation for your participation. You can choose to stop participating in the study at any time for any reason. You will not suffer any prejudice or penalty by your decision to stop your participation. You will experience NO consequences either academically or personally if you choose to withdraw from this study.

Potential benefits of participation include having an opportunity to reflect on your personal or professional experiences, increased self-awareness, contributing to a study that may impact programs aimed at improving the campus climate for sexual minority students, and access to a summary of the results.

WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY  
H. S. I. R. B.  
Approved for use for one year from this date:

MAY 14 2009  
x   
HSIRB Chair

Should you have any questions prior to or during the study, you can contact the primary investigator, Patrick H. Munley, Ph.D. at (269) 387-5120 or [patrick.munley@wmich.edu](mailto:patrick.munley@wmich.edu) or you may contact the student investigator, Bonnie M. Benson, M.Ed. at (231) 821-9766 or [bonnie.benson@wmich.edu](mailto:bonnie.benson@wmich.edu) You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Institutional Review Board at 269-387-8293 or the Vice President for Research at 269-387-8298 if questions arise during the course of the study.

This consent document has been approved for use for one year by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) as indicated by the stamped date and signature of the board chair in the upper right corner. Do not participate in this study if the stamped date is older than one year.

I have read this informed consent document. The risks and benefits have been explained to me. I agree to take part in this study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Please Print Your Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix J

### Participant Background Questionnaire

# **Lesbian Perceptions of Transgender Study** **Participant Background Questionnaire**

Page 1 of 3

## **DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION**

How did you learn about this study? \_\_\_\_\_

Year in School (circle one):     2<sup>nd</sup> year/Sophomore     3<sup>rd</sup> year/Junior     4<sup>th</sup> year+/Senior     Graduate Student

Living Arrangement (circle one):    Off Campus    On Campus

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Academic Major or Field of Study

Highest Degree Received (circle one):    High School/GED    Bachelor's    Master's    Doctorate

Employment:    N/A    P/T    F/T    Occupation or Job Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Individual Income Range:     \_\_\_\_\_    \$0-\$24,999  
    \_\_\_\_\_    \$25,000-49,999  
    \_\_\_\_\_    \$50,000-\$74,999  
    \_\_\_\_\_    \$75,000-\$99,999  
    \_\_\_\_\_    \$100,000 +

Socioeconomic Class Status (circle one):

Lower Class     Lower-Middle Class     Middle Class     Upper-Middle Class     Upper Class

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Racial/Ethnic Identity (Please list all identifiers you use.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Age                      Ability Status                      Religious/Spiritual Affiliation

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Relationship Status                      If partnered: How long?                      Partner's sex                      Partner's sexual orientation

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Do you have children?                      If yes: How many?                      Do they live with you?

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Sexual Orientation (Please list all identifiers you use)

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Gender Expression (Please list all identifiers you use, such as feminine, androgynous, masculine, butch, femme, etc.)

At what age did you come out to yourself?

Family:    Not At All    A Select Few    Out to Most Folks    Everyone

On Campus:    Not At All    A Select Few    Out to Most Folks    Everyone

What kinds of **exposure** have you had, if any, to **information** about transgender people?

[illegible]

Please continue on the back of this sheet if needed.

**Lesbian Perceptions of Transgender Study  
Participant Background Questionnaire**  
Page 3 of 3

**EXPERIENCE WITH TRANSGENDER INFORMATION AND/OR PEOPLE** (continued from page 2)

What kinds of **experiences** have you had, if any, that **involved transgender people**?

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Please continue on the back of this sheet if needed.

## Appendix K

### Participant Contact Information

**Lesbian Perceptions of Transgender Study  
Participant Contact Information**

**CONTACT INFORMATION**

Name	Today's Date
------	--------------

Mailing Address	City	State	Zip
-----------------	------	-------	-----

College/University	City	State
--------------------	------	-------

Email Address

Phone # Land Line: (\_\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ Okay to Leave a Message?    Yes    No

Cell Phone: (\_\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ Okay to Leave a Message?    Yes    No

## Appendix L

### Phone Script for Scheduling the First Interview and Participant Check Interview

### Phone Script for Scheduling the First Interview and Participant Check Interview

Italics indicate instructions the researcher will follow, while regular text indicates approximate wording that the researcher will use.

1. *Ask to speak to the (potential) participant*
2. Hello, this is Bonnie Benson from Western Michigan University. I'm calling in regard to the research study about lesbian/queer/same-gender-loving students' perceptions of transgender individuals.
3. *To Schedule the First Interview (for those who are selected upon returning the consent document and have not been previously contacted):* I received the forms you mailed in response to my call for participants and you have been selected to participate! *Ensure the person is still interested in participating. If no, thank her and end the conversation. If yes, schedule the first interview.* I would like to go ahead and schedule the first interview now. It will last approximately one to two hours. *Schedule.* Thank you. I will send an email confirming this interview time as a reminder. I look forward to talking with you then. Goodbye.
4. *To Schedule the First Interview (for those who were not initially selected, and who have been told they are still under consideration for participation):* I'm pleased to let you know that you have been selected to participate in the study! *Ensure the person is still interested in participating. If no, thank her and end the conversation. If yes, schedule the first interview.* I would like to go ahead and schedule the first interview now. It will last approximately one to two hours. *Schedule.* Thank you. I will send an email confirming this interview time as a reminder. I look forward to talking with you then. Goodbye.
5. *To Schedule the Participant Check Interview:* I'm calling to verify that you received my mailing containing a description of the participant check procedure and the summary of my findings so far in the study. *If no, troubleshoot. If yes, Great.* I would like to go ahead and schedule the participant check interview now. It will last approximately 30-60 minutes. *Schedule.* In preparation for the interview, please be sure to read through the summary I sent, and give some thought to the questions I asked so that we can talk about them during the interview. Thank you. I will send an email confirming this interview time as a reminder. I look forward to talking with you then. Goodbye.

## Appendix M

### Phone Script for Potential Participants Not Yet Selected

### Phone Script for Potential Participants Not Yet Selected

Italics indicate instructions the researcher will follow, while regular text indicates approximate wording that the researcher will use.

1. *Ask to speak to the potential participant.*
2. *First Call:* Hello, this is Bonnie Benson from Western Michigan University. I received the forms you mailed in response to my call for participants in the research study about lesbian/queer/same-gender-loving students' perceptions of transgender individuals. Thank you so much for taking the time to respond.
  - a. *If the Participant Background Questionnaire or Participant Contact Information sheet are unclear or incomplete, attempt to clarify/complete the forms at this time.* At this time, I have a question about an area of the (Participant Background Questionnaire/Participant Contact Information sheet) that was unclear/incomplete... Thank you.
  - b. As I described in the letter I mailed you, I will be conducting phone interviews over a period of several months. I will likewise select participants for the study over a period of months. My goal is to talk to people who have a variety of experiences, which I will discover as I go along. At this time, I am still in the early (beginning) phase of interviewing participants. You are still under consideration for participating in this study. I will call you again in the near future to let you know that you are still a candidate for participation in the study. If, at the end of the study, you are no longer under consideration for participating, I will send you an email indicating this. At that time I will destroy all forms and correspondence containing your name and contact information. Do you have any questions at this time?

- c. Thanks again for your interest in the study. I'm very excited to get started, and I hope to be speaking with you again in the near future. Goodbye.

3. *Additional Calls:* Hello, this is Bonnie Benson from Western Michigan University. I'm calling in regard to the research study about lesbian/queer/same-gender-loving students' perceptions of transgender individuals. I want to let you know that I have completed several interviews, and still have a number of interviews remaining. You are still under consideration for participating in this study and I will continue to keep you informed as the study proceeds. You may also withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Are you still interested in participating in the study? *If no:* Thanks anyway. *End the Conversation.* *If yes:* That's great. I really appreciate your continued interest. I'll give you a call again to let you know of my progress, or I will send an email if you are no longer under consideration for participating. Again, I hope to speak with you again in the near future. Goodbye.

## Appendix N

### Interview Confirmation Email

Dear (Name),

I am writing to confirm the (first/second/participant check) phone interview we recently scheduled for my dissertation research. I will be calling you at (phone number) on (date) at (time).

If you have any questions or are unable to keep this interview time, please contact me at [Phone Number] or [bonnie.benson@wmich.edu](mailto:bonnie.benson@wmich.edu).

I look forward to talking with you!

Thanks,

Bonnie M. Benson, M.Ed.  
Western Michigan University  
[Phone Number]  
[bonnie.benson@wmich.edu](mailto:bonnie.benson@wmich.edu)

## Appendix O

### Interview Guide

## Interview Guide

Note: This guide serves as an overview of the interview procedure. The questions are meant to span two interview sessions. Because the interview sessions may take varying amounts of time, the point at which the first interview ends and the second interview begins will be flexible. Questions may be added or modified as data analysis proceeds. In general, the questions are open-ended to allow participants to talk about their experiences. The researcher will follow up on topics the participants discuss and will prompt for clarification as needed. Italics indicate instructions the researcher will follow, while regular text indicates approximate wording that the researcher will use.

1. *Ask to speak to the person with whom the interview is scheduled.*
2. Hello, this is Bonnie Benson from Western Michigan University. This is the time we had scheduled for the interview. Are you ready to begin?
3. *Introduction to Interview 1: Reminders about confidentiality and the right to stop participation at any point. Are you ready for me to turn on the tape? Let the participant know the tape has been turned on.*
4. *Introduction to Interview 2: Today's interview will be much like the first interview. We'll just work our way through some questions and continue with the conversational format we had last time. As before, I'll let you know when our time has come to an end. Are you ready to begin? Let the participant know the tape has been turned on. Skip ahead to where we left off last time.*
5. Let's begin. *Introduction of the interviewer and how the interviewer arrived at the present research topic. The first part of the interview, facilitated by the first question, is meant to allow the participant and researcher to become comfortable with one another and for the researcher to get to know the participant.* Today I'd really like to get to know you and for us to become comfortable talking to one another. I know that phone conversations can be very different from face-to-face interactions, and that they can be somewhat awkward, particularly for people who haven't ever met face-to-face. You can't see, for example, that I may be smiling and nodding. So I'd like to really take our time today. One of the reasons we will have two interviews is so that we can have more than enough time and will not feel rushed. I envision our conversation being just that – a conversation rather than a question-and-answer style discussion.
6. Tell me about your experience of being a lesbian, queer, or same-gender-loving woman on your campus.
  - a) What is your sense of the lesbian/queer/same-gender-loving community on your campus?

- b) Describe your participation, if any, in the lesbian/queer/same-gender-loving community on your campus.
- 7. I'm interested in learning about lesbian/queer/same-gender-loving women's perceptions of transgender people. When I say that in a broad way, what comes to mind for you?
- 8. What does transgender identity mean to you?
- 9. Tell me about your exposure to transgender issues and/or experiences with transgender people.
  - a) What is it like for you to (*interact/befriend/live/work/attend school*) with transgender people?
  - b) What led you to participate in \_\_\_\_ which led you to learn about/interact with transgender people?
  - c) How did you first learn about transgender issues/people?
  - d) Describe a memorable experience involving a transgender person/people.
  - e) Are there other ways you have learned about transgender issues/people, other than through (*personal relationships/attending school/reading/etc.*) with/about transgender people?
- 10. Has understanding gender been important to you? If so, how?
- 11. What would you say are some of the benefits of being transgender? What would you say are some of the obstacles transgender people face?
- 12. How have your perceptions of transgender people developed over time? Tell me about how you came to adopt the opinions, attitudes, assumptions, or beliefs that you have now.
- 13. What have you observed or experienced between lesbian/queer/same-gender-loving women and transgender people?
  - a) How would you describe the ideal relationship between transgender people and lesbian/queer/same-gender-loving women?
  - b) How do you think that ideal could come to be realized?
- 14. To what extent had you thought about these issues before preparing for this interview?
- 15. *Conclusion of Interview 1:* We have come to the end of our time today. I want to thank you for talking with me. Now I would like to tentatively schedule a time for the second interview. (*Schedule second interview.*) I will send you a follow-up email to confirm this time or to reschedule if needed –

particularly if my data analysis takes longer than I expect. I also want to give you the opportunity to offer any comments or ask any questions that you have at this time.

16. *Conclusion of Interview 2:* We have come to the end of our interview. I want to thank you again for talking with me today. I will contact you again in the near future to schedule the follow-up interview (aka participant check) and to send you the summary of my preliminary findings for your review. Would you like to offer any comments or ask any questions at this time? Thanks again. Goodbye.

## Appendix P

### First Interview Thank-you Email

Dear (Name),

I'm writing to thank you for participating in the first interview for my dissertation research. I truly appreciate your taking the time to talk with me. As we discussed, your second interview is tentatively scheduled for (date) at (time). I will email you again closer to that date to confirm the second interview.

I look forward to talking with you again.

Best Regards,

Bonnie M. Benson, M.Ed.  
Western Michigan University  
[Phone Number]  
[bonnie.benson@wmich.edu](mailto:bonnie.benson@wmich.edu)

## Appendix Q

### Second Interview Thank-you Email

Dear (Name),

I'm writing to thank you for participating in the second interview for my dissertation research. I truly appreciate your taking the time to talk with me again. As we discussed, you will hear from me again when it is time for the participant check interview.

I look forward to talking with you then.

Best Regards,

Bonnie M. Benson, M.Ed.  
Western Michigan University  
[Phone Number]  
[bonnie.benson@wmich.edu](mailto:bonnie.benson@wmich.edu)

## Appendix R

### Participant Check Letter

Bonnie M. Benson  
[Address]

---

(Date)

Name  
Address  
Address

Dear (Name),

I want to thank you again for your participation in the telephone interviews for my study. I have now completed the interviews and several early rounds of data analysis. At this time, your feedback would be very valuable. As we discussed, I have enclosed a summary of the themes or categories that I have identified from the interviews. Please read the summary carefully. In preparation for the final “participant check” interview, I would like you to think about the questions below.

1. How well does the summary describe my experience? What is missing from the story?
2. What thoughts come to mind as I read the summary?
3. What additional thoughts or experiences would I like to add about my story after reading the summary? What did I not think of before that would be important for the researcher to know?

**Remember, you are the expert on your experience, and I am interested in describing your experience as accurately as possible.**

I will contact you in the near future to schedule a time to talk over the phone for our final interview, which will last approximately 30-60 minutes. As always, if you have any questions about the procedures for this participant check, or any other aspect of the study, feel free to contact me as indicated below.

Best Regards,

Bonnie M. Benson, M.Ed.  
Western Michigan University  
[Phone Number]  
[bonnie.benson@wmich.edu](mailto:bonnie.benson@wmich.edu)

## Appendix S

### Participant Check Interview Guide

### Participant Check Interview Guide

Note: This guide serves as an overview of the participant check interview procedure. The researcher will follow up on topics the participants discuss and will prompt for clarification as needed. Italics indicate instructions the researcher will follow, while regular text indicates approximate wording that the researcher will use.

1. *Ask to speak to the participant.*
2. Hello, this is Bonnie Benson from Western Michigan University. This is the time we had scheduled for the participant check interview. Are you ready to begin? *Let participant know the tape has been turned on.*
3. *Allow for introductory comments about how things have been going for the participant since we last spoke. Allow the participant to “warm up” to the interview again.* As I mentioned before, it is very important to me that the results of this study accurately reflect your lived experience. What are your thoughts, feelings, or reactions to the summary I sent? *Possible follow-up questions:*
  - a. How well does the summary describe your experience?
    - i. What is missing from the story?
  - b. What thoughts come to mind as you read the summary?
  - c. What additional thoughts or experiences would you like to add about your story after reading the summary? What did you not think of before that would be important for me to know?
4. *Conclusion of Interview:* We have come to the end of our interview. I want to thank you again for talking with me today and taking the time to review the summary and share your reactions. Your participation has been very important to me. Would you

like a copy of the results of this study when it is completed? Would you like to offer any comments or ask any questions at this time? Thank you. Goodbye.

## Appendix T

### Participant Check Interview Thank-you Email

Dear (Name),

I'm writing to thank you for completing the final interview for my dissertation research! I truly appreciate your time and feedback. (*If participant requested the study results*, As we discussed, you will hear from me again when the study is complete. At that time, I will make the results available as you requested.)

Thank you!

Best Regards,

Bonnie M. Benson, M.Ed.  
Western Michigan University  
[Phone Number]  
[bonnie.benson@wmich.edu](mailto:bonnie.benson@wmich.edu)

## Appendix U

### HSIRB Approval Letter



Human Subjects Institutional Review Board

Date: May 14, 2009

To: Patrick Munley, Principal Investigator  
Bonnie Benson, Student Investigator for dissertation  
Allison Buller, Student Investigator

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair 

Re: HSIRB Project Number: 09-05-03

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project entitled "A Grounded Theory of Lesbian Students' Perceptions of Transgender Individuals" has been **approved** under the **expedited** category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note that you may **only** conduct this research exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project. You must also seek reapproval if the project extends beyond the termination date noted below. In addition if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: May 14, 2010