Speaking Our Truth: Gender Minority People's Experiences with Discrimination

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SPEAKING OUR TRUTH: GENDER MINORITY PEOPLE’S EXPERIENCES WITH DISCRIMINATION

by

Codie L. Stone

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy Sociology Western Michigan University December 2017

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This research builds on the growing literature on gender minority identities and issues, and aims to bring to light the voices, experiences, and ideas of this marginalized population contributing to our knowledge of the ways that discrimination is experienced by gender minorities. Participants' in this study are adults who identify within a marginalized gender category, mostly transgender and gender non-binary. The purpose of this research is to provide a glimpse into the lives of these participants and showcase the extreme vulnerability and vigilance, as well as resilience, participants navigate and embody. Using an intersectional framework, this research explores the influences of multiple social factors on participant's gender identities and experiences, including generations, race, education, family support, religion, and geographic location. Borrowing from grounded theory approach this study outlines four distinct types of discrimination participants described: institutional discrimination, public attacks, microaggressions, and intersectional discriminations. While some participants described being physically or verbally attacked, the most common types of discrimination were institutional and microaggressions. There were few places where participants did not describe facing discrimination, and many described the vigilance they must maintain in an attempt to ensure their emotional and physical safety, both in public and private spaces.

Ultimately, this research shows the resiliency of these participants, who face potentially hostile environments daily and find ways to cope with the complexity of their negative experiences. Because
we live intersectional lives, it can be difficult for participants to discern whether they are treated negatively based on their gender identity or expression, or if it is due to their race, religion, ability, or sexuality. The lack of public knowledge about gender minority identities and issues was cited as a major concern for participants, who want their communities to be a more welcoming places for people of all genders. This study aims to provide the public with information about some of the people who live as gender minorities in southwest Michigan, and their recommendations for how to improve individual and institutional interactions.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project would not have been possible without the fierce commitment and inspirational support of numerous people in my life. I must begin by thanking my participants for trusting me to share their experiences with the public. Thank you all for taking the time to share your stories and answer intimate questions in order to build knowledges about the lives of people in gender minority categories in our communities.

Thank you to my dissertation committee, Dr. Ann Miles, Dr. Zoann Snyder, Dr. Whitney DeCamp, and Dr. Gary Bischof, all of whom provided critical feedback throughout this research process. I would like to especially thank Dr. Bischof for his guidance throughout the HSIRB approval process. Additionally, I would like to thank my major advisor, Dr. Ann Miles, for not giving up on me, and not letting me give up on myself. Dr. Miles was willing to put up with my obstinance and continuously challenge me to think more critically, and write more clearly, throughout this research process, and for that I am extremely grateful.

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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

I am not a cookie cutter of everyone else, I am myself, and I am strong, and I am trans,
and I am doing it my way. – Bobbie Lee

The weekend of June 9th and 10th, 2017 was blazing hot, sunny, but thankfully breezy as
hundreds of people roamed around Arcadia Park in downtown Kalamazoo for the 10th annual
Kalamazoo Pride celebration. This two-day event aims to celebrate LGBTQ people and serves as
the biggest fundraiser for the local gender and sexual minority\(^1\) (GSM) resource center Out Front
Kalamazoo (OFK). This is a weekend many people across Michigan wait for all year, as
Kalamazoo Pride is the second largest pride event in the state (next to Motor City Pride in
Detroit). I have attended nine of the last ten Kalamazoo Pride festivals and the sense of
community and belonging many people express is unrivaled throughout the rest of the year. Yet,
when one looks more critically at the festival it becomes clear that improvements can be made to
create a more inclusive environment for gender minorities (among other identities). For instance,
there were multiple booths that depicted transgender (trans), agender, and non-binary flags, but
during at least two of headlining acts when the performer asked the crowd to make some noise
for gays and lesbians there was no mention of gender identities at all. I kept waiting for a
performer doing this to ask where the trans people, non-binary, agender, or any other gender

\(^1\) Gender and sexual minorities is an alternative way of referring to the diverse identities that comprise
LGBTQIA+ populations (Wilcox, 2014; Mayer, et al., 2008). In an effort to be as inclusive as possible in this report,
I have used the phrase gender and sexual minorities (GSM) when referring to groups of diverse individuals who do
not identify as cisgender or heterosexual. However, I have used specific labels for individuals based on their self-
identifications. When referencing groups of individuals with diverse gender identities, I have used the phrase
“gender minorities” and “people in gender minority categories” rather than the umbrella term “transgender.” During
the call for participation I did use the phrase transgender as an umbrella term, but as some participants have made
clear to me the use of transgender as an umbrella term can be problematic. In an attempt to maintain the distinction
between my transgender and gender non-binary-identified participants, I extensively use the phrase “people in
gender minority categories.” Additionally, I have used this phrase to maintain “people first” language to avoid
reducing individuals to their gender identities, and to reflect the influence of social control through categorization
that may be the reason gender and sexuality labels exist at all (see discussion of Foucault's theory in Chapter Two).
Widespread inclusion of transgender people in the LGBT community began throughout the U.S. only in the 1990s, and in that time gender minority advocates have made important legal and social gains. For example, some states now allow transgender people to change their legal name and gender on official government-issued documents such as birth certificates, driver's licenses and state identification cards (Stryker, 2008). Gender identity is a protected status in non-discrimination ordinances addressing employment and housing in 18 states. Seventeen states include public accommodations (state services, legal services, restaurants, hotels, etc.) in their non-discrimination ordinances, and 8 states prohibit insurance companies from excluding transgender-related health care from coverage (Movement Advancement Project, 2014). Twenty states and the District of Columbia have gender identity as a protected status in non-discrimination laws addressing employment, housing, and public accommodation; additionally, over 160 individual municipalities throughout the United States that have passed laws, ordinances, and policies prohibiting gender identity-based discrimination (ACLU, 2017). Over 45 different cities and counties in the state of Michigan are included in that figure (Trager, 2016). But, despite these legislative gains around the nation, people in gender minorities still face discrimination and barriers to protection in many areas of the U.S.

In 2011, the National Transgender Center for Equality (NTCE) and the National LGBTQ Task Force (Task Force) released “Injustice at Every Turn: A Report of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey”, which is groundbreaking research that extensively studied
transgender people's experiences with discrimination in the U.S for the first time. A team of community advocates, transgender leaders, lawyers, researchers, and policy experts created a survey that was ultimately completed by over 7,500 people. The researchers distributed the survey online, but also actively sought out hard-to-reach populations, such as homeless, rural, and low-income transgender and gender non-conforming people to complete paper surveys (Grant et al., 2011). Both the online and paper surveys were available in English and Spanish. Overall the researchers included 6,456 valid survey responses from every U.S. State, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Virgin Islands (Grant et al., 2011, p.12). The NCTE calls this research a “game changer,” because this report quantifies discrimination and violence against transgender people in ways that allow for legal and cultural change (NCTE, 2015). This report is the first national-level study completed about gender minorities' experiences with discrimination, with the goal of providing concrete examples of people's lived experiences in order to bring attention to the lived experiences of people living in gender minorities and push for more inclusive policies, practices, and social experiences.

In order to study gender minorities' experiences with discrimination, the authors of the NTDS report had to define discrimination, which they did as “events that would have a major impact on a person's quality of life and ability to sustain themselves financially or emotionally” (Grant et al., 2011). The study reported that 63% of the research participants had experienced an act of discrimination, including being evicted, losing jobs, becoming homeless, experiencing physical and sexual assault and harassment, losing relationships, being denied services, being bullied by peers and authorities in educational settings, and being incarcerated because of their gender identity or expression. The NTDS report provides important national quantitative data
about transgender people's experiences with discrimination that are consistent with previous literature about various regional transgender populations' experiences. The authors of the NTDS conducted this research to provide quantitative data to back up the experiences of transgender and gender non-conforming people they heard while working in the community. They wanted to present data to policymakers and community leaders that would show the urgency of issues faced by transgender and gender non-conforming people, to push for comprehensive solutions to various types of bias against people in gender minority categories.

NTDS results specific to Michigan show that transgender people experience widespread discrimination throughout the state. Of the 175 Michiganders who responded, 84% reported workplace harassment or mistreatment, 20% reported a household income of $10,000 or less, 17% were refused a home or apartment, 23% became homeless, and 16% were unemployed because of their gender identity/expression (Grant et al., 2011; National Center for Transgender Equality [NCTE] & National LGBTQ Task Force [Task Force], 2011, p. 1). Michigan respondents also reported that 19% were refused medical care because of their gender identity or expression, and 51% experienced verbal harassment or disrespect in public accommodations and services (Grant et al., 2011; NCTE & Task Force, 2011, p. 2). The attempted suicide rate reported by Michigan NTDS respondents was 52%, 32 times greater than the attempted suicide rate reported by the general public (1.6%) (Grant et al., 2011; NCTE & Task Force, 2011, p. 2), and even higher than the 41% rate of the national NTDS sample (Grant et al, 2011, p. 2). Given the high level of discrimination described by this relatively small population of transgender residents of Michigan, it is clear more research is needed in order to better understand their experiences and to make Michigan a safer place for transgender people to live and work.
Many existing studies of gender minorities focusing on discrimination discuss overt
discrimination experiences, such as being denied a job or health care because of one's gender
identity or expression (Bradford et al., 2013; Garofalo et al., 2006; Lombardi et al., 2004; Risser
& Shelton, 2002; Spicer, 2010; Xavier, 2000) or violence against transgender people (Stone,
2009). These types of studies are clearly important, but some scholars argue that the face of
discrimination has been changing from overt manifestations to subtle microaggressions since the
multiple civil rights movements of the 1950s-60s (Lewis et al. 2012; Feagin, 1991; Pettigrew and
Martin, 1987). Social norms have changed, so that overt discrimination is less tolerated, so
dominant social groups have developed subtle ways to express demeaning messages and dislike
towards oppressed groups (Smith et al., 2012), such as intentionally serving a person of color
only after serving all white customers at a bar. The negative impacts of microaggressions have
been discussed by multiple scholars (Dion, 2002; Nadal, 2009; Sinclair, 2006; Sue et al., 2009;
Sue, 2010; Swim et al., 2001; Wang, et al., 2011). Sue (2010) even argues that microaggressions
may be more harmful than overt discrimination because they are often daily occurrences and
their impacts can build over time.

In Michigan, people in gender minorities have legal protections in a handful of cities and
other municipalities but not under the state non-discrimination law. The Elliott-Larsen Civil
Rights Act (ELCRA) offers legal redress to Michigan residents who have been discriminated
against in housing, employment, or public accommodations due to their status in legally
protected categories. These categories include race, religion, national origin, age, sex, marital
status, height and weight, but not sexual orientation, gender identity or expression (Equality
Michigan, 2014). Originally passed in 1976 the ELCRA has been amended multiple times to
update protected categories, and in 2014 Republican State House Representative Frank Foster introduced a bill to amend the ELCRA to include sexual orientation and gender identity/expression. Representative Foster lost his primary election in the 2014 midterm elections to a more conservative Tea Party member, who publicly challenged Foster's support for amending the ELCRA; after which Foster changed his proposed amendment to only add sexual orientation but not gender identity/expression (Clark and Pluta, 2014). Democratic Representative Sam Singh then introduced a different amendment to the ELCRA that would include both gender identity/expression and sexual orientation in the fall of 2014, based on recommendations of a coalition of Michigan pro-LGBT business and organizations called Freedom Michigan. During the lame duck Congressional session of 2014, the House Commerce committee decided not to advance the amendment of the ELCRA to a full vote on the House floor (Oosting, 2014a). While some opponents of either amendment questioned whether people in gender and sexual minorities even face discrimination in Michigan (Oosting, 2014a), only one person from the LGBT community was allowed to testify in front of the House Commerce Committee, and he spoke generally about the impacts of the amendments on business and the state economy (Elecablog, 2014). The politicians in Michigan did not make time to hear the testimonies of the multiple people in gender minorities who prepared statements to tell their stories of experiencing discrimination before making their decision to let the bills die in committee (Electablog, 2014).

Currently there is not a favorable political climate to reintroduce an amendment to the ELCRA, as Republicans won control of the State House and Senate in the November 2014 midterm elections (Tannehill, 2014). For example, while the attempt to amend/update the
ELCRA never made it out of committee to be voted on the House or Senate floor, then Speaker of the House Jase Bolger successfully introduced House Bill 5958 “Religious Freedom Restoration Act” (RFRA) (Oosting, 2014b). This bill would have exempted those with “sincerely held religious beliefs” from government regulations they believe “substantially burden” those beliefs (Oosting, 2014b). Thus public business owners could claim a religious exemption and be able to legally refuse to do business with people in gender and sexual minorities. Opponents of the RFRA argue it will give people a “license to discriminate” against those they don't like, and will especially impact LGBT people who may not have other avenues of legal or social protection against being fired or denied service based on their gender identity or sexual orientation (Oosting, 2014b). In addition to the overt discrimination that may legally occur if the RFRA passes into law (even if the ELCRA were to be amended to include sexual orientation and gender identity/expression), this law may also embolden some people to engage in subtler forms of discrimination that convey negative messages to the target.

Clearly, the political climate in Michigan is currently not favorable towards transgender and gender non-conforming people, and politicians have been actively ignoring transgender and gender non-conforming Michiganders who try to make their experiences known. In this study, I aim to give voice to people in gender minorities in southwest Michigan in a way that might be more difficult for decision-makers to ignore. This dissertation provides qualitative data of participants' experiences living and working in southwest Michigan as gender minorities; my goal is disseminating this information to local policymakers and social justice agencies in an effort to create social change. This research will provide a better understanding of the range of overt discrimination and microaggressions gender minorities face in southwest Michigan.
Though this dissertation sample is limited in how accurately it reflects the demographics of gender minorities in the location, hopefully this study will provide a starting point for individuals and organizations to become more inclusive of diverse gender identities and expressions. The remainder of this chapter will frame my approach to this research, provide a portrait of the participants, and outline the methodology of the study.

Methodology – An Intersectional Perspective

As was true for cisgender women in male-dominated scientific research (Collins, 2000; Harding, 1987; Hill-Smith 1987 & 1990; Reinhartz, 1992), people in gender minorities have not had many opportunities to describe their life experiences on their own terms. Of the existing literature on gender minority individuals and issues, much of it comes from medical communities, and the history of pathologizing the bodies of gender minorities and their life experiences (which will be discussed in depth in Chapter Two). Many studies about their experiences with discrimination like the NDTS focus on quantitative information, which provides numerical data that shows the prevalence of discrimination among various gender minority populations. Since this study aims to better understand how people in gender minorities understand their own gender identities and expressions, and experiences and how they manage their experiences with discrimination, particularly microaggressions, I conducted qualitative in-depth interviews to gain an understanding of how participants think about these topics. The specific research questions that guided this study are: 1) How do people in gender minorities in southwest Michigan describe their experiences with gender identity-based discrimination and microaggressions? 2) What are the impacts of such experiences on the individual, and how are those impacts managed by different people? And 3) What recommendations do participants have
for policymakers to make the community a more welcoming and affirming space for people in gender minorities? The knowledge assembled in this dissertation contributes to an academic understanding of the range of experiences (with gender identity formation and discrimination) experienced by participants. Additionally, this information can be used by local policymakers to inform more critical thinking about inclusion of people in gender minorities.

The analysis of data collected from these broad questions shows how intersectional identities impact participants' experiences in more complex ways than I originally thought. Developed in 1989 by Kimberle Crenshaw, the concept of intersectionality is an analytic tool rooted in Black feminism and Critical Race theory that examines the interactions of multiple social identities and how they impact people's experiences in different social contexts. That is, it is not enough to merely include gender and race as separate and dichotomous variables (black/white or male/female); but rather it is important to understand how individuals' social identities are inextricably integrated and create unique experiences for them (Crenshaw, 1994).

Crenshaw (1989) stresses that black women have an experience that is unique from white women or black men's experiences, though they can be categorized with either group in various situations. For example, Crenshaw (1989) describes a discrimination case against General Motors (GM) by black women who claimed GM did not hire black women before 1964, which effectively meant black women could not get promoted in a seniority-based work environment. The court declined to allow the case to proceed because GM had hired white women before 1964, which Crenshaw argues is an example of how race and sex discrimination boundaries are drawn by the experiences of white women and black men. Thus, as Crenshaw states, “Black women are protected only to the extent that their experiences coincide with those of either of the
two groups” (1989, p. 143).

In a later article Crenshaw expands on the concept of intersectionality by describing how efforts to provide support and protection for survivors of domestic violence may be hindered by ignoring how race, immigration status, and class impact individual survivors' experiences (1994). Domestic violence intervention strategies based on the experiences of middle or upper-class white women have limited application to the experiences of women of color, women who are immigrants, and women living in a lower-class (Crenshaw, 1994). Crenshaw argues that many intervention strategies are based on the idea that battered women are psychologically disempowered through patriarchal domination by men, which does not account for other types of structural disempowerment faced survivors of domestic violence based on race, class, or immigration status. Thus, many survivors of domestic violence lack access to specific resources that could help them end their abuse, such as adequate housing, child care, and jobs that pay a living wage to have a change to get out of poverty (Crenshaw, 1994).

Incorporating an intersectional framework into research pushes scholars to explore complex networks of identity by focusing on individuals whose lives are directly impacted by their interconnected experiences with ability, class, gender, race, sexuality, and other social identities. This focus is necessary to thoroughly understand individuals' unique life experiences, for example how a lesbian black woman's experiences may differ from those of a straight black woman. Moore (2012) explores this example as she contends that few mainstream heterosexual sociologists have seriously included lesbian feminist theory when analyzing black women's sexuality. In this article, Moore points to Patricia Hill-Collins as an exception and shows how Hill-Collins integrates the systemic power of heterosexual privilege throughout her discussions
of black women's sexuality and social statuses. In her books *Black Feminist Thought* (2000) and *Black Sexual Politics* (2004), Hill-Collins recognized and gave voice to lesbian and heterosexual black women, showcasing an intersectional approach to conducting research that reach into life within the intersections of identity (Moore, 2012).

Since Crenshaw made the case for increased intersectionality in scholarship many have used intersectional frameworks to explore the heterogeneity of experiences within diverse social groups and settings (Cho and Ferree, 2010; Cole, 2009; Hancock, 2007; Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach, 2008). For example, some have explored the experiences of African-American Congresswomen, both as targets of congressional marginalization (Hawkesworth, 2003) and as leaders of progressive legislation in state legislatures (Orey et al., 2006). Another example, in a 2004 ethnography Berger examines how the women she worked with used the combined stigmas of being drug addicts, sex workers, and living with HIV as a motivation to transform their lives as activists and advocates for other marginalized people. Researchers who let their participants speak freely about their own experiences may find themselves exploring a vast array of possibilities within population groups. Our social world is complex, dynamic, and adaptive, and thus researchers must keep up to continue to strive to fully understand individuals’ unique life experiences based on complex intersections of social identities. An intersectional approach to research can uncover a wealth of unexplored knowledge that may lead to better understandings of the complexity of individuals’ lives, which can lead to the creation of better social policies, practices, and procedures.

Throughout the research process I strove to seriously integrate an intersectional framework. I intentionally thought about whose voices were often ignored in the local
community and worked to reach those populations for interviews, as well as remaining conscious of how I have interpreted those voices' experiences in my dissertation. Before beginning this project, I researched how the authors of the NTDS reached a wide range of participants, and began reaching out to diverse community members to learn how to best build rapport among the most marginalized gender minorities. I intentionally reached out to people I know in gender minority categories who are also people of color, low-income, and disabled in an attempt to ensure participants included representatives from diverse parts of the population. Throughout the data analysis process, I took note of participants' experiences that showcased intersectional impacts, and I highlighted the most prevalent of those experiences in the discussion of discrimination (see Chapter Four). As a feminist researcher I am tasked with giving voice to participants’ experiences, and I believe an intersectional framework was the best way for me to be true to the complexity of participants’ experiences based on their social identities.

Reflective Statement

I began my dissertation process with a dilemma; I needed to produce an academically solid product at the same time that I wanted to conduct research that would benefit the communities I live in, as a gender minority individual living in southwest Michigan. These two things are not mutually exclusive, but I struggled to find a project that spoke to me as an activist scholar and that I could complete within a realistic timeframe for a dissertation. With the publication of the NTDS report I found an example of a study that showed a quantifiable need for more research into the experiences of transgender people in the United States. As a transgender researcher myself, I decided to take up the authors' call to action and use the skills I have had the privilege to develop to conduct research into the local community of people in
gender minorities that will hopefully provide education and support for creating a more welcoming area for all individuals. The NTDS authors conducted a quantitative study that provided a ground-breaking look at the scope of discrimination against people in gender minorities. I chose to focus on qualitative knowledge about people in gender minorities in my local community, in order to provide a more detailed and nuanced understanding of participants' experiences in southwest Michigan. Additionally, I asked participants about their specific recommendations for local policymakers in order to provide examples of policies, practices, and procedures that aim to be more inclusive to people of all gender identities and expressions.

In order to accomplish my specific research goals, I relied on feminist epistemology to inform all parts of the research process. Feminist epistemology provides a framework that values the individual experiences of research participants as scientific data that can be collected and analyzed to produce knowledge about our social world (Cancian, 1992). Harding (1987) argues that one way to produce more critical knowledge is by exploring the unique experiences of women as an oppressed group. In other words, Harding argues it is important to learn about the experiences of women as a social group within other experiences, rather than assuming, for example, that devout Catholic women and men have the same experiences in life because they are Catholic. In order to explore the complexity of human relationships, Harding argues that feminist methodology must consider how gender impacts social experiences. Similarly, Crenshaw's (1989) intersectional approach strengthens researchers' abilities to understand the complexity of their participants lived realities by highlighting unique experiences for those with multiple marginalized identities. Feminist epistemology also calls for research that aims to change the lived realities of research participants, exemplified by Fonow and Cook (1991) who
state, “The aim of feminist research is liberation” (p.6). As stated above, my background as an activist pushed me to include social action in my research, and feminist epistemology provides a critical framework to accomplish my goals with this dissertation.

Feminist epistemology warns researchers to be aware of their own social identities and positions and how they may impact research topics, data collection, and analysis (Naples and Sachs, 2000). Gorelick (1991), for example, discusses the potential dangers of privileged women making broad generalizations about all women that do not account for intersections of ability, class, race, et cetera, and therefore may reconstruct existing unequal privilege systems. She argues that social identities such as class and race may impact women researching other women if the researchers are not aware of their (unintentional) participation in oppressive social systems. Similarly, Lee Maracle's (1996) *I Am Woman: A Native Perspective on Sociology and Feminism*, provides an example of how researchers' social identities can provide unique perspectives within their research. In her book, Maracle discusses the invisibility of Native American women within the wider Native American culture, while stating that Native men show more respect towards White women than Native women. During meetings, Maracle states she witnessed how Native women's voices were silenced by seemingly endless men's arguments, while a white woman was quickly recognized to speak. “Native men go to great lengths to recognize her, and of course, if there is controversy, her word is very often the respected one" (Maracle, 1996, p. 22). Maracle's observation may not have been obvious to a White woman or a Native American man, thus showcasing the importance of recognizing how researchers' social identities can lead to the development of different knowledges. As a transgender person myself, I bring a different perspective to the research process, which will inevitably produce different knowledges about
the experiences of people in gender minority categories than research conducted by cisgender researchers. However, living as a marginalized gender identity myself, there were times when I was too close the data and it was only through conversations with cisgender colleagues that I was able to step back and see extraordinary themes that I am too habituated into to see as clearly as those who are not directly living with similar experiences.

Additionally, it is important for feminist researchers to explore the intersectional power dynamics that exist between researchers and participants based on ability, class, race, sexuality, and other social identities. For example, Wolf (1996) argues that it is important to recognize the power differences between researchers and participants, even if they share aspects of their identities, such as shared gender identity. Thus, even though I'm a transgender person interviewing other transgender people, as a white, cisgender-passing, trans-masculine, formally educated, almost-middle class person I have a lot of privileged social identities to be aware of during this research process. In particular, it is important to recognize that my interpretations of the data will inevitably be influenced by my own social positions, experiences, and beliefs (e.g. being white, highly formally educated, low-income, cis-passing, masculine and genderqueer-identified, just to name a few). That said, feminist epistemology provides strategies that attempt to minimize power inequalities based on social identities, as described below.

One way feminist researchers can attempt to minimize power differences between the researchers and the participants is through critical self-reflexivity (Wolf, 1996). McCorkel and Myers (2003) exemplify this in their discussion of how they both attempted to be aware of the impact of their own social positions on the participants in their ethnographic studies. Both researchers were studying communities mostly comprised of people of color, so they had to
critically assess how their positions as white women affected their relationships with their participants. What they found was that while they were attempting to give voice to their participants and be good feminist researchers, they had not been critically aware of the influence their dominant narratives had on their interpretation of the data, and thus how they could have ignored the situated knowledges of the participants (McCorkel & Myers, 2003). It was not until years after they conducted the research that McCorkel and Myers critically analyzed their research and saw how they relied on master narratives they learned from others in their privileged positions to frame questions and interpret the data in their projects. For example, upon analysis of her research of inmates at a women's prison, McCorkel found that she had avoided acknowledging the impact her class, gender, and race had on her interactions with her participants. Thus, she did not realize until this analysis that she attempted to build rapport by empathizing with her similarities to the participants (i.e. gender), which led to her ignoring the barriers raised by class and race in her efforts (McCorkel & Myers, 2003). Had these researchers been more critically aware of how their identities could influence their research they may have been able to build better rapport with their participants, which may have led to gaining immeasurable knowledge about our world.

When collecting and analyzing participants' interviews there were many times when I had to step back and think about how my privileged identities could influence my interactions with, and interpretations of, participants' experiences. These power differences may be lessened by researchers who are aware of the potential impact of their social positions and submit themselves to the same level of scrutiny as the study participants (DeVault, 1999). I found that my social positions as a white, masculine, cis-passing, transgender person with advanced degrees in formal
education did influence my interactions with some participants. One incident that exemplifies this influence happened when I interviewed James who (as I found out afterwards) did not know I am also transgender. During our interview I had commented to James about his appearance after he mentioned he had been taking testosterone shots for three months and he kind of brushed it off. After we finished the interview I said something about my own transition and James stopped, looked at me, and said, “Wait, you're trans? Well that comment means so much more coming from you! [about his appearance].” I often wonder how our interview would have been different if James had realized from the beginning that I am also transgender, rather than cisgender, as that may have strengthened our rapport throughout the interview. There is an inherent power differential between cisgender and people in gender minorities, so if James thought that I am cisgender that inevitably creates a hierarchy between us with James in a more vulnerable position than he may have otherwise felt with a transgender researcher.

Another guiding principle of feminist epistemology is that research should aim to examine previously unexamined gender issues and engage in social action through advocating legal and social policies. In fact, Fonow and Cook (1991) state, "the aim of feminist research is liberation" (6). As a social justice activist I actively sought to produce knowledge that focused on creating social change in gender minority communities, and again feminist epistemology provides a framework for activist-focused scholarship. For example, in her exploration of the prevalence of domestic violence in American Indian families, Lisa Poupard (2003) argued that domestic violence is a trait of colonization and internalization of the oppressor's culture. She ends her report with a call for action for all 'othered' people to end Western-imposed power relationships, and create better treatment options for survivors and perpetrators of physical and
sexual violence (Poupart, 2003). In this article, Poupart used her privileged position as an educated person with access to a (relatively) widespread audience, to encourage social change.

I am privileged enough to have developed a set of academic research skills, and like Poupart I aim to use my privileges to promote positive social change for people in gender minority categories as much as possible. Through this research I have become aware of the importance of critical discussions and active listening among and between people in both dominant and minority gender categories. To that end, the last chapter of my findings explores the policy recommendations participants feel would help make southwest Michigan a more welcoming and inclusive place. I specifically asked participants for their recommendations to provide examples of social changes policymakers in southwest Michigan could enact. As part of my aim to encourage social change through this scholarship I will present the results to local LGBT organizations and explain how the information I obtain could inform their conversations with legal, social, and economic leaders.

Data Collection

Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured, open-ended interviews with transgender and gender non-conforming people in southwest Michigan. The primary method of recruiting participants was snowball sampling; I reached out to people in gender minority categories I knew to spread the word about the study among their personal contacts and communities. Local GSM centers also disseminated information about the study through their monthly emails, and I attended local GSM-focused events (Kalamazoo Pride, Grand Rapids Pride, Against Me!\(^2\) concert, Transgender Day of Remembrance memorial) where I distributed

\(^2\) Against Me! is a punk rock band fronted by Laura Jane Grace, a transgender woman who came out publicly in 2012 and has since released an album that includes songs inspired by her process coming out in the punk scene
“call for participation” flyers as well. Potential participants reached out to me via email, by phone, or in person, we would set up a time for the interview, and I would send them the informed consent forms to review before we met. Participants chose whether to have their interviews recorded (audio or video), and interviews lasted an average of 75-90 minutes. Informal follow-up discussions were conducted with some participants to clarify information, such as specific terms used to describe themselves, and other informal contact through social media and seeing each other at community events were also used to collect additional information at each participants' determination.

Portrait of Participants

Participants in this study included 17 adults (those over 18 years old) who have resided or worked in southwest Michigan and identify as a socially marginalized gender identity. Participants lived, worked, and described experiences throughout southwest Michigan, including in Allegan, Calhoun, Kalamazoo, Kent, Ottowa, and St. Joseph counties. Interviews were conducted from April 2015 to July 2016 at locations of the participants' choice. I intentionally sought out participants who represented the diversity people who identify as gender minorities by focusing on reaching out to people of color, low-income, and feminine-identified people (transgender women, those with a feminine expression, etc.) in southwest Michigan. This section will explore broad demographics characteristics of the individuals who chose to engage in this project. All but two participants chose to use their real names rather than pseudonyms, and agreed to take part in a documentary film to be made available for public educational opportunities.

(Morris, 2016).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender Identity</th>
<th>Race or Ethnicity</th>
<th>Sexuality</th>
<th>Employment Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bianca</td>
<td>Transgender woman</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Straight</td>
<td>Factory employee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill</td>
<td>Transgender man</td>
<td>Mixed – African American and White</td>
<td>Straight</td>
<td>Personal caregiver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bobbie Lee</td>
<td>Transgender woman</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Primarily attracted to women but is open to “see what happens naturally”</td>
<td>Unemployed, formerly in construction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Davison</td>
<td>Transgender woman</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Pansexual</td>
<td>Mental health care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dee</td>
<td>Gender non-binary &amp; Femme</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Bisexual (defined as people like me and people not like me)</td>
<td>Retail &amp; artist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dyrk</td>
<td>Transgender man</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elvira</td>
<td>Gender non-binary/ Femme</td>
<td>LatinX</td>
<td>Pansexual</td>
<td>Artist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eric</td>
<td>Transgender man</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Straight</td>
<td>Job coach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frankie</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Bisexual</td>
<td>Chef &amp; artist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>Transgender man</td>
<td>Arab</td>
<td>Queer</td>
<td>Tattoo shop staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jay</td>
<td>Transman</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Attracted to women</td>
<td>Non-profit organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kamora</td>
<td>Transgender woman</td>
<td>Multiracial – majority Black mixed with Native</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>Student &amp; retail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lex</td>
<td>Gender non-binary/Genderqueer</td>
<td>Mixed person – Black and White</td>
<td>Queer</td>
<td>Retail &amp; artist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mal</td>
<td>Transgender man</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Heterosexual, feels “boxed in” by this term but it was the best term at</td>
<td>Mental health care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marcy</td>
<td>Transgender woman</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Pansexual</td>
<td>U.S. Veteran &amp; temporary employee in factories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Max</td>
<td>Non-binary Transman</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Queer</td>
<td>Student &amp; Direct support professional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Triston</td>
<td>Gender non-binary &amp; transfeminine</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Gay</td>
<td>Student, &amp; retail</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The decision to use one's own name speaks to the resiliency and strength of these participants, who risk their emotional and physical safety everyday just by daring to live authentically, and yet still spent their free time sharing some of their worst experiences with me to help educate and build empathy with the public. As a researcher I am responsible for balancing participants' personal protection with honoring their voices and desires in how to engage in this research. To that end, I have included the informational table below as a quick snapshot of the diversity of participants who chose to engage in this research; however, I do not differentiate those who chose to use pseudonyms and generalized identity aspects as much as possible.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed as they were collected through a grounded theory approach, an inductive method of analysis in which researchers evaluate data for themes during the collection process, and use that early analysis to inform further data collection (Charmaz, 2016). Rather than collecting data to test pre-existing theories, grounded theory tasks the researcher with finding patterns in the data that explain how individuals understand their experiences, and solve their problems (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In this research, I relied on a classic grounded theory approach, which calls for data to be analyzed from multiple angles and with an open mind (Glasner, 2007). As I conducted and transcribed participants' interviews, particular themes emerged and I adjusted my interview questions for future participants accordingly. For example, after four participants described feeling more confident after coming out as transgender I began to ask subsequent participants about their confidence levels after they came out as transgender or gender non-binary. When juxtaposed with the stories of discrimination and microaggressions
participants described, this confidence seems contradictory at first. However, when I asked more
participants about if and why they felt more confident after coming out their responses revealed a
trend among participants that helps contextualize the confidence. In other words, I was able to
learn more about how participants experienced their confidence and how it is expressed in their
lives. Grounded theory as an analytical tool calls for open coding to determine emerging themes,
along with a continuous process of comparative analysis to focus themes into analytic categories
(Glasner & Strauss, 1967; Glasner, 1998; Holton, 2007). By analyzing data as they were
collected, and adjusting interview questions to accommodate emerging themes, the participants'
voices had a significant impact on the direction of this research.

After all data were collected I completed several rounds of open coding and memoing to
refine the analytic categories. Open coding is an analysis technique that does not rely on pre-
established codes, but rather allows researchers to openly explore the data, and see what
substantive codes emerge (Esterberg, 2002). Memoing is a process of critically assessing
relationships among the substantive codes that emerged during open coding to determine
theoretical categories (Glasner, 1978, p.165). To continue the coding process, I systematically
read through interview transcripts to identify reoccurring themes between participants'
interviews. The substantive codes that emerged through the use of grounded theory led to the
creation of three major analytic categories: gender identity and expression, discrimination and
microaggressions, and policy recommendations. I read through each participants' interview and
took note of experiences that related to each major analytic category by creating a table with
each participants' name in a column with three rows (one for each major analytic category).
During the second round of coding, I used pre-established codes from the NTDS report to code
the discrimination and microaggressions category. Since this study was inspired by the NTDS report, it made sense to use the outline established by that groundbreaking study to study the discrimination my participants' experienced. The NTDS study analyzed their participants' experiences according to the social institutions in which they were discriminated against.

There was no such road map for the gender identity and expression section, so I again used open coding to analyze substantive codes in that category. Coding this major analytic category focused on how participants discussed their gender identity and expression, as noted in the major categories table created during the first round of coding. While reading through the interviews focusing on the gender identity and expression category, both broad and distinct themes emerged in how participants discussed their gender identity and expression based on differences in generation, race, family, religion, and geographic location. Once these themes emerged in the gender identity and expression category, I recognized similar patterns from the discrimination and microaggressions category that made it clear the NTDS codes were not the best fit for the data. Consistent with the demands of grounded theory, and after discussions with colleagues, I ultimately re-analyzed the discrimination and microaggressions category using the themes that emerged in the gender identity and expression category. To complete the final round of coding for the discrimination category, I read through the participants' experiences in the major analytic categories table related to discrimination and microaggressions to determine patterns of similarities and differences. I used again open coding to analyze the recommendations category, which revealed a similar pattern of intersectional differences among participants' suggestions. Throughout all rounds of coding, I continued memoing and discussing my findings with my main advisor to determine substantive themes within each major analytic category.
Benefits of Research

This study was designed to investigate the experiences of transgender and gender non-conforming people in southwest Michigan with discrimination and microaggressions, as well as their policy recommendations. Many participants noted how much it meant to them to be able to talk about their experiences with others, or to take part in a research study conducted by and for transgender people. For example, when asked if he talked to others about negative experiences Bill replied that he didn't tell others and, “talking about this is making me feel amazing. Like seriously...this is making me feel a lot better.” Similarly, Bobbie Lee described her participation in this project as a pivotal moment for her in regards to her relationship with her family,

They didn't want me here today because I mentioned it to them and they were kind of quiet about it because they knew this was kind of a finalization me being filmed as myself was kind of like a finalization of that I'm not going back to that life and so this will put a nail in the coffin for them which is nice for me because it means I am who I say I am.

Research conducted within gender diverse communities by members of those communities may create opportunities for other transgender and gender non-conforming people to have similarly empowering experiences.

In addition to the empowering experiences for participants, this study also provides a contemporary look into the lives of some transgender and gender non-conforming people's lives in southwest Michigan. While this study may not be generalizable to the larger transgender and gender non-conforming populations of southwest Michigan due to the small sample size, the evidence presented by participants does coincide with national data about transgender and gender non-conforming people's experiences with discrimination. The goal of this research is to provide
the public, including law and policy-makers, with more information about local people in gender
minority categories who are impacted by area laws, policies, and social interactions. Hopefully,
the information discovered through this study will lead to more engaged and productive
conversations between transgender accomplices, policymakers, and the general public in
southwest Michigan.

As previously described, the state of Michigan recently decided not to vote on an
amendment to the Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act (ELCRA) to include sexual orientation and
One of the arguments against the amendment was that there were no reports of discrimination
based on sexual orientation or gender identity/expression, so there was no reason for the
amendment (Oosting, 2014a). It is not inconceivable that people who were fired from their jobs
for being transgender would not report that to anyone because there is no legal redress currently
available to them. This study may be used to provide documented evidence of examples of
discrimination faced by transgender and gender non-conforming people in southwest Michigan,
which may help sway future lawmakers to support amending the ELCRA.

During the fight to amend the ELCRA multiple Michigan social justice organizations and
businesses formed a coalition called Freedom Michigan, which was focused on educating the
public and lawmakers about the necessity of expanding the ELCRA to include sexual orientation
and gender identity/expression (ACLUmich.org, 2014). Throughout the fall of 2014 Freedom
Michigan sent out multiple calls for people's stories about their experiences with discrimination
to their email list, on multiple social media sites, and through outreach to personal connections.
The organization scrambled to find volunteers to share their stories with our lawmakers, in an
effort to humanize the conversation and hear from those directly impacted by the impending decision (Freedom Michigan, 2014). Clearly organizations in Michigan want to hear from transgender and gender non-conforming people about their experiences with discrimination, and this study could provide a valuable starting point to collecting that information.

This study may also benefit local GSM community resource centers by providing information specific to our community that could be used during educational programs. Out Front Kalamazoo (OFK) (formerly the Kalamazoo Gay Lesbian Resource Center) has a “LGBT Workplace Diversity Training,” which includes a section on people's personal stories of discrimination in business and social settings based on their sexual orientation and/or gender identity/expression (OFK, 2014). Since this is a qualitative study there are multiple examples of people's experiences with discrimination based on gender identity/expression in the same geographic location of many of the organizations and businesses likely to ask OFK to conduct such trainings. This study highlights that discrimination and microaggressions against transgender and gender non-conforming folks are problems in southwest Michigan that should be taken seriously. As a former board member for OFK, I have the opportunity to disseminate the results of this study to the Executive Director who currently creates the transgender education trainings and has expressed interest in the findings.

In additional to OFK, this study could also benefit local college educators who wish to incorporate the results into classroom and public lectures/presentations on transgender topics. Some local academic departments encourage faculty and instructors to incorporate transgender topics into appropriate courses. One such department even conducted a workshop for faculty and instructors to learn from one another how to effectively integrate transgender topics in their
courses in Spring 2015. The information discovered through this study could deepen college educator's understanding of transgender experiences with discrimination and microaggressions, which means they would be better able to incorporate those topics into courses.

I have also had the opportunity to conduct multiple university classroom and public presentations to educate audiences about transgender topics throughout southwest Michigan and northeastern Indiana. In my experience, audiences at those presentations are very receptive to the stories of transgender people. I always concisely discuss the major NTDS findings, and I believe the incorporation of local participants' voices will strengthen these educational presentations. Audiences are often more empathetic to gender identity-based discrimination when they have a concrete (even if anonymous) example of something that has happened in their own “backyard”.

The following chapters will explore participants' discussions of their gender identity and expression, experiences with discrimination and microaggressions, and their recommendations to policymakers for creating welcoming atmospheres for transgender and gender non-conforming people in southwest Michigan. Chapter Two will provide a brief history transgender and gender non-conforming people's experiences in the United States, including an exploration of the medicalization of gender non-conforming behavior and the creation of transgender as an identity in medicine and through the media. Chapter Three focuses on participants' descriptions of their gender identities and expressions, and contextualize those descriptions based on the larger social context of the two generations (Generation X and Millennials as well be described in detail) in which they developed their gender identities. Additionally, Chapter Three will explore the intersectional differences in participants’ gender identities and expressions based on other social factors such as class, family and religion, race, and geographic location. In Chapter Four I will
focus on participants' experiences with discrimination and microaggressions in southwest Michigan, again contextualizing how they responded to those situations by generations. This chapter will also highlight differences expressed based on participants' class, family and religion, race, and geographic location. Chapter Five describes the policy recommendations outlined by participants, and I discuss them in relation to the policy recommendations outlined in the follow-up study to the NTDS, the 2015 US Trans Survey. The final chapter will provide an overview of the knowledge brought to light by this study, and discuss the overall implications of listening to people in gender minorities and responding to their concerns.
If someone is consistently denied access to basic things like bathroom use, then it creates an environment where it's okay for other people to commit crimes against them. If we consistently say, for instance, women who look like they might be men and men who look like they might be women, can't use gender specific bathrooms because it's not safe for the people who are around them. Doesn't it make sense that those who are being labeled as unsafe that other will believe that it's okay for them to lash out because they feel unsafe? And the government has already said you are unsafe, and we acknowledge that you feel unsafe, so go ahead and do what you want to these people. And really it's the people who are different who are unsafe in these environments, where people are being given a ticket that allows them to do whatever. – Eric

Why are people's lives impacted so greatly by gender identities and expressions? One way to address this question is with an adapted application of Foucault's (1978) theory of the history of sexuality to the history of the emergence of gender identities, and the role they play in maintaining the status quo. The history of gender identities is closely linked to the history of the development of sexual identity, and thus Foucault's theory of the history of sexuality is applicable to the history of gender identities. As will be described in greater detail later on, Foucault (1978) argues that the control over naming and defining specific sexual identities is key to controlling public perception and social legitimacy of those sexualities. Foucault's logic can also inform how gender identities came to be formed as various social labels were defined by the Western medical community throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. This chapter will outline Foucault's (1978) theory about social construction of sexualities and apply the same theory to research about gender identities. Additionally, this chapter describes how the Western medical community has been influenced by socially constructed ideologies and has relied on what Connell (2011) refers to as categorical thinking, or the uncritical reliance on existing social
categories such as masculinity and femininity, in highly influential studies that have impacted the lives of people in gender minorities. Finally, this chapter lays out how the current debate in transgender medical care between the existing Standards of Care guidelines for transition-related transgender healthcare and the relatively new Informed Consent model, aligns with Foucault's (1978) theory that social control and repression of personal freedoms can create social identities as people struggle against being oppressed for various behaviors that have been defined as socially unacceptable. According to Foucault's (1978) theory, gender minorities must have control over naming and defining their own gender identities to be taken seriously by society and avoid more gender-based discrimination.

The History of Social Control of Sex and Gender

In order to understand current beliefs about sex, sexuality, gender identity, and gender expression, it is important to explore the historical contexts in which these ideas were constructed, categorized, and controlled in Western society. We must understand who has the power to define and control whether actions, thoughts, and bodies are considered moral or deviant throughout societies, and the history behind that control. As Foucault (1978) contends, the Catholic Church, and later the Western medical community both had powerful impacts on the formation of ideas about and expressions of sexuality and gender as social identities. Foucault (1978) argues that sexuality is not an objective state that can be separated from socially constructed power relations, but rather is a result of the post-Enlightenment strategic usage of sexuality as a controlling tactic, and ensuing focus on human sexual desires and gendered bodies and behaviors (pg. 107). Throughout the 19th century increased scrutiny of, and power over, defining the nature and morality of human sexualities and gendered bodies and behaviors,
stemming from Western medical medicine's sexual development norms, has led to the proliferation of various sexual and gender identities, and influenced cultural assumptions about which sexes, sexualities, and gender identities are “natural” (i.e., “legitimate”) human variations that should be accepted, and which are morally or biologically deviant (Foucault, 1978).

Social Control and Bodies

According to Foucault (1978), the history of sexuality in Western culture is typified by increasing discipline over bodies and institutional surveillance of those bodies for social control. Ruling bodies desire control of the masses in order to ultimately maintain authority, power, and resources, partially by attempting to ensure uninterrupted continuity of sexuality norms such as heteronormativity, monogamy, patriarchal lineage, and other tools used to oppress people throughout history. Since the 17th century, social institutions have created standardized categories of normative human bodies, sexual desires, and behaviors to which individuals have increasingly been expected to adhere (Foucault, 1978). First, in the 17th century, the Catholic Church encouraged people to be more self-vigilant in recognizing and confessing their sexual thoughts and desires, as well as actions, which Church officials used to define morally acceptable sexual thoughts and desires (Foucault, 1978, pg. 20). This led to a growth of discourses around bodies, sexual behaviors, and desires in multiple areas of social life (Foucault, 1978). During the 18th century, these discourses influenced researchers to begin to study human sex, sexuality, and gender identity and expression, which resulted in the creation of the Western sexual development norms that were widely accepted throughout Western societies. People were expected to have bodies that conformed to the medical community's definition of a distinct male and female binary, experience sexual desires defined by this community (females only attracted to males and
vice versa), and engage in sexual acts defined by the medical community and Catholic Church as socially and morally acceptable (and only after marriage) (Foucault, 1978). In other words, individuals are controlled by society's insistence that they have bodies arranged in socially normative ways and be engaged in socially approved sexual activities only after the required rituals are observed. The process of limiting human freedoms by instilling the idea that certain sexual behaviors are 'right' or 'natural' works to control human behavior to the benefit of the ruling class.

Foucault (1978) contends that power is exercised over human sexuality and gendered bodies through a network of relationships that define a binary of socially and morally acceptable groupings and prohibited groupings that are expected to remain concealed (pg. 83). Certain sexual behaviors, desires, and human bodies were defined as immoral and socially unacceptable by multiple social institutions who created language and laws to discuss what was to be considered taboo and censored in society based on the Western medical ideal of sexual development (Foucault, 1978, pg. 84). The power to define unacceptable sexualities and gender identities creates categories of previously undefined identities, by punishing and dominating those who engage in taboo gender identities, gender expressions, and sexualities. This power works because it remains disguised by the idea that binary-based gender and sexualities are natural states of humanity, and therefore to question if people's genitals dictates their gender identities is as foreign as questioning if humans need to breathe oxygen to survive. Thus, rather than protecting a natural state of humanity from degradation, social control of gender and sexuality actually works to limit natural occurrences of human freedoms of expression (Foucault, 1978, pgs. 85-86).
Religious and legal edicts that limit human freedom by enforcing strict adherence to dichotomous gender roles, especially surrounding the body, are used to control populations for multiple purposes. In patriarchal societies, for instance, it is common for ruling classes to create laws that make abortion and birth control information difficult or illegal to access, or use religious-based ideology to make that information seem immoral. This creates a social class in which individuals capable of giving birth have little control over whether or when they reproduce. The patriarchal government in this example is then able to control a numerical majority of the population by creating adherence to the idea that abortion and birth control are wrong. This kind of discipline makes it so people who would have otherwise had abortions and dedicated their energy into other areas of social life, such as obtaining social wealth, expanding medical knowledge, or fighting for social justice, instead are constrained by the ideology that shames or legally forces them to continue a pregnancy. Historically, this has led to women being kept out of the public sphere, which created a male-centered public sphere with limited competition. As women continue to push for entrance and equality in the public sphere, the backlash they are subject to as a group show the growing pains men as a group are experiencing as their collective control over women loosens. However, given the hidden nature of such social control it can be difficult for people in oppressed social groups to recognize their own oppression.

For example, legal systems are put into place to formalize the power in language that is eventually considered an unquestionable aspect of society, so Foucault (1978) argues that when analyzing power relations, it is imperative not to rely solely on laws as defining moral actions (pg. 90). Laws are created by the ruling class to exert social control over the masses in order to
maintain their authority in society. For example, many states in the U.S. only recognize 'male' (M) and 'female' (F) as gender designations on state identification cards, so when an agender-identified person goes to get a license their identity is not legally recognized. Thus, if they want to engage in the society with a driver's license, an agender person is forced to conform to socially constructed gender identifications enforced by laws, and choose an M or an F instead. Foucault therefore argues that we must look at how power operates in and organizes a multiplicity of relationships in all social spheres, because “power is everywhere” and becomes embodied into the state apparatus through legal systems (1978, pg. 93). According to Foucault (1978) there is no binary of rulers and ruled people at the root of power relations, but rather resistances to power are natural consequences within power relations (pg. 95). Power, therefore, is in the naming and defining of language because it posits a binary of licit and illicit, permitted and forbidden sexualities and gender identities, and the ability to disseminate a dominant language throughout multiple social institutions that results in increased social control (Foucault, 1978, pg. 101).

According to Foucault (1978) social institutions attempted to gain more social control over people by creating a binary of “good” and “bad” human sexual desires and gendered bodies and behaviors (pg. 104). The Enlightenment in the 18th century saw science playing a greater role in producing knowledge about the world, and thus the Western medical community developed the dominant discourse of sexuality and human bodies (Foucault, 1978). During this time feminine bodies were increasingly pathologized, sexualized, and tied to family and children, while children's sexuality was viewed as a danger to be controlled. Procreative behavior came under increasing scrutiny in accordance with social responsibilities, and norms of sexual development separated “natural” developments from pathological deviations from social norms.
(Foucault, 1978, pgs. 104-105). Therefore, according to Foucault (1978) rather than a natural given that is waiting to be discovered, sexualities are produced by naming and defining socially constructed power relations linked to sexual behaviors, desires, and human bodies (pg.106). This was all linked to social control of the population through the use of alliances within the family unit, such as marriages, kinship ties, and transmission of names and possessions, which all function to maintain their own existence. On the other hand, Foucault argues that sexuality can be used as a more effective form of social control than the alliances described above (1978, p. 106). Unlike family alliances that have a goal of reproduction, sexuality is innovative and dynamic, so focusing on sexuality as a means of social control forces individuals to think more deeply about themselves and their relationship to society, or at least follow the socially defined norms. Defining sexualities in a society forces individuals to analyze their bodily sensations and qualities of pleasure in different situations to know if their sexualities are “normal” or not (Foucault, 1978, p.106). Therefore, society creates a type of social control that makes people increase their self-discipline and surveillance of others to ensure adherence to sexual development norms. For example, the act of being attracted to those of the same sex have existed for as long as recorded human history, but it was not until relatively recently that society defined those desires and actions as having a deeper meaning about who one is as a person. A person can be morally or socially judged based on their sexual desires and actions.

Pathologization of Bodies

In the 19th century Western medicine divorced medicine of the body from medicine about sex and created the idea of an isolated “sexual instinct” that either aligned or deviated from the accepted sexual development norm, which set up those who deviated to be seen as having
abnormal sexual development (Foucault, 1978, pg. 117). These abnormalities, or sexual “perversions” as they were called, became the focus of scientific study and biological explanations that stated that deviations from the sexual development norm are “diseases” that could be hereditary and must be controlled, so as to not impact future generations (Foucault, 1978, pg. 118). For instance, it was assumed that those who deviated from the sexual development norms, such as homosexuals and gender non-conforming people, may produce sterile children, or increase the likelihood of other diseases in future generations (Foucault, 1978, pg. 120). This idea had widespread influence in multiple social institutions such as medicine and psychiatry, the legal system, the family, and education systems, which led to increased surveillance of individuals' sexual and gendered behaviors, bodies, and desires within these social institutions (Foucault, 1978, pg. 122). According to Foucault (1978), the primary concern of those who used sexual development norms to exert social control was in protecting the “body, vigor, longevity, progenitor, and descent” of the ruling classes, which led to a “political reordering of life” (pg. 123). The Western medical community's sexual development norms became ubiquitous throughout social institutions influencing power relations associated with human sexual behaviors and gender expressions, resulting in related dominant and minority social identities.

Throughout the 1800s, the rising bourgeoisie defended themselves and arranged social power relations around protecting and affirming Western medicine's sexual development norms as representing healthy, socially and morally acceptable sexuality and gendered bodies to be cultivated for the good of society (Foucault, 1978). The ruling class saw themselves as having a body and sexuality that needed to be nurtured as a distinct aspect of one's identity and protected
as politically, economically, and historically important for the future of the bourgeoisie (Foucault, 1978, pg. 125). In other words, a healthy body and mind were defined as hallmarks of the bourgeoisie, and necessary to protect the future of the ruling classes.

As the exploited social classes were being pushed to also critically consider their sexualities as essential aspects of their identities, conflicts arose around the treatment of those exploited classes, particularly related to issues common in dense urban spaces (e.g. sanitation problems, disease outbreaks, prostitution and venereal disease), the growing need for stable and competent workers in the industrial economy, and an economic need to regulate populations through social control. In order to maintain control over the exploited classes' sexuality, new technologies of surveillance emerged to bring their sexual desires and gender identities in accordance with the norms developed by the Western medical community (Foucault, 1978, pg. 126). Since the exploited classes did not have the language or understanding of how sexual desires and actions were supposed to be, at least according to the Western medical model, the bourgeoisie had to create a social support system that would teach people the new languages and encourage them to think accordingly. These social structures were necessary to support the use of sexuality as a means of social control (Foucault, 1978, p. 126)

Individuals' sexual desires and gendered bodies and behaviors became embodied, and discourses emerged that identified individuals as their “perversion” in social classifications. For example, whereas before the late 19th century those who engaged in sodomy were seen as debaucheries lawbreakers or sinners, in the 1870s the term “homosexuality” was coined to describe and explain the kind of person who would engage in sodomy (Foucault, 1978). The homosexual became the social identity of a person whose sexuality was the root of all other
aspects of their personality and humanity (Foucault, 1978, pg. 43). Scientific studies identified behavioral, bodily, or desire-based deviations from the sexual development norm as unnatural and often immoral. For instance, people with obvious intersex conditions\footnote{Intersex conditions are those that lead to atypical development of sex characteristics, including external genitalia, sex chromosomes, reproductive organs, and sex-related hormones outside normative sexual development models. For example, some folks are born with an exceptionally large clitoris, a vagina that lacks an opening, divided scrotum that look like labia, or XXY chromosomes (Schneider, et al., 2006).} were often considered criminals because their bodies did not conform to the supposed 'natural law' that there are two distinct sexes (Foucault, 1978, pg.38). Thus, intersex individuals were often suspected of being inherently immoral and deviant in other ways as well. Using sexuality as a means of social control also works to create a secret and ubiquitous influence throughout social life that creates the illusion of there being a “natural” state of humanity, and so those who challenged Western medicine's sexual development norms often face social and legal ramifications (Foucault, 1978).

Despite the fact that there is current scientific evidence contradicting it, much of the Western medical community continues to advance the idea of dichotomous sex and gender binaries. For example, Anne Fausto-Sterling (2000) outlines how sex, as well as gender, is a socially constructed category based on how biological research is constructed and conducted. Critical analysis of scientific studies shows a bias towards the sexual development norms used by Western medicine in producing and reinforcing these specific development norms as “natural” (Joy and Repta, 2012, pg. 19). For example, Rebecca Jordan-Young (2010) describes how brain organization studies that have been used to support the Western medical community's idea that sex differences exist in the human brain based on exposure to sex hormones in the womb, and the uncritical influence that has had in other social institutions. This creates a hegemonic discourse that makes certain behaviors and ideas seem natural, while those that deviate from the
hegemonic discourse are deemed unnatural.

The Science of Sex and Gender Differences

The science of sex and gender differences has evolved in important ways throughout the past two centuries, and has been more influenced by cultural phenomenon than is recognized (Richardson, 2013; Reis, 2009). For example, the history of the scientific study of intersex bodies shows how medical researchers' decisions about how to “correct” intersex conditions, especially those resulting in ambiguous genitalia, were entangled in social constructions of what was “natural” and “normal” for various sexes and genders (Reis, 2009, p. x). In a synthetic analysis of over 300 numerously cited studies conducted using brain organization theory to explain human gender differences (from 1960 – 2008), Jordan-Young (2010) concludes that researchers inadvertently rely on dynamic, biased social constructions of what counts as masculine and feminine behavior when evaluating gender behavior. Thus the seemingly seamless “scientific” literature of brain organization theory is inherently flawed, because the researchers' unexamined biases about masculine and feminine behavior influenced the methodologies of the studies (Jordan-Young, 2010). For example, like many people, scientists often have an uncritical understanding of what constitutes masculine and feminine behavior that bias their results (Richardson, 2013; Jordan-Young, 2010). Therefore, fundamentally flawed scientific studies have been used to support gender research that has greatly impacted both the scientific community and wider general society's view of transgender and gender non-conforming people.

The Western medical community has historically relied on socially constructed categories of what type of bodies, behaviors, and desires are either feminine or masculine that impacts how
people are treated based on their gendered bodies and identities. Social constructions of sex and gender expectations influence how scientists interpret actions, behaviors, and thoughts as indicative to separate 'male' and 'female' brains, bodies, and behaviors (Fine, 2010; Jordan-Young, 2010; Martin, 2001; Richardson, 2013). According to Richardson (2013), the influence of cultural constructions of gender can be seen in multiple ways in scientific research on human sex chromosomes, from the types of questions asked in the studies, to the theories and methodologies used, and even the descriptive language used in the research field. For example, the X and Y chromosomes are regularly gendered in popular and scientific literature with the X being described as “she,” “motherly,” “passive,” the “sexy” chromosome, and associated with mystery and contradiction, and the Y is described as “he,” “macho,” “active,” “clever,” “dominant,” and “hyperactive” (Richardson, 2013, p.3). Scientists tend to portray boys and men with Klinefelter Syndrome (born with XXY chromosomes) as more feminine because they have an extra X chromosome (Richardson, 2013). In another example, Jordan-Young (2010) interviewed prominent brain organization researchers about how they operationalized masculinity and femininity in research studies and “heard repeatedly that masculine and feminine sexuality are simply 'commonsense' ideas” (p. 109). Uncritical explanations of what is regarded as feminine and masculine behaviors can bias the results of research studies that attempt to discover if feminine and masculine behaviors are due to innate sex differences or not (Jordan-Young, 2010).

Scientific definitions of feminine and masculine sexuality have changed over time due to advances in scientific research and changing attitudes towards sexuality in the U.S. (Richardson, 2013; Jordan-Young, 2010). For example, as Jordan-Young (2010) discusses in her research on
brain organization theory, in the first half the 20th century female sexuality was defined as passive, vaginally-focused (as opposed to focused on the clitoris), masochistic (women value a certain level of masculine “brutality” during sexual activities), and with a lower natural capacity for sexual response than men's capacity (p. 111). This Victorian-era ideology about female sexuality was the pervasive definition throughout brain organization research conducted from the 1960s through the 1980, even as a number of scientific studies in the 1950s and 1960s found that women achieve greater sexual satisfaction from clitoral, rather than just vaginal, stimulation. In fact, Masters and Johnson's (1965) findings directly contradict the idea that women have less sexual capacity than men when they found that women are capable of multiple sequential orgasms (while men are not) (in Jordan-Young, 2010 p. 113).

From the late 1960s until the 1980s brain organization researchers defined feminine and masculine sexualities as two distinct and complementary sexual natures (Jordan-Young, 2010). Feminine sexuality was defined as passive, infrequently aroused (even after Masters and Johnson's work), and masochistic, while masculine sexuality was defined as initiative, versatile (in regard to sexual positions), dominant, and frequently/easily sexually aroused (Jordan-Young, 2010). Men were expected to engage in behaviors such as masturbation, sex with multiple partners, sex outside of marriage, and only desire women; women were expected to refrain from all those behaviors, exclusively desire men, and ultimately use sex as a way to fulfill their desire for romantic love and motherhood (Jordan-Young, 2010). In the early 1980s however, brain organization scientists' definitions of female sexuality changed to one that included masturbation, multiple sexual partners, and arousal through clitoral stimulation as “commonsense” defining aspects of feminine sexuality, which directly contradict the way female
sexuality was defined in earlier studies (Jordan-Young, 2010, p. 114). This change in the researchers' definitions of female sexuality was not openly discussed within the discipline, thus the foundational research of brain organization theory likely contradicts brain organization research conducted after 1980, and yet these studies are still regularly cited as evidence supporting the idea that there is a “female brain” and “male brain” structured by hormone exposure in utero (Jordan-Young, 2010, p. 143). In reference to this contradiction, Jordan-Young explains, “...the 'cleansing' effect that it has on the scientific record is unhealthy, because to eyes trained solely on the current literature and its characterization of the research trajectory, it makes brain organization research appear seamless, coherent, and ever-advancing—rather than characterized by many dead ends, reevaluations, and continuing contradictions” (2010, p. 143).

A critical look at the scientific record of brain organization studies shows a pattern of inconsistency in how feminine and masculine behaviors are defined by researchers studying the theory, and a reliance on socially constructed gender roles to define feminine and masculine behavior (Jordan-Young, 2010). Jordan-Young (2010) argues there is no consistent scientific evidence to support the idea that prenatal hormone exposure is linked to sex-typed traits and interests (p. 228). For example, brain organization research on girls with congenital adrenal hyperplasia4 (CAH) has been the most heavily relied on to support the idea that exposure to prenatal testosterone will produce a more masculine brain structure resulting in more masculine interests (Jordan-Young, 2010). However, in her analysis Jordan-Young (2010) found mixed results for studies in all the areas of research. For example, seven out of eight independent

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4 An intersex condition in which the adrenal glands secrete unusually high levels of testosterone that may result in ambiguous genitalia in people with XX chromosomes. Girls with CAH represent the highest levels of testosterone in human females (Jordan-Young, 2010).
studies that compared girls with CAH to unaffected girls found CAH-affected girls to be “more masculine,” but the only strong finding among the studies is that they tend to choose stereotypically “masculine” toys and games, and prefer male playmates (Jordan-Young, 2010, p. 226). Of the studies focusing on aggression in girls with CAH, only one of the studies found their participants to have higher levels of aggression (Jordan-Young, 2010, p. 226). Aggression is considered a masculine trait, so if brain organization theory was correct, girls with CAH should be consistently more masculine in this area than unaffected girls, but the research does not support that theory (Jordan-Young, 2010).

Studies of girls with CAH do not take into consideration the impact of the fact that these girls are expected to have masculine behavior, which could influence how doctors, parents, and even the girls themselves interpret different behaviors throughout their lives. Because girls with CAH are suspected of having a masculine brain structure and may have masculine-looking outward genitals, it is likely that more of their behaviors will be interpreted as masculine by the people charged with observing these girls (Jordan-Young, 2010; Fine, 2010). Psychologists have found that people's perceptions of children's behaviors and emotions change based on the perceived gender of the child (Jordan-Young, 2010). For example, Jordan-Young describes one study in which researchers videotaped a gender-neutrally dressed 22-month old infant and asked 464 medical, nursing, and psychology students to watch the film and label the infant's activities as masculine or feminine. Overall, the observers were more likely to label the child's activities as “masculine” when they were told the child was male, “feminine” when told the child was a girl, and when told the child was “a hermaphrodite” (intersex) women-observers were about 70% more likely to perceive the child's activities as “masculine” (Delk, et al. 1986 in Jordan-Young,
2010, p. 251). So, when doctors and parents are observing girls with CAH they may be more likely to interpret those children's behaviors as masculine, because they are primed to expect those girls to exhibit more masculine behaviors (Fine, 2010; Jordan-Young, 2010). Many researchers have used findings from these types of flawed studies as evidence that increased testosterone levels in women leads to them being more masculine, thus upholding their theory (Fine, 2010; Jordan-Young, 2010).

Flawed scientific research has been used to enforce Western medicine's control over what is considered normative sexual development. These norms have become so ubiquitous throughout society they are thought of as “natural” even by researchers studying how sex hormones impact gender differences and the brain structure (Richardson, 2013; Fausto-Sterling, 2012; Fine, 2010; Jordan-Young, 2010). The Western medical community's power over defining 'normative' sexual development has created a social reality that makes members of the Western medical community the sole authority over socially acceptable human sexual desires and gendered bodies and behaviors (Fine, 2010; Jordan-Young, 2010; Fausto-Sterling, 2012). When society looks to the medical community to determine individuals' correct gender identity expressions, many people may find themselves persecuted for living outside the acceptable models. As we will see in Chapter Three, the authority of the Western medical community is being challenged by younger people in gender minorities with the proliferation of the Internet.

Transgender and gender non-conforming people challenge Western medicine's authority over gender identities, and while medical providers have historically acted as gatekeepers of who could access gender-affirmative medical treatments there is a growing social justice movement for greater bodily autonomy. Additionally, transgender and gender non-conforming people have
fought for greater power over naming and defining their own gender identities rather than relying on explanations stemming from the Western medical community that do not always accurately represent the wide diversity of identities expressed. The following section will outline the scientific history of the creation of gender identities and the way transgender and gender non-conforming people have fought for greater control over the naming, defining, and ultimately social legitimacy of their gender identities and expressions.

History of Defining Gender Identities

The previous section outlined how mainstream Western science reinforces the sex binary of female and male, and the gender binary of man and woman by relying on socially constructed and unscientific definitions of femininity and masculinity. Binary conceptions of sex and gender have been incredibly pervasive throughout the history of Western medicine, and thus have impacted the lives of gender non-conforming people who desired gender-affirming medical intervention throughout the 20th century. Even researchers who were sympathetic to gender non-conforming people in the early 1900s and advocated for their access to gender-affirming medical treatments, such as German sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld, exhibited reliance on binary thinking about sex and gender in their study designs. Hirschfeld was a contentious figure in the early 1900s, in that he was openly homosexual and studying homosexuality and gender variance in a way that was overwhelmingly rejected by most doctors in the U.S. (Stryker, 2008; Edgar, 2004; Meyorwitz, 2002).

Though Hirschfeld was a pioneer in early studies of human sexuality, having written the most thorough accounts on sexual and gender variance, *Die Transvestiten* (1910) and *Die Homosexualität des Mannes und des Weibes* (1914), before Alfred Kinsey published *Sexual
Behavior in the Human Male (1948), he has largely been forgotten over time (Bullough, 2003; Edgars, 2004). During his lifetime, Hirschfeld was shunned by many scientists because he was a left-leaning, openly homosexual man, who was not afraid to publish his research widely. Sometimes Hirschfeld prioritized the quantity of work he published over the quality, especially in the early 1900s as he rushed to meet deadlines and page requirements, which led to some scientists dismissing the high quality research Hirschfeld did conduct (Bullough, 2003). In addition to his research on and advocacy of sexuality and gender variance, Hirschfeld became a target for the emerging Nazi party in the 1920s, because he was a Jewish homosexual who openly advocated for homosexual rights in Germany (Bullough, 2003; Edgar, 2004). Despite his flaws as a researcher, and the immense pressure he came under as the Nazis gained power in Germany, Hirschfeld was a significant figure in transgender history.

In the late 1800s, European scientists in the emerging field of endocrinology discovered sex hormones, which provided scientists with the catalyst of the idea that men and women's brains are structured by sex hormones into a gender binary (Jordan-Young, 2010). Soon after it was discovered that all humans have both testosterone (“male” sex hormone) and estrogen (“female” sex hormone), which led Hirschfeld to argue that human sexes overlapped biologically. This discovery was also instrumental in Hirschfeld advancing the idea of continuums of human sex (female - male), sexuality (homosexual - heterosexual), and gender (woman – man) with natural variations between the two poles, and it became a more acceptable alternative to the dominant mainstream Western medicine's sexual development norm for many sexologists throughout Europe (Joy and Repta, 2012; Edgar, 2004; Meyerowitz, 2002).

Hirschfeld's work builds on Eugen Steinach's discovery in the early 1900s that
transplanting male guinea pig's testicles into a female guinea pig led to the female guinea pig mounting the castrated male (seen as male behavior). After reviewing Steinach's work, Hirschfeld concludes that sex hormones in testicles and ovaries feminized or masculinized the test animals; and since the same kinds of sex hormones are found in humans, he argues that anomalies in the production of sex hormones could lead to naturally occurring sex, sexuality and gender variance (Hirschfeld, in Stryker and Whittle, 2006, pgs. 85-95). Based on his research, Hirschfeld believes that humans represent a wide variety of combinations of sex characteristics and traits, erotic preferences, psychological inclinations, and cultural practices that are natural variations of human sexuality and gender (Hirschfeld, in Stryker and Whittle, 2006, pgs. 85-95).

Hirschfeld aimed to create a scientific discourse of sex that was inclusive of multiple sexes, genders, and desires in order to protect people from punishment under German law (Paragraph 175), which made sexual acts between men illegal (Stryker, 2008; Meyorwitz, 2002).

Hirschfeld (1910) developed a doctrine of sexual intermediaries, in which he argues that there are natural variations in human sexes, sexualities, and genders, because all humans have both “male” and “female” sex hormones, so it is quite possible for people to have “mixed sexual formations” (which he referred to as sexual intermediaries) (p. 87 in Stryker and Whittle, 2006). The categories of sexual intermediaries Hirschfeld defined included 1) people born with ambiguous genitalia, 2) those who had secondary sex characteristics associated with a sex other than their own (e.g. men with gynecomastia, women with unusual amounts of facial hair, etc.), 3) homosexuals and bisexuals, and 4) people who desired or attempted to live as a gender other than the one they were designated at birth. Hirschfeld defines people who desire medical intervention to change their body to match their gender identity as “transsexuals”, and thus
different from those who desire to dress in the clothing of the “opposite sex” who he calls “transvestites” (1910, p.91-92 in Stryker and Whittle, 2006). His belief in the biological basis of sexual intermediaries led Hirschfeld to argue that their feelings and desires are a natural variation of humanity that is not pathological and should not be criminalized (Rudacille, 2005)

Hirschfeld, an avowed homosexual, argued that just societies should recognize and accept sexual and gender variances without criminalizing them (Stryker, 2008). Though Berlin was more socially accepting of homosexuality than most of the rest of the Western world in the late 1800s/early1900s, Hirschfeld's homosexuality, arrogance, and sometimes sloppy or blatantly biased research designs and writings often brought his theories under criticism (Bullough, 2003). Undaunted, Hirschfeld founded the *Institute for Sexual Science* in 1919, which provided opportunities for researchers to study sex, gender, and desires, and through which Hirschfeld developed a psychotherapeutic procedure based on accepting the patients' sex, gender, and desire variations (Meyerowitz, 2002; Bullough, 2003). The purpose of Hirschfeld's institute was to change the discourse around sexual and gender variations, from immoral/unnatural to one that recognized that such variations are natural. The discourse of sex Hirschfeld promoted helped create an atmosphere of tentative tolerance of homosexuality and gender variance within the city of Berlin. For example, Hirschfeld was often able to get approval from the Berlin police for crossdressing patients to wear the clothing of their choice, by explaining that they were undergoing psychiatric care and requesting that they be allowed to dress in their preferred clothing as part of that care. Additionally, Hirschfeld was one of the first scientists to refer patients for sex reassignment surgeries, and he provided opportunities for his colleagues to carry out the first complete surgeries for transgender women that created a vagina and labia along with
removing the male genitalia at the Institute for Sexual Science (Rudacille, 2005).

Throughout the 1920s and early 1930s, Hirschfeld encouraged researchers at his institute to continue in the face of increasing pressure from the growing Nazi regime. Eventually, Hirschfeld was forced into exile in Paris in the early 1930s, and in 1933 the Institute for Sexual Science was vandalized, looted, and the archives were burned in a Berlin public square. In addition to being a Jewish homosexual man, Hirschfeld was seen as a threat by the Nazis because they believed in strict boundaries between females and males and promoted compulsory heterosexuality, which Hirschfeld's research rejected (Rudacille, 2005). According to Foucault's (1978) theory, the Nazis may have realized that Hirschfeld's discourse on the natural variations of sexes, genders, and desires helped create an atmosphere of tolerance for homosexual and gender-nonconforming people in pre-WWII Berlin. In order to gain back social control, the Nazis had to take back the power to define homosexuality and gender non-conformity as immorally deviating from the “natural” binary of sex, gender, and desire (Rudacille, 2005).

Despite the Nazi's attempts to destroy Hirschfeld and his colleagues' research, the impact of the research had already spread throughout the Western world (Bellough, 2003). Hirschfeld had published widely during his lifetime (he died in Paris in 1935) in a variety of publications throughout the 1910s and 1920s (Meyerowitz, 2002). Due to his broad publication strategy, some gender non-conforming people in the U.S. read about the research coming from Hirschfeld's institute in the 1930s. In some cases, tabloids and other magazines published sensationalized stories of "sex reversals", and other articles that conflated sex, gender and sexuality (Meyerowitz, 2002). As Hirschfeld's influence within the Western medical community declined, due to inter-discipline conflicts, his influence over the discourse of sexuality continued as people
throughout the United States read his research and identified with his patients (Bellough, 2003; Mancini, 2010).

In the U.S. only people with intersex conditions defined by the dominant sexual development norm of the Western medical community were considered to have a “legitimate” medical reason to seek gender-affirming medical treatments (such as hormone replacement therapies or genital surgeries) (Wentling, et al., 2007). Doctors were more willing to provide medical treatments to those who were trying to correct their socially deviant biology, than to those whose gender identity did not match the socially accepted sex of their otherwise healthy body. Popular publications that ran stories about gender non-conforming and intersex people often backed up the ideology behind these doctors' decisions by stressing that only those who had intersex conditions should be eligible for medical interventions (Meyerowitz, 2002). This type of discourse stressed the belief that gender variant feelings alone were not enough for access to medical treatments, which worked to maintain patriarchal gender and sex norms (Wieringa, 2011; Stryker, 2008). In order to maintain control over who had access to gender reassignment surgeries and hormone replacement therapy, and thus maintain control over definitions of sex, sexuality, and gender, many doctors would only treat patients with medically proven intersex conditions whose treatments were in line with Western medicine's sexual development norms.

Despite the fact that most publications in the early 1900s depicted people with sexual and gender variances as pathological, and that the majority of doctors in the U.S. would only treat people with medically confirmed intersex conditions, many gender non-conforming people still wrote to editors asking for advice on accessing gender affirming medical treatment (Meyerowitz, 2002). Many others discovered that there were other people like them in the world, as well as a
new language for describing their feelings (Meyerowitz, 2002; Spargo, 2000). Based on
Hirschfeld's theory of sexual intermediaries, many gender non-conforming people who desired
medical treatments to alter their bodies, adopted the term transsexual to describe themselves
(Stryker, 2008). Even as transsexuals and other non-intersex, gender non-conforming people
reached out to doctors throughout the U.S. and Europe, the medical community largely refused
to treat people without what they considered a “legitimate” reason i.e. intersex conditions
(Meyerowitz, 2002; Rudacille, 2005).

In keeping with the Western medical community's sexual development norms, many
U.S. doctors directly rejected Hirschfeld's idea that transsexuals should be recommended for
gender-affirming medical treatments throughout the 1930s and 1940s. For example, one
prominent researcher, and the editor of Sexology Magazine’s Question and Answers Department,
David Caudwell (1949) contends that gender non-conforming people were in need of
psychological intervention but not medical intervention, in order to be happy living as the gender
they were assigned at birth. He saw these individuals as pathological for deviating from the
sexual development norms established by Western medicine, and who did not have adequate
reinforcement of their assigned gender roles during childhood (in Stryker & Whittle, 2006).

In the 1930s and 1940s some transsexuals were able to access gender affirming medical
treatments in Denmark and a few other European countries where Hirschfeld's theory of sexual
intermediaries was more influential. One of the most famous Americans to undergo early gender
affirming medical treatments in Denmark, Christine Jorgensen, avoided media sensationalized
versions of her story by sending press releases with her story to media outlets for publication
(Meyerowitz 2002; Stryker, 2008). Thus she was better able to control the narrative about her
life by dictating the initial reports. Jorgensen also represented the ideal image of femininity in the U.S., blond, heterosexual, and white she was portrayed in headlines as a demure “blonde beauty,” and was the model of a “good transsexual” (Skidmore, 2011, pg. 272). Jorgensen's story made headlines in mainstream newspapers in the U.S. for months before her return to the U.S. (after her treatment in Denmark) in February 1953 (Meyerowitz, 2002; Rudacille, 2005). Which set a precedent that benefited gender non-conforming people's access to gender-affirming medical treatments, but only within the limits of the Western medical community's sexual development norms (Skidmore, 2011)

After the media sensation caused by Christine Jorgensen coming publicly out as a transsexual woman, people in the U.S. began to more aggressively seek out doctors who would help them access gender-affirming medical treatment. One U.S.-based student of Magnus Hirschfeld, Harry Benjamin, was especially influential in developing a discourse of sex and gender that would influence the future of transgender health care and social understandings of transgender people for decades (Rudacille, 2005; Pearson, 2008). Benjamin's work with transsexual women in the 1950s and 1960s was the catalyst for the creation of standardized guidelines for clinicians treating people with a mental illness diagnosis he called Gender Identity Disorder (GID), defined as a strong, persistent desire to be another gender and strong discomfort with one's biological sex (Cook, 2004 p. 24-25; WPATH, 2008). Benjamin argues that transsexual people's self-described gender identity is so firmly ingrained in their fundamental understanding of themselves, that “psychotherapy for the purpose of curing the condition is a waste of time” (1966, p. 51 in Stryker and Whittle, 2006). Thus, he concludes the best way to treat transsexual people is to help them function as comfortably as possible living as their self-
described gender identity (Benjamin, 1966 in Stryker and Whittle, 2006).

To accomplish this Benjamin (1966) advocates that transsexual women attend therapy sessions to learn how to navigate our social and legal worlds successfully as their self-described gender, have hormone replacement therapy to feminize their bodies, and in some cases, have access to gender-affirming surgeries (in Stryker and Whittle, 2006). Benjamin (1966) contends that transsexual people who have gender-affirming surgeries and hormone replacement therapy are happier and more comfortable with themselves afterwards, rather than feeling stuck in a gender that does not conform to their own self-image (in Stryker and Whittle, 2006). Legally however, transsexual people could be arrested for breaking laws that prohibited individuals from wearing clothing of the “opposite” sex, which would bring more social humiliation onto transsexual people (Benjamin, 1966, p. 50 in Stryker and Whittle, 2006). Given these kind of legal and social disparities, Benjamin consistently argued that social and legal interpretations about transsexual individuals must be reconsidered, so they can live more comfortably within society (Benjamin, 1966 in Stryker and Whittle, 2006).

Benjamin's work with transsexual women set the standards for how other doctors would learn how to diagnosis and treat transgender and gender non-conforming people throughout the U.S. The original Harry Benjamin Standards of Care (SOC) were created by a group of physicians, psychologists, social scientists, and legal professionals based on Benjamin's work and their own experiences working with transgender and gender non-conforming people in the early 1970s (WPATH, 2008; Pearson, 2008). Until recently, these standards centered on the idea that people in gender minorities have a mental illness, gender identity disorder, and that they need the approval of medical professionals to access gender-affirming medical treatments. In
order to be eligible for gender-affirming medical treatments, gender non-conforming people had to undergo at least one year of psychotherapy, live as their preferred gender full time for at least one year, and fulfill socially accepted gender roles and expressions of femininity or masculinity according to their preferred gender identity (Coleman, et al., 2011).

Foucault (1978) argues homosexuality became a social identity, albeit a stigmatized one, because of scientific discourses and social controls, so too did gender identity become a controlled social identity. The SOC provided transgender and gender non-conforming people with a path to access medical treatments they desired, but it also gave medical providers the final say over whether individuals could access gender affirming medical treatments or not. This created a system of medical “gatekeepers” who transgender and gender non-conforming people have to navigate in order to access treatments (Coleman, et al., 2011). The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) is the continuously updated handbook with guidelines for diagnosing and treating various mental disorders published by the American Psychiatric Association since 1952 (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2015). Since the publication of the first edition of the DSM, the diagnosis and treatment of transgender and gender non-conforming people has been GID.

Recent changes to the DSM and the SOC show that there is slightly greater social and medical acceptance of gender non-conforming people who do not identify as transgender. In the most recent edition of the DSM (DSM-5), the diagnosis of GID has been replaced with the diagnosis of Gender Dysphoria (GD), defined as “a marked difference between the individual's expressed/experienced gender and the gender others would assign him or her” for at least six months (APA, 2013). In order to obtain a GD diagnosis, people must experience significant
distress about their condition, including “strong desires to be treated as the other gender or to be rid of one's sex characteristics, or a strong conviction that one has feelings and reactions typical of the other gender” (APA, 2013). The change in diagnostic language was based on the desire to avoid the stigma associated with the diagnosis of GID and advocate that gender non-conformity itself is not a mental disorder, while simultaneously providing a legitimate psychiatric diagnosis for accessing gender-affirming health care (APA, 2013).

Some transgender and gender non-conforming people critiqued the diagnosis of GID as failing to include a range of gender diversity and experiences of gender dysphoria, as well as giving control over defining who counts as transgender and should have access to gender-affirming medical treatment and legal documentation to professional gatekeepers (Strangio, 2012). People who do not fit neatly into socially accepted ideas of gender, such as those who cannot afford or do not desire gender-affirming medical care, or those whose gender identities fall outside the two socially accepted gender categories, often face problems obtaining legal documentation that correctly identifies their gender (Spade, 2011). The diagnostic language change in the DSM-5 may therefore make it easier for some transgender and gender non-conforming people who are outside the normative gender binary to argue for documentation that better reflects their gender identities. The standardization of medical care led to the development of a specific narrative transgender and gender non-conforming people were expected to adhere to in order to access gender-affirming treatments, which included a binary gender identity (man or woman) and a heterosexual orientation (Stryker, 2008; Rudacille, 2005). The definition of transgender and gender non-conforming identities as a mental illness, GID, is one that has been resisted by many transgender and gender non-conforming people throughout the 20th century.
Influence of Categorical Thinking

The history of medical science showcases a reliance on what Raewyn Connell refers to as “categorical thinking” about gender (2011, p.1676). Categorical thinking is a way of conceptualizing gender as a distinct binary based on body types that takes the categories of “man” and “woman” for granted while analyzing their relationship to one another (Connell, 1987, p. 55). Gendered categories within this way of thinking are based on the idea that there is a clear dichotomy of human bodies that influences the behaviors, interests, and social roles of individuals (Connell, 2011). Connell (2011) argues that categorical thinking erases the diversity and difference found within gender categories in that there can only be one male role and one female role. Thus, categorical thinking cannot acknowledge or analyze gender differences within gender categories. Additionally, categorical thinking is unable to conceptualize how gender, gender inequalities, and gender stratifications are created, changed, and challenged over time except by external forces (technology, economics, globalization, etc.), which does not leave any consideration for how gender itself may be dynamic (Connell, 2011, p. 1676).

The scientific studies previously described show an overwhelming reliance on categorical thinking about gender, as evidenced by researchers' uncritical use of socially constructed ideals of what is considered feminine and masculine behavior, rather than attempting to critically analyze the categories themselves. As Connell (2011) points out, the trend of relying on categorical thinking has been prevalent throughout research about gender. Even in the beginning of scientific research about gender categorical thinking is evident through the way researchers conducted and reported on their studies and participants. For example, Richard von Krafft-Ebing
(1893), studying homosexuality, a category within which he included people whose gender identity did not match their designated gender, described one of his patients as an individual who was designated female at birth but was raised as a boy (referred to as “S”). According to Krafft-Ebing, S lived as a man, had masculine behaviors, and wore male clothing, information that when coupled with S's own admittance of a dislike for anything feminine (except beautiful women) and a penchant for fashioning and wearing imitation scrotums and phalluses as described in S's autobiography seem to indicate some kind of a male identification (1893:22, in Stryker and Whittle, 2006). Krafft-Ebing's disregard for S's, seemingly male, identification is clear by his use of female pronouns for S and continuously referring to S as female throughout the article. It is clear in his writings that Krafft-Ebing believed that S was a homosexual female, with no intention of allowing for the possibility that S's masculine gender identification was non-pathological. Krafft-Ebing's reliance on categorical thinking is clear as he sees S's gender directly connected to S's anatomy, and is therefore only able to see S as female.

Even as an early advocate for acceptance of homosexuals and gender non-conforming people, Magnus Hirschfeld's research shows a reliance on categorical thinking about gender. Although Hirschfeld (1910) holds that transsexuals and other gender non-conforming people are natural variations of humanity, he also contends that these variations are pathological and require therapeutic intervention (though based on the strength of the drive to “cross-dress” or otherwise affiliate with the “opposite” sex some individuals would be better served living as their professed binary gender) (p. 33 in Stryker and Whittle, 2006). An example can be seen in how Hirschfeld discusses whether people designated male at birth who dressed or desired to dress and/or live as a woman should marry or not. Hirschfeld argued that they should not marry because, “They are
mostly very restless spirits, inclined towards adventure, and would find it difficult to chain themselves to domestic duties...” (1910, p. 39 in Stryker and Whittle, 2006). Hirschfeld's claims about transsexual women using words that connote traditionally masculine behaviors like “restless” and “adventure”, as well as his belief that they would not be suited for “domestic duties” indicate that he did not see transsexual women as fitting into the category of “women”.

Hirschfeld's protégé Harry Benjamin (1966), whose work with transsexual women is still influential in modern transgender health care, also show how his studies were influenced by socially constructed gender expectations and categorical thinking. Benjamin (1966) regards any kinds of gender non-conformity as pathological, but stresses that psychotherapy, while helpful to individuals coping with social reactions, is not a cure for instances when people desire gender-affirming medical treatments (in Stryker and Whittle, 2006). For example, Aleshia Brevard, a male to female transsexual actress, former Playboy bunny, and one of Benjamin's patients, has reported that Benjamin made a distinction between the transsexual women (who were referred to as "his girls") and the cisgender women at his medical clinic (who were referred to as "real girls") (Rudacille 2005; 93). Harry Benjamin did a lot to advance transgender people's access to gender-affirming medical treatments in the U.S., however Brevard's statement shows that Benjamin still made distinctions between his cisgender and transgender patients based on categorical thinking.

As previously discussed, Harry Benjamin's SOC for transgender and gender non-conforming people has been consistently used since the first edition published in 1979, and while it has been updated several times over the past few decades to account for evolving knowledge about transgender people, there has been a backlash against the medical community's social
control of gender-affirming medical treatment. A growing number of transgender and gender non-conforming people, allies, and some medical providers have been advocating for an informed consent model to be taken seriously by the medical community. These advocates critique the SOC model of transgender health for centering on the medical gatekeepers rather than the specific needs and desires of individual transgender and gender-nonconforming people. In addition to the social stigma of being diagnosed with a mental “disorder”, some transgender and gender non-conforming people critiqued the diagnosis of GID as failing to include a range of gender diversity and experiences of gender dysphoria, as well as giving control over defining who counts as transgender and should have access to gender-affirming medical treatment and legal documentation to professional gatekeepers (Strangio, 2012). People who do not fit neatly into socially accepted ideas of gender, such as those who cannot afford or do not desire gender-affirming medical care, or those whose gender identities fall outside the two socially accepted gender categories, often face problems obtaining legal documentation as their preferred gender (Spade, 2011). The medical community continues to control access to gender-affirming medical treatments and influence social attitudes towards transgender and gender non-conforming people with standards of care that reflect gender identities made legitimate with scientific research that has continuously relied on categorical thinking about gender. Thus, the SOC model of transgender health has been critiqued and updated multiple times, but many transgender and gender non-conforming people believe it is fundamentally flawed and should be replaced with a different model.

One SOC alternative model, “Informed Consent for Access to Trans Health” (ICATH), abandons the stigmatizing mental health diagnosis (GID) and instead relies on patients'
autonomous needs and choices for gender-affirming medical treatments. Advocates of the ICATH model argue that informed consent is an intrinsic part of medical procedures, and requiring transgender and gender non-conforming people to get permission from medical gatekeepers to prove they deserve gender-affirming medical treatments creates additional barriers that cisgender people seeking similar procedures do not face (O'Reilly, 2012). The ICATH model stresses that not all transgender and gender non-conforming people can afford, or desire, the long-term therapy even the most recently updated SOC advocates. As such, the ICATH model states that therapy is an option, but not a requirement for anyone to access gender-affirming medical treatments. This new model of transgender health care states that transgender and gender non-conforming people should control their own access to gender-affirming medical treatment, rather than have to prove their gender to gatekeepers based on outdated and narrow standards of gender defined by the medical community (O'Reilly, 2012). As previously shown, the medical community's understanding of gender is based on biased studies that use categorical thinking to define gender categories. Many transgender and gender non-conforming people are currently attempting to control the power to define their own gender identities (binary or non-binary identities), and access to gender-affirming medical treatments that do not rely on biased assumptions about gender for those who desire medical intervention. Just as the narrow medical model of transgender and gender non-conforming identities was influential in U.S. society, a more inclusive and contextually-driven understanding of gender identities will likely influence social attitudes towards transgender and gender non-conforming people, potentially resulting in less gender-based discrimination and microaggressions.

The next chapter of this dissertation will explore the varied ways participants described
their gender identities and expressions. Some participants described understanding of their gender identities and expressions using the kind of categorical thinking Connell (2011) outlined. Others preferred to self-define their gender identities and expressions based on various other life experiences they have had. In the next chapter I will explore how participants' understandings of their gender identities and expressions have been impacted by the social contexts in which they live. Throughout the analysis a generational difference became clear between Generation X and Millennial participants, as well as intersectional differences among all the participants. The next chapter will explore how participants discussed their gender identities and expressions, comparing and contrasting the experiences of generations of participants, as well as how experiences with race, families, religion, and geographic location impacted participants understanding of their gender identities and expressions.
CHAPTER THREE
GENDER IDENTITY AND EXPRESSION: CONTEXT MATTERS

At first I was against it. When I first met trans people I was confused, I was like what why are you doing this no, that’s nasty. I was so against it. I even had a couple of trans women who asked to do what’s called, put me in drag so basically make me look like a girl, um but I wasn’t comfortable with it, I was like no you guys sound crazy, I know I am gay but you guys are taking it too far but I couldn’t deny the not feeling comfortable. So I couldn’t deny those people I couldn’t deny being around those people being around them kind of made me feel comfortable but I still couldn’t understand why they were doing what they were doing. So I was just like y'all is weird, but I kind of like it I just don’t understand it. - Kamora

The dominant narrative about transgender people generally includes some form of the idea that people know from an early age that they are “in the wrong body”, but researchers have found that transgender gender identities are more complex than that common idea suggests (Wagner, Kunkel, & Compton, 2016). Over the last few decades there have been more critical understandings of the social construction of biological sex categories and, as described above, acknowledgement of the impact of social constructions on seemingly objective scientific categorizations (Matlin, 2008). Emerging theories of transgender identity attempt to merge the idea of fluidity and self-constructed identities with the experiences of individuals lived realities in their social identities (Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2010). What has become known as “transgender theory” (Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2010, p.435) goes beyond the kind of 'either/or' thinking prevalent in existing feminist and queer theories to include a 'both/neither' idea of gender (Roen, 2001). Transgender theory argues it is necessary to also understand how lived realities may impose limits on one's ability to express their gender fluidity, including social realities faced by people
in different classes, and of difference races, abilities, genders, sexualities, etc. (Monro, 2000).

Though social constructions are an important part of understanding transgender identities, there are researchers who argue for more critical explorations of transgender identities. For example, Tauschert (2002) saw the potential for a purely social constructionist approach to transgender theory to undermine the complexity and fuzziness of gender in relation to the essential continuity of the mind and body. That is, our minds and bodies are part of one being and there are multiple mental connections to gender that could be overlooked by only focusing on gender as a social construction.

Building on the burgeoning idea of transgender theory, Nogashi and Brzuzy (2010) contend there are three sources of dynamic interaction that impact individuals' identity formations: unconscious experiences of embodied interactions, self-constructed identity aspects, and the social environments in which people live. This iteration of transgender theory goes beyond personal understandings of one's gender identity, to include the impacts of social environments as well. Nogashi and Brzuzy (2010) describe an example of how social workers can integrate transgender theory into their practice, by creating social environments that do not reify anti-transgender spaces. For example, the authors state that social workers should use language that reflects the depathologization of transgender identities and expressions, such as not insisting that gender reassignment surgeries are necessary for transgender clients (Nogashi & Brzuzy, 2010). Participants discussed how they understand their own gender identities and expressions by describing experiences with all of the sources Nogashi and Brzuzy (2010) outlined. This chapter will explore participants' discussions of their gender identities and expressions with a focus on the impact of social environments on identity formations.
Gender identity, how one experiences and understands one's gender, is a fundamental identity that impacts not only how one views oneself, but also how one interacts with others in society (Steensma et al., 2013). Cisgender identities (when one identifies as the gender they are designated at birth) are the norm and society is structured to reflect the experiences of cisgender people in all areas of life. This provides multiple (if not always extremely diverse) cisgender role models for young people to emulate when developing their gender identities. There is a lack of diverse representations of transgender and gender non-conforming identities, which means many young people have no positive role models to look to when developing their gender identities (Bornstein, 1994; Feinberg, 1996; Macgillivray & Jennings, 2008).

Access to positive identity roles models is important to gender identity formation and one transgender researcher developed a model for gender identity formation applicable to transgender and gender non-conforming people. Devor (2004) describes a 14-stage “transsexual identity formation” model (p.45) and outlines two overarching themes—witnessing and mirroring—that inform gender identity formation for transgender and gender non-conforming people. The first three stages of Devor's model include anxiety, confusion, and comparing one's gender performance to social expectations, which may include feeling uncomfortable with one's designated gender identity and may overcompensate in gender or sex conforming activities. This is often followed by processes of gender exploration and self-discovery, through researching alternative gender identities and finding others who identify as transgender or gender non-conforming. Access to information about transgender identities and resources has increasingly

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Though Devor's model uses the language of “transsexual” identified people (those seeking medical interventions to change their physical bodies to match their concepts of their gender identities), the author notes that this model is based on the experiences of both transsexual and other transgender identified people and thus can apply to a large sample of trans people. Devor also highlights that this model may not fit all trans people's experiences, as every person's experience of being transsexual or transgender is unique (2004, p. 42).
been made more widely available because of the omnipresence of the internet. Gradually, often including a series of delays and testing others perceptions of their identities, individuals come to accept and be proud of their gender identities as they learn how to live comfortably as their gender identities (Devor, 2004).

Devor identifies two primary themes that influence each stage in this model, witnessing and mirroring, which describe interactive processes in which individuals' identities are impacted by the feedback they receive from others (2004). Witnessing is when others send positive feedback that they see people as the genders they identify with during interpersonal interaction (e.g., I recognize you as you recognize yourself). These interpersonal perceptions may reinforce individuals' self-image of their gender identities. Witnesses are assumed to have a more objective interpretation of how accurately wider society may see individuals receiving the feedback, and thus how well those individuals are being accepted by others as their gender identities. Mirroring is described by Devor (2004) as the need to be able to see ourselves reflected in others, “to know that we are recognized and accepted by our peers. We need to know that we are not alone” (p.47). Devor's (2004) application of the concept of mirroring in relation to transgender and gender non-conforming people relates to the need to be validated both by peers, and by the greater cisgender-centric culture. In other words, peer acceptance alone is not enough validation to confirm one's identity, but there is also a need for gender identities to be accepted by those outside of your own group as well.

Devor's (2004) foundational study showcases how the messages individuals' receive from others can influence the formation of transgender and gender non-conforming people's gender identities. Levitt and Ippolito (2014) similarly argue that the lack of appropriately diverse gender
identity role models available to transgender and gender non-conforming people can influence their gender identity formation. These researchers interviewed 17 self-identified transgender people (with a variety of desires around the use of medical interventions), from Tennessee, Georgia, Pennsylvania, New Mexico, Kentucky, and California through a combination of in-person and telephone interviews. Participants reported feeling pressure to conform to cisgender social norms (often since childhood), as well as empowered when exposed to narratives outside the cisgender norm and when allowed to explore their gender identities freely (Levitt & Ippolito, 2014). Additionally, the process of gender identity formation is described by participants as a continual process of identifying one's authentic sense of gender identity and expression from social expectations and pressures of that gender identity or expression. In other words, participants described critically thinking about what they wanted for their gender identities versus what society expects or pressures people's identities to be like throughout their lifetimes.

Levitt and Ippolito (2014), found that most of their participants (15) discussed the social, legal, and financial considerations before deciding how to best transition for themselves. For example, some participants strongly desired to have physical medical interventions because the mismatch of the social expectations of their biological characteristics and rigid gender identities or expressions caused them significant distress. While some participants stated no desire for a physical transition at all, ten of the 17 participants in the study did describe considering physical transition as a key part of their gender identity formation (Levitt & Ippolito, 2014). The desire to physically transition one's body seems to be at least partially influenced by others' perceptions of one's gender identity. Nine participants described wanting to physically transition to better ensure that others treated them as their gender identities, for example one transman stated his
decision was made at least partially so that “other people aren’t confused” (Levitt & Ippolito, 2014, p.1745).

Studies of racial identity formation have noted that others' perceptions of individuals' racial identities can have negative economic, political, and health consequences for those affected (Guendelman et al., 2011; Cheryan & Monin, 2005; Liang et al., 2004; Fisher, Wallace, & Fenton, 2000). Cheryan and Monin (2005) describe the tendency for people to doubt or not recognize an individual's membership as part of a particular social group as identity denial. Guendelman et al., (2011) studied the effects of “identity denial” on Asian Americans whose American identity is denied by others who perceive them as perpetually “foreign.” For example, they found that Asian Americans may be more likely to eat unhealthy American foods like hamburgers and french fries rather than healthier Asian foods like sushi in an attempt to be seen as more “American,” which can have negative health outcomes (Guendelman et al., 2011). Transgender and gender non-conforming people may also face identity denial of their gender identities by others influencing their gender identity formation.

The messages transgender and gender non-conforming people are likely to receive that may influence their gender identity formation depend on social contexts. One way to explore how social messages can impact gender identity formation is to examine generational differences among transgender and gender non-conforming people's gender identities. The concept of a “generation” of people who were born in similar timeframes, and thus experienced similar social, cultural, and political events, gained prominence as an analytic category in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (White, 2013). Over time generational analysis revealed differences in these cohorts' attitudes and values based on experiences with significant social, cultural, and
political events during formative developmental ages (Mannheim, 1952; McMullin et al., 2007). Further refinement of the concept has shown that generational experiences are influenced by age at which events are experienced and previous socialization (Twenge & Campbell, 2012). Younger people who are still in key developmental stages, such as childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood, experience and are influenced by sociocultural events differently than those whose identity formation has begun to solidify as an adult (Costanza et al., 2012; Kupperschmidt, 2000; Smola & Sutton, 2002; Strauss & Howe, 1991). The larger body of work on life course theory reinforces this idea by examining how people's perspectives are shaped by the social context they experience (Costanza et al., 2012; Gade, 1991 & 2009; Elder, 1994 & 1998; MacLean & Elder, 2007).

Gender identity is widely assumed to be an essential aspect of individuals due to the internalization of social messages that enforce and reinforce the idea of a natural binary-based gender identity. Since an enforced gender binary has been naturalized throughout society, it can be difficult to displace those internalized ideas about gender, especially if people think they are alone in their gender non-conforming thoughts. Depending on how and when during an individual's life they are exposed to the idea of transgender or gender non-conforming identities may influence what they think is possible for their own gender identities. However, generational differences alone do not account for intersectional differences in how transgender and gender non-conforming people experience their gender identity formation based on their multiple social identities and locations.

Berger (1960) argues it is important to analyze not only the social and political climate of the generational timeframe, but also to differentiate between the experiences of individuals
within unique social contexts, such as different occupations. Other researchers have pointed out the importance of including analysis of other aspects of individuals' differences, such as race, gender, and sexual orientation from one another within temporal generations (Chaudhary, 2015; Reger, 2015; Stewart, 2003). As Parry and Urwin (2010) note, generations are often conceptualized through dominant (i.e. white, straight, cisgender, and middle-class) cultural perceptions of what counts as a generational reaction and internalization of significant historical events. Similarly, Gaganakis (2006) argues that Black and White racial identities are formed within different social contexts in the same culture, thus it is important to be cognizant of how we identify and define racial identity formation within generations. For example, Black individuals growing up in the 1950s may have had different reactions to significant historical events, such as integration of education systems, than White individuals growing up in the same time period. Looking solely at dominant generational trends of the 1950s youth population may ignore the impact of those significant experiences on Black individuals’ racial identity formation, as White individuals are prioritized in the dominant culture.

This study aims to understand both the dominant culture's generational social contexts in which participants developed their gender identities, particularly focusing on the messages they may have received through the media. Additionally, I will explore some of the intersectional identities that participants described as impacting their gender identities and expressions throughout their lives. During the data analysis process generational differences emerged in regard to the influence of larger social contexts in which participants developed their gender identities. The first data analysis compares the social context in which each generations of participants grew up, and the possible influences the messages they received about transgender
and gender non-conforming people may have had on their own gender identity formation. A second analysis of the data revealed a number of differences in how participants described their gender identities in relation to multiple intersectional social identities. Due to the limitations of this dissertation I have decided to discuss the most prevalent themes: family/religion, race/ethnicity, and geographic location.

Generations

Participants fell within two generations defined by the Pew Research Center (2015) as Generation X (those born between 1965-1980) and the Millennial Generation (those born 1981-1997). While most participants indicated their age during the interview, once I realized the generational themes emerging among the data I had to calculate a few participants' ages based on years and ages they mentioned during their interviews.

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<th>Table 2 – Generations &amp; Gender Identities</th>
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Generation X is defined as beginning in 1965; just one year later Dr. Harry Benjamin published his Standards of Care that outlined clinical guidelines for diagnosing and treating “transsexual” patients. Transsexual was the mainstream term used to describe people who sought medical treatments to change their bodies to be more comfortable in their gender identities (Rudacille, 2005). Stories about gender and sexual diversity were starting to move out of the tabloids into more mainstream and reputable publications, and those whose gender identity was incongruent with social expectations began to have language to describe their feelings more precisely (Stryker, 2008; Rudacille, 2005).

As transgender people's stories trickled slowly into mainstream media, often via sensationalized stories and campy representations of transgender women in tabloids, magazines, and in films and television, some transgender and gender non-conforming people learned that other people like them existed. For example, one of the participants, Bobbie Lee, learned the term “transsexual” in 1979 when she was 13 years old by reading a family member's magazine and saw a feature story about a newly out transgender actress Caroline Cossey.

...it had a photo of her and a story about her and that she had transitioned...and she had been in a James Bond film, and that she was just kind of pretty amazing to me.... It kind of opened a door to me of like, wow I actually could be who I wanted to be someday.
Transgender and gender non-conforming people were not regularly discussed in the mainstream media by any means in the 1970s and 1980s. It was a happy coincidence that Bobbie Lee saw Cossey discussing her gender transition in *Redbook*, and one that gave Bobbie Lee hope for her future as a transgender woman.

Other Generation X participants described learning that they were not alone in their gender variant feelings much later in life than Bobbie Lee. For example, Marcie knew she related to femininity more than masculinity since she was child, and as an adult she often cross-dressed at home in private, but she did not have the language for her feelings and stated she thought she was gay. Once Marcy had access to the virtual communities forming on the Internet in the 1990s, she was exposed to the term transgender and began to realize how much she related to those who identified as transgender women. Similarly, Frankie described growing up knowing he was different but without the language to describe it or others like him,

You didn't, there were no words for transgender back then. You didn't have anything, you didn't even hear the words so you don't know what you are, thinking 'I am weird and probably the only one in the universe that feels this way.' You grew up in a lot of isolation, thinking that you are the only one like that and you probably shouldn't tell anyone because when they find out stuff like that you get beat up.

Visibility of transgender people in mainstream media may help mitigate the sense of isolation Frankie described, particularly with the expansion of the Internet in everyday life for many millennials. For example, Eric, an older Millennial on the cusp of Generation X, said he learned about transgender people from watching Sally Jesse Raphael's daytime talk show as a teenager. There was a plethora of these kinds of talk shows in the 1990s, such as *The Jerry Springer Show*, *Maury*, and *Ricki Lake* that included episodes with exploitative topics on transgender and gender non-conforming people's lives. With titles such as “I'm Pregnant by a
Transsexual”, “He-She Confessions” and “If It Looks Like a Woman” these shows sensationalized the lives of transgender and gender non-conforming people and reinforced heteronormative and cis-normative social ideals, especially of transgender women. These kinds of limited representations of gender diversity obviously impacted transgender women, however other gender diverse people looking for someone like them in the media were also impacted in different ways. As mentioned above, Eric first became aware of other transgender people by seeing transgender women exploited on daytime talk shows, but because he only saw depictions of male to female transgender woman he did not think it was possible to transition from female to male (FtM). Like many other Generation X and Millennial participants in this study, Eric became aware of other transmen through the Internet, “There was this whole world of FtM people! I was like 'ok!' and it was that moment when you go 'That's it (snaps fingers). That's the word'!”

Role of the Internet

The internet provides people with the opportunity to more easily learn about others transitioning within, and living outside of, the gender binary, rather than relying on medical professionals for information and support (Shapiro, 2004). Transgender and gender non-conforming people are able to use the internet to learn new gender languages, about new medical possibilities, and the legal and safety issues facing transgender people around the world (Shapiro, 2004). At this point there are also literally thousands of individuals' stories on the internet telling how they came to understand their transgender or gender non-conforming identities, which Stein (2016) describes as digital spaces akin to feminist consciousness-raising groups of the 1970s. Now that transgender and gender non-conforming people are able to more easily communicate
with one another through the Internet, more critical discussions and understandings of gender identities are being embraced, and people are living as their own self-defined gender identities. Digital spaces, such as websites, blogs, and videos, create safe online spaces where transgender and gender non-conforming people can gather to form a virtual community and discuss ideas and feelings not encouraged in most “real life” communities (Marciano, 2014).

The internet changed the way transgender and gender non-conforming people engaged with and are represented by media. In their youth, Generation Xers were consumers of media created by others and thus had limited access to stories of gender diversity. Nor did Generation X youth have the kind of communal power available to Millennials through online organizing, social media campaigns, and the ability to communicate their ideas and feelings virtually en masse to media outlets. Before the age of widespread internet use, transgender and gender non-conforming people passed around copies of locally produced, do-it-yourself newsletters and zines through “snail mail” (Cavalcante, 2016). Not everyone had access to such publications though, so others relied on the imperfect representations of transgender and gender non-conforming people found in movies and television shows. Films like *Tootsie*, *Mrs. Doubtfire*, and *The Birdcage* included variations of “a guy in a dress” characters that in one way provided some kind of transgender and gender non-conforming visibility for those desperate for any glimpse of someone like them. However, as one of Cavalcante's participants said of the film *Tootsie*, “Even though I loved it, you still knew it was a straight guy in a dress” (2016, p. 114), so the representations available to Generation X transgender and gender non-conforming people coming of age were limited at best.

Millennials are the first generation to grow up with more regular internet access, and thus
had a wider range of representations of transgender and gender non-conforming experiences than members of Generation X (Cavalcante, 2016). The internet allowed individuals to produce their own content with the potential to reach a world-wide audience and find others with similar feelings about gender. Online social media sites like Tumblr and Facebook provide transgender and gender non-conforming people a virtual space to explore their gender identities and expressions (Cavalcante, 2016; Marciano, 2014). Online environments people in gender minority categories opportunities to ask others like them questions about their experiences. Additionally, these are environments over which transgender and gender non-conforming people have the ability to self-define, control their own narratives, and create support and care systems (Cavalcante, 2016). Millennial transgender and gender non-conforming people who had access to these types of virtual environments at younger ages were exposed to more diverse representations of trans and gender non-conforming identities and experiences in ways members of Generation X were not.

Participants showcased this generational split as only Millennial participants identified as gender non-binary, while Generation X participants tended to identify their gender identities according to gender binary standards. Millennial, gender non-conforming participants in this study commonly described their gender identities as “fluid”, while most Generation X participants said they knew their true gender from a young age but had no words to describe it. For example, Millennial Dee identifies as gender non-binary and femme and described their gender identity as fluid in that, “Sometimes I can be both [masculine and feminine], sometimes I can be neither, sometimes I can ebb and flow and things of that nature.” Similarly, Triston described their gender fluidity as part of an exploration of their gender identity, and is
comfortable with the idea of this journey stating, “Who knows where I'll be in two months (chuckles).” On the other hand, Generation X transman Frankie recalls hating the feminine clothing and mannerisms forced on him as a child, and stated “I used to cry myself to sleep at night, thinking “Why is this not right? I will wake up and it will be different...I was supposed to be a boy; this isn't right....” Another Generation X participant, Bobbie Lee knew she loved and related better to femininity since childhood and when asked to describe her gender identity she stated, “My gender is female.” The Generation X participants talked about their binary gender as an essential and unchanging part of their identity since childhood. Only the Millennial gender non-nonconforming participants however described gender fluidity as a natural part of their understandings of their gender identities.

Gender Minority Representations in Media

Another factor in these generational differences between Millennial and Generation X participants may be due to differences in the visibility and power of people in gender minorities in the media during the two generations. For instance, as Millennials started coming of age in the late 1990s and 2000s there had been a change in the visibility of transgender (and to a much lesser extent gender non-binary people) in media. Whereas in the late 1980s and early 1990s people in gender minorities were most often depicted in negative ways, such as the “man in a dress” comedic trope and sensationalized appearances on daytime talk shows, in the late 1990s and 2000s more positive representations of transgender people became available with shows like Transparent and I Am Jazz, as well as transgender children's stories being told on news shows like 20/20. Transgender people started to have a bit more control over their narratives in the media, and while gender non-conforming people had less visibility in mainstream media many
took advantage of the ability to tell their stories and find others like them through the internet.

Expanded visibility of people in gender minorities' self-narratives has led to an increase in the diversity of gendered representations available to Millennial gender non-binary participants not available to young Generation X participants. Young Generation X participants lacked a social space similar to the Internet in which to freely explore their gender identities, therefore they did not discuss the ideas of self-defining gender identities or bucking social expectations of gender expressions as consistently as the Millennial participants. Millennial participants all seemed to be aware and respectful of gender non-binary identities, regardless of their personal gender identifications. For example, while talking about her sexuality Kamora, a millennial transwoman, discussed her thought process for reconciling her identities with a non-binary partner's identities.

“So personally if I identify as a heterosexual woman it makes passing for me a lot easier but being attracted to someone who is non-binary and trying to keep that passing makes me feel like a bad person. Because this person shouldn’t have to identify to one gender because I am attracted to them, and so then I will continue to identify as heterosexual until I get into a relationship with them but, um, in the meantime I guess I will just wait and see how that plays out, but for now I am a heterosexual woman.”

Even though Kamora identifies within the binary, she is aware of the needs of potential gender non-binary partners and is thinking critically about how to address the differences in their identities so they are both comfortable.

One Generation X transwoman on the cusp of being a Millennial, who was in a relationship with a Millennial gender non-binary person at the time of the interview, did express some internal resistance towards her binary-based gender identity. When asked to describe her gender identity, Davison stated she identifies as female and tells others she is transfemale or a transwoman if they ask for details. She added, “When I talk to younger people who are up on
non-binary language I feel like this over the hill person by being too binary by just saying female or woman.” Davison interacts more with Millennial gender non-binary people than any other Generation X participant, and thus was forced to engage with those self-defining ideas expressed by many gender non-binary people relatively early in her transition. Since our interview Davison has posted on social media about her gender exploration and has concluded that since gender is a social construct nothing she does is inherently male or female. Therefore, she has decided not to feel bad about “failing” to embody social expectations associated with the label “woman” any longer and live according to what she refers to as a “non-binary philosophy.” This switch in Davison's understanding of her gender identity comes from her critically thinking about social expectations of her gender and what actions and behaviors she engages in for herself versus what she does to live up to social expectations of her gender.

Education Privilege

The kind of critical thinking about gender Davison exemplified is a common theme among Millennial gender non-binary participants, which may be related to their education privilege. Davison has the highest degree among the Generation X participants, and all four Millennial gender non-binary participants either have a bachelor's degree, are currently in college, or have some college experience. Additionally, most gender non-binary participants referenced their education privilege at some point in their interviews. For example, Elvira said they learned about non-binary gender identities at a university student organization meeting,

I went to OUTSpoken my freshman year of college and they did an information panel on the different gender identities outside of men and women, and I was like 'Wait, what? That really exists?! It's not just me? This is something other people are feeling at the same time?

Dee explicitly described using their education privilege to continue to learn about a variety of
ways people are identifying their gender, “I have the privilege of having at least some education, going to college also opened my eyes, meeting transgender people and, um, learning more about people who ended up being people like me.”

Access to education, as well as social expectations around education have increased for Millennial participants who are largely expected to at least have a bachelor's degree or some kind of professional licensure. This generational change in educational attainment may help explain why so many more Millennial than Generation X participants discussed formal education settings as areas of critical growth in regard to their gender identities. Coupled with the increased visibility of people in gender minorities in media and online, the education privilege Millennial participants described may push them to think more critically about their gender identities in ways not encouraged of most Generation X participants.

Generational differences cannot explain all aspects of how participants described their gender identities and expressions though. In order to better understand how participants understand their gender identities and expressions, I also analyzed intersectional differences described in their experiences. The emergence of these intersectional differences throughout my participants’ interviews necessitated a discussion of their impacts on their lives. For this dissertation research project, I chose to focus on the most prevalent themes that emerged in relation to participants' discussions of their gender identities and expressions, including family interactions, experience with religion, geographic location, and race and ethnicity.

Intersectional Differences

While conducting the first of the data analyses, several intersectional differences emerged among participants' descriptions of their gender identity formation. Some participants in both
generations described feeling the need to hide their gender feelings from their families when they were young. Race and ethnicity were cited as another important difference in how participants described their gender identity formations. Finally, geographic location also influenced participants’ gender identity formation, in regard to the social contexts in which they came of age impacting when and how they come out to other people. This section will explore the intersectional differences described by participants in their gender identity formation that go beyond the influences of the dominant culture's social norms. Since this section is focused on intersectional impacts on gender identity formation, there are several places where themes overlapped, such as race and ethnicity with families or religious experiences and geographic location. Therefore, this chapter will weave participants' intersectional differences together to better reflect participants' experiences as they reported in their interviews.

Families

Families are a primary place of support for many people, so how one's family responds to family members in gender minorities, or the fear of what the response may be, can influence individuals' gender identities in different ways. In a 2009 study called the Family Acceptance Project Caitlin Ryan and associates found that the level of family acceptance or rejection of LGBT identities impacts the relationship between LGBT youth and their families. The authors found that families’ likelihood of rejecting or accepting LGBT relatives was predicated by family characteristics rather than the characteristics of the individual coming out as LGBT. For example, Ryan et al. (2009) found that religious, immigrant, Latino, and low-income families seem to be less accepting of their LGBT youth. This is in turn, was associated with more negative health outcomes for those youth, such as depression, substance abuse, and suicidal
ideation or attempts. Therefore, whether or not the family accepts an LGBT youth could have substantial impacts on their development. Participants described a range of experiences with their families, from extremely accepting to rejecting them completely when they came out.

For example, though Bianca was very scared to come out as transgender to her family, they have been a continual source of support. “My mom actually was always accepting and that made it—my family made it that much easier, but I was still nervous to tell them that I felt that I was a woman.” Dee also stated their mom and stepdad were “trying”,

My mom works to use they/them/their, and she researches and works really hard, and my mom has my aunt doing it. My aunt has no idea what’s going on but she’s doing it, and that’s amazing (laughs). Um, so that’s happening, cause before I didn’t really tell anyone about my pronouns. Like I came out to my mom and I was like “Oh….”, so my mom was like “so you want to be a full man?” and I’m like “No that’s not it”, she’s like, “Ok, I’m learning,” I’m like, “Alright”, so sometimes it gets a little awkward, but people are trying.

More commonly, participants described negative or tense relationships with family members, for example Bobbie Lee’s brothers used to lock her out of their father's home in Arizona when she dressed femininely. Marcy also cross-dressed at home when she was married, and after twenty years of marriage, “I don't know if my wife got sick of it or what, but she finally split, and that's when I said 'Finally, my time. I'm going to transition.’”

While there were a range of experiences with family acceptance and rejection among participants, a generational split became obvious at this point in the analysis as well. Most Millennial participants described having at least one accepting family member, while complete family rejection was common among Generation X participants’ stories. The generational differences in social acceptance and visibility of transgender and gender non-conforming people may help explain why Generation X participants described experiencing familial rejection more than Millennial participants. If the Generation X participants had limited access to information
about transgender people, then it is likely that their Baby Boomer generation parents had even less information and may have been less likely to accept their own children (Generation Xers) as transgender or gender non-conforming. Comparably the Generation X parents likely had a little bit more exposure to gender diversity than their Baby Boomer parents, even if it was often sensationalist and inaccurate. Generation X parents may have more familiarity than Baby Boomer parents with using the Internet as a means of educating themselves and finding a community of others going through similar experiences. Thus, like Millennial participants who were able to build community online, Generation X parents of Millennial children in gender minority categories may have been better able to find resources and support to cope with their children's transitions and ultimately may be more accepting than their own Baby Boomer parents.

Both generations of participants discussed hiding their gender variant feelings from their families, either knowing inherently or learning from the actions of their families that gender variant expressions were taboo. For example, James, a Millennial transman, grew up in a strict Arab Catholic household and said “I knew not to talk about it especially with my mother because she is all about image, image, image and it’s something that you never discuss.” Bobbie Lee described a similar experience growing up in a strict Catholic household and knowing she should not tell anyone about wanting to be a girl when she was as young as four or five years old. In fact, she said her mom made fun of her when she found out Bobbie Lee was crossdressing by calling her “My little Suzie.” Similar experiences were echoed by Dee, a gender non-binary femme person, who described judiciously choosing who to come out to in their Dad's family. That side of the family is religious and conservative, so Dee has not come out to them as non-
binary for fear of rejection or alienation. However, Dee is open about their gender identity with their immediate family.

Participants who did not grow up in religious households also described why they didn't feel like they could be open and honest about their gender feelings as well. Marcy, another Generation X transwoman, described growing up in a conservative small town in southwest Michigan,

Not knowing what transgender was because back in the 60s and 70s... you can't just go up to your ma and be like 'Hey I want to be a boy or I want to be a girl' because they would think there is something seriously wrong here and they would've sent you to the hospital and locked you up for who knows how long.

Eric, a Millennial transman on the cusp of Generation X, said he learned to stop telling people he was a boy by watching his mother's reactions change over time,

Basically as soon as I could talk in sentences I was telling people that I was a boy and not a girl, and being big and loud and it was 1980 by then just sort of went “Ha Ha” (waves hand dismissively), 'Whatever.' Um, and nothing was ever really said about it. As I got older and I could logically understand whether or not they were receptive to what I was saying, as opposed to just telling them and letting it go, which was probably around four or five, I started noticing my mother's anger about it. She would get upset about it when I would say that I was a boy, and so I learned to stop, to hold it in, because it was upsetting people around me and it wasn't doing me any good because no one was listening.

Fear of rejection was cited by many participants as to why they were not open with their families about their gender variant feelings throughout their lives. Bobbie Lee, for instance, had children by the time she knew she wanted to be accepted and seen as the woman she knew herself to be in her early 20s, but did not think her partner would have supported her at the time.

I guess she would have allowed me at that time, but...she wouldn't have been supportive [enough] at that time to stay with me, she would have moved on, but your children have a really powerful draw, so you want to be able to stay with your children and do what was considered the right thing by everyone around you, it wasn't the same time as what it is now.
Therefore, rather than starting her transition Bobbie Lee threw herself into masculine activities like working on cars, playing sports, working 12-hour shifts, and riding dirt bikes in order to avoid being suspected of being different from other guys. Bobbie Lee tried to overcompensate in order to fulfill the social roles expected of her based on her gender assigned at birth, and decided to “Keep myself hidden... I just kept myself so busy that I was running away from it... learning to do everything to try and fill my time and take my mind off who I really wanted to be.” This worked for Bobbie Lee until she was in a motorcycle accident at 42 years of age. This life-threatening accident gave Bobbie Lee “A lot of free time... that made me think a lot,” and she ultimately decided “I wasn't able to wait anymore” to transition from living as male to living as female. Even though she is the primary caretaker for her family, Bobbie Lee still faces rejection and disrespect from her children and partner about her gender identity and expression. At one point Bobbie Lee spent time in a psychiatric facility for gender dysphoria-related reasons, and reported her family was not supportive at all, “My mom and my brother came but they were kind of unhappy, and my mom still lets me know how I'm basically the devil and I'm going to, ya know....”

Even participants who have accepting and supportive families described the fear of coming out as transgender or gender non-conforming to them. For example, Bianca's family, and especially her mom, have been incredibly accepting and supportive of her transition, yet growing up Bianca was so afraid of negative reactions that she thought she would have to move away in order to transition.

I didn't see that happening anytime soon so I got to the point where I said to myself, well you are being treated like a man you have to live like a man. I was just going to suck it up and just be unhappy.
When Bianca finally did come out as a transgender woman, her mom said “I know! I was just waiting for you to say something because I didn't want to put that off on you.” Bianca's mom led the family in her acceptance and support, she got Bianca into therapy and did everything she could to support her child. Bianca told me, “She said, 'You can either live for other people or you can live for yourself and you only have one life to live.'” The social stigma associated with transgender and gender non-conforming people influenced Bianca to believe there was no way her family would support her, but her Generation X mother made sure Bianca knew she was fully accepted and supported. Bianca is the only transgender woman who described feeling empowered to identify specifically as a transgender woman, which may be in part due to her family's reaction to her transition. “It really is something I'm proud of and there are a lot of people who cannot be themselves, so why hide it?”

Race and Ethnicity

Family acceptance is not always as immediate as Bianca experienced, often it takes time for family members to understand their transgender or gender non-conforming relative's identity. These journeys to acceptance can take many paths, and one participant described how they used their ethnic identity as LatinX (a gender non-binary term for Latino/a) to help their father be more accepting of their non-binary gender identity. Elvira's father is an immigrant from Mexico who expected Elvira to embody the “girly daughter,” as he comes from a culture with strict gender role enforcement. In high school this created friction between them when Elvira expressed gender non-conforming ideations and bucked their father's gender stereotypes of Latina women. However, over time Elvira was able to share their interest and knowledge about the influence of colonialism on Latin American cultures with their father. “The Oaxacans...the
third gender they have, and I'm pretty sure my dad is aware of it and he is slightly being more understanding of how things are taught and how things have been colonized.” Another bonding moment Elvira had with their father came after Jennicet Gutierrez interrupted President Obama at a press conference on marriage equality to plead for any attention to be paid to the violence and abuse towards immigrant transgender women (and others) in U.S. deportation centers (Gutierrez, 2015). Many Facebook conversations were had over the appropriateness of Gutierrez's interruption, including between Elvira, their father, and his brother (Elvira's uncle). Elvira and their father came together over their support for immigrant rights when explaining to Elvira's uncle why undocumented immigrants need protection,

Dad and I were in agreement, and him being an immigrant, and me being trans, we bonded a lot more from that...because he likes Jennicet, and she is someone who I look up to at the moment. So in a sense it’s like just how everything can change in a lot of different ways it depends on the culture too.

Elvira's ethnicity became a point of connection with their father, and they were able to use that connection to educate their father about their gender identity and give him another cultural point of reference to think about his acceptance of his child's gender identity.

Other participants described how their experiences with race or ethnicity impacted their gender identities and expressions in other ways as well. When I asked Dee to talk about their gender identity they sighed and stated,

This gets deep for me, because personally a lot of things are bound to my experience. I was born into the Black girl experience and I identified very heavily with that because I was raised with the expectations of our society and also what Black people expected out of Black women, even though I didn't identify as a Black woman...I don't ascribe to any sort of binary, no female, no woman-man, um feminine and masculine. I think those are constructs and I don't want them to necessarily dictate my life.

Dee's experiences growing up with the expectations of a Black girl in their community changed
the way they experienced gender roles. It was Dee's mother who worked to provide for the family, so her gendered expressions were different than the mainstream, white-dominated femininity expectations Dee was exposed to throughout society. Dee talked about this conception as “black femme” vs “white femininity”,

I do highly identify with the term “femme” though. Femme is a special term that a lot of times get misconstrued with “femininity”. Femme is a term that is used by a lot of people of color because our femme-ness is not necessarily comparable with, um, the femme-ness or femininity of white folks. Which white people in America at least are the default and so um how I describe it is, my mom is a very feminine person, she identifies that way, but she used to come home from work from her male-labor job, she would flex her muscles and things of that nature, and that’s the femininity that I grew up with and the femme-ness that I know. And that’s not comparable with the femme-ness you may see with, uh, white women or white feminine identified folk, and so for me femme doesn’t mean 'feminine' because feminine is part of you know, um, kind of like the white default.... So, in comparison to white femininity, it seems masculine, in comparison black masculinity it can seem as a bit more docile, but a lot of black women and black femme people have to carry a lot on their shoulders and be very independent.

Growing up in what they described as a “black girl experience”, Dee saw their mother perform the role of 'woman' and 'mother' in alternative ways than they saw white women perform the same social roles. Dee came to understand a black femme identity as rooted in strength and independence, and as distinctly different than the dominant culture's default white femininity that seemed rooted in submission, docility and deference to men. Dee is proud of their mother's gender representation and feels connected to the idea of black femme as an integral part of their gender identity based on their experiences growing up.

Another area where race was explicitly brought up was in relation to visibility and safety for participants. Kamora, a Black transgender woman, talked about how much safer she felt living in southwest Michigan compared to her hometown of Detroit. When she was 15 Kamora lived in Palmer Park, a neighborhood in Detroit she described as “a well-known gay
community”, and was introduced to transgender women in the area. Kamora was first
“confused...I was so against it [being transgender]”, but she felt connected to these women in a
way she couldn't explain, “I was just like y'all is weird but I kind of like it.” Unfortunately,
Palmer Park was not a safe area for transgender women as Kamora explained,

On numerous nights transwomen would be working the streets and I would go out there
cause these were my friends...so I would be out there with them keeping them company
and stuff like that. Numerous occasions cars full of guys would drive past or women and
they would throw various things out the window. One day these two guys drove past and
they threw an Everclear glass bottle at a corner a bunch of girls were standing at. Didn’t
hit nobody it hit the ground and kind of shattered a little bit but didn’t hit nobody but I
took it upon myself because they went up and made a Michigan-U and came back around
the other side of the riser, so I took it upon myself to take the bottle and throw it back at
the car as it went back the other way. They had a flat tire and so uh I have been standing
out there with girls and have had roman candles shot at us. I have been standing out there
with girls and I have been shot at with paintball guns. Uh, yeah it was pretty severe.

Kamora has a theory that she experiences less gender identity-based discrimination and
microaggressions in southwest Michigan because “a white person cannot tell that I am trans. I
feel like a black person is better at identifying me as trans than a white person.” This theory fits
with literature on race relations that confirms people in racial groups have difficulty recognizing
differences within other racial groups (Zebrowitz, Montepare, & Lee, 1993). When one is
isolated from members of other races the idea that “they all look alike” becomes plausible
because one does not learn the subtle differences within other racial groups (Zebrowitz et a,
1993).

Geographic Location

Kamora developed her theory about race based on her move from Detroit (majority black
city) to southwest Michigan (majority white area), which indicates that geographic location also
plays a part in how participants formed and experience their gender identities. Like Kamora's
experiences, Marcy exemplified how geographic location can impact one's interpretation of how other people treat them. Marcy grew up in a conservative small town in west Michigan outside of a small college city in Ottawa county, and she did not feel safe being open as a transgender woman in her hometown. However, she stated feeling comfortable being openly transgender in the small college city, which is known to be fairly conservative and highly religious. She said, “so far it's been very easy for me to transition in [small college city]” and talked about various LGBT organizations working towards equality for all people in the city, such as PFLAG, [Small College City] is Ready, and [College] is Ready. Coming from a very small town where she thinks she was the only open LGBT person around, Marcie's positive perception of transitioning in a relatively larger city partially comes from her experiences with the general population as people who are “not cruel where they are going to beat and attack you”, even if they do sometimes “look and stare and give you the funniest looks.” Based on her previous experiences living in a small conservative town, Marcy found the small college city more welcoming because she can handle people staring at her as long as she is not in danger of being beaten up. Marcy saw more possibility to transition safely and live publicly in the small college city, compared to living in her hometown where she feared a harsher reception.

James on the other hand described a very different experience living in a nearby city where he attends college. While at college James experienced a lot of support that influenced his decision to come out as a transgender man (discussed further in Chapter Four), however James' overall assessment of how accepting the area he lives in is for transgender people differs from Marcy's. A native of a mid-sized city (located on the east side of Michigan), James was surprised how much more religiously conservative southwest Michigan is compared to his experiences
with religion in his hometown.

Over here its religion, religion, religion so being so close to [small college city] and I’ve never had religion thrown at me in so many different directions.... I grew up in a Catholic church but it was never really something they talk about. Even if you disagree you just don’t talk about it. I wouldn’t say it’s respectful there, but it’s more respectful. Over here people have a lot to say when you don’t even ask their opinion. Just being who you are aggravates them, it irritates them, and it provokes them. People are a lot more ignorant to me. Religion is so imbedded in people’s lives and how they live it that I’m just like shocked.

James also talked about how his girlfriend's very religious family would be “nice to [his] face...but when I leave they would use the wrong pronouns on purpose to be like 'this is what it says in the Bible’” (though they had been trying to be more respectful at the time of the interview). Marcy's perception of it being easy to transition in the small college city is in contrast with James' experiences in a similar and close by location, because each had their individual experiences, backgrounds, and expectations for how others typically act in public.

Individuals' backgrounds and social identities clearly impact their experiences in certain areas, which James and Marcy's experiences in a similar location exemplify. Marcy grew up in a very small, conservative, and highly religious town in Ottawa county, and experienced a lot of negative treatment because she was perceived by others to be different (explored more fully in Chapter Four), so when she moved to the small college city and people were not openly hostile towards her that made the area seem safer and more accepting. She even described pushing social boundaries while in the small college city in ways she would not dare to in larger cities, even those nearby her small college city.

I love watching people’s expressions I think sometimes I dress purposefully flamboyant just to see peoples’ expressions on their faces. It just lights my day up when I can make somebody just go uuuh.... Ya know you have got to know your boundaries and when you can and you can’t. And [small college city] seems to be, people here are pretty great people.
While James, having been brought up in different geographic location, views the same geographic location Marcy sees as liberating and safe, as having more hostility toward LGBT people in general.

Like queer people over there nobody says much where I grew up. You just don’t say much, it’s like whatever. I had a trans friend in high school and it was rough for him obviously, it’s rough anywhere but here I wouldn’t even imagine someone coming out as trans in high school just for safety reasons.

Here we see how similar geographic locations can be experienced differently by individuals based on their intersecting social identities. James did not grow up in an area with a high degree of public religiosity, while Marcy did and their experiences of living in similar geographic areas were described very differently.

Participants’ descriptions of how they think about their gender identities and expressions showcased the complicated interplay and influence of their experiences and identities. While generational similarities and differences are visible, intersectional experiences emerged based on their family upbringing, race and ethnicity, experiences with religion, and geographic locations. Their stories showcase the wide variety of ways participants understand and talk about their gender identities and expressions. The overall low-level of understanding about people in gender minorities in our society means that the general public is generally unaware of how to respectfully interact with gender minorities. Thus, the often complicated and critical discussions of gender identity and expressions I had with participants are not common in mainstream discussions of people in gender minorities' lives,

It is important to understand the role of intersecting identities on individuals' experiences, particularly when attempting to reflect something as personal and nuanced as gender identities.
and expressions. Media messages about gender diversity often propagate negative and damaging stereotypes and reinforce hegemonic cis-normativity. When the public mostly receives biased representations of transgender and gender non-conforming people, it can lead to intentional and unintentional negative interactions. The next chapter focuses on exploring the types of negative interactions participants described, and the impact those experiences had on their lives. This chapter provides an overview of themes that emerged in instances of overt discrimination, such as losing one's job or being refused services. Additionally, Chapter Four will provide an in-depth analysis of the types of intersectional microaggressions described by participants.
CHAPTER FOUR
DISCRIMINATION AND MICROAGGRESSIONS

At the age of 24 my life is perfect, but I do have days where I wonder if this is the day I come across someone who is crazy and doesn’t understand, and because of that I have to suffer. That is a fear nobody should have to wake up with; will I be harmed because of who I am? So I can say that I have been affected in a major way. I carry my mace in my purse. - Bianca

Definitions of discrimination have changed over time as researchers have acknowledged how discrimination has been experienced by various social groups. Much research about discrimination comes from race and ethnicity focused theories that emerged from social movements of the 1960s, when identity-based, race conscious theories of widespread oppression began to emerge. Critical race theories of discrimination went beyond analyzing overt, interpersonal types of discrimination, such as racist white business owners only hiring white employees, to instead focus on exposing hidden racism within institutional polices, practices, rules, and procedures (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Institutional discrimination does not rely on individuals' prejudices rather it differs in that the discriminatory behaviors are ingrained in U.S. social systems and can be difficult to discern (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Building on the work of critical race theorists, other researchers began applying more critical institutional-based definitions of discrimination to the experiences of multiple, marginalized identities.

One of the hallmarks of institutional discrimination is that it is not easily apparent to those who enforce policies, practices, rules, and procedures that uphold discriminatory outcomes.
Due to the nature of institutional discrimination, many fair-minded people may unintentionally perpetuate discriminatory beliefs, attitudes, and institutional policies through upholding the beliefs and values of socially dominant groups (Henkel et al., 2006). For example, Stamarski and Son Hing (2015) argue that human resources (HR) policies discriminate against women in many workplaces. One such policy is through favoring “face time” (being seen working by the boss) in job performance criteria, which systematically favors men who are not expected to be primary family caregivers and are able to spend more time at work than women (Fuegen et al., 2004; Glass 2004). If women are more likely to be caregivers, they will be forced to prioritize their dependents' care over the dominant value of face time at work. As such, women are more likely to work flexible or part-time hours that may not coincide with the employers' hours, thus putting women at a systematic disadvantage when employers are evaluating face time as a job performance criterion (Stamarski & Son Hing, 2015). While this job performance criteria item seems gender neutral, there are discriminatory gendered outcomes that are not taken into account when such policies are instituted. Therefore, anyone employing this criterion in job performance evaluations would be upholding discriminatorily gendered employment outcomes, regardless of their own personal biases or lack thereof.

Many marginalized populations face similar kinds of institutional discrimination, for example Hatzenhuehler et al. (2010) studied the psychological impacts of same-sex marriage bans on lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) people who lived in states with constitutional amendments against same-sex marriage. Using longitudinal data from the National Epidemiological Survey on Alcohol and Related Conditions, researchers were able to study the differences between participants who took part in two sets of interviews conducted four years
apart (2001 – 2005) that asked about participants' sexual orientation and diagnosis of mood and anxiety disorders. These interviews were conducted before and after passage of constitutional amendments banning same-sex marriage in 14 states. The authors noted a 248.2% increase in the number of LGB people diagnosed with generalized anxiety disorder between 2001 and 2004, which may at least partially result from the negative campaigns against same-sex marriage and exposure to antigay attitudes (Hatzenhueler et al., 2010; Meyer, 2003; Rostosky et al., 2009). While it is likely that all the individuals who voted for the constitutional amendments against marriage equality do not hold malice towards LGB people (Levitt et al., 2009), the impact of their arguments and campaigns had negative effects on LGB people living in those states.

People are impacted when they perceive that they have been treated unfairly because of their membership in certain social groups. Yet, it can be difficult for those affected to determine if the level of discrimination they perceive matches the level of discrimination that occurs (Major, Quinton, & McCoy, 2002). For instance, due to known structural inequalities and individual racism, Black students may perceive racial discrimination when they are denied admission to colleges and universities, but simultaneously may have no firm evidence to prove that discrimination occurred. However, even the perception of discrimination has measurable consequences on individuals' lives, including emotional and psychological distress, which people may cope with in multiple ways. Some people may minimize the discrimination experience (minimization bias), while others might tend to see more discrimination than has occurred (vigilance bias) (Major & Kaiser, 2005). There are pros and cons of each type of bias in terms of protecting individuals in marginalized groups from harm, such as having a heightened awareness for discrimination (vigilance bias), while others ignore or deny legitimate acts of discrimination.
based on a desire to protect oneself or because individual discrimination can be difficult to
discern (minimization bias) (Kaiser & Major, 2006; Crosby et al. 1986).

Social contexts matter when attempting to discern whether or not individuals perceive
discrimination in any given situation. For example, Cohen et al. (1999) studied the differences in
perceptions of discrimination between African American and white college students on written
essays. African American students who received critical written feedback on their essay that
included statements about the grader's belief in the student's ability to improve their writing in
the future, were less likely to perceive the grader as racially biased. The positive encouragement
along with the critical evaluation of the essays seemed to mitigate African American students'
perceptions of grader bias. White students were the least likely to perceive discrimination
regardless of whether they received encouraging statements in critical feedback (Cohen, et al.,
1999). Since it is difficult to discern the grader's intent, African American students who did not
receive encouraging statements, as well as critical ones, on their essays perhaps assumed bias
based on knowledge of past experiences. The African American students who did receive
encouraging and critical feedback may have been less likely to see the feedback as biased
because the encouraging statements helped balance the negative perception of the critical
feedback. White students may have been less likely to have been discriminated against based on
their race, and thus would be less likely to interpret critical feedback as being biased. Thus both
the students' social identities and the context of the essay content feedback, seem to have
impacted their interpretation of the grader.

Individuals' world views have been shown to impact perceptions of discrimination even
when it can be proven. Many people tend to resist labeling their own negative experiences as
discrimination, and do not perceive even directly discriminatory actions as such (Magley et al., 1999; Vorauer & Kumhyr, 2001). A meritocratic worldview provides individuals with the idea that the world is fair and that one has complete control over their life chances, if you work hard you will be successful. This worldview may lead to the belief that those who are not successful just do not work as hard as they could or should, rather than seeing structural inequalities such as institutional racism, sexism, and ableism, for example, as having an influence on an individual’s life chances (Kaiser & Major, 2006). When one holds a meritocratic worldview they may not recognize how structural discrimination can impact their own lives, and thus may interpret clearly discriminatory practices as “just the way things are” or as otherwise not pertinent to their situation. Those who engage in minimization bias in particular may hold meritocratic world views that make it difficult for them to acknowledge discriminatory actions.

Regardless of whether discrimination can be proven, perceived discrimination experiences impact individuals' lives. For example, researchers have found that perceptions of discrimination impact health outcomes among racial groups through structural racism that not only limits access to wealth, but creates psychological distress through the buildup of microaggressions (Magley et al., 1999; Vorauer & Kumhyr, 2001). For example, Sanchez and Brock (1996) studied perceived discrimination of Hispanic employees and found that racial and ethnic-based perceived discrimination as an additional source of stress on employees that went beyond the usual employee stressors. The authors concluded that management should try to make decisions and communicate in ways that do not lead to perceptions of differential treatment based on race or ethnicity, and provide resources to help employees cope with perceptions of discrimination to avoid negative outcomes, such as producing lower-quality work or quitting
Employers who want to attract the highest quality employees should be aware of how institutional polices, and individuals' behaviors, may work to discourage Hispanic people from applying for jobs available in what might be considered a safe space only for White people.

Multiple studies have outlined the negative impacts of discrimination on marginalized groups, such as losing out on economic, educational, and housing opportunities, and negative health impacts (Feagin & Eckberg, 1980; Feagin & Feagin, 1986; Feagin, 1991; Sanchez & Brock, 1996; Williams, et al., 1997; Valentine et al., 1999; Dion, 2002; Renna & King, 2007; Hudelson, et al., 2009). Researchers have begun to focus on how individuals' perceptions of discrimination differ based on their affiliation with various social groups\(^6\) (Blodorn, et al., 2012; Pescosolido & Rubin, 2000). Social identity theory explains how group affiliation impacts individuals' self-identifications, and social groups' relationships to social power, prestige, and status (Tajfel, 1981; Hogg & Abrams, 1988).

While much research has been conducted about the impact of perceived discrimination on racial and ethnic groups, there is growing research on the impact of discrimination on transgender people that shows a similar trend. In a 2002 study by the National Center for Lesbian Rights and the Transgender Law Center, 155 participants in San Francisco reported experiencing gender identity based discrimination in employment, public accommodations, housing, health care, and in interactions with police and other social service providers (Minter & Daley, 2003). Bazargan and Galvan (2012) found an association between perceived discrimination and depression among Latina male to female transgender women, and warn of the increased risk of

\(^6\) Social groups are defined as collections of individuals with shared goals, norms, and interactions (Persell, 1992).
mental health problems among transgender women based on discrimination and sexual violence. It is becoming clear that perceived discrimination impacts transgender people in a variety of ways, and that more research is needed to explore this phenomenon.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the development of social identity theory provided a way to understand why people in certain social groups (based on gender, race, class, etc.) tend to behave in similar ways. Social identity theory argues that society is made up of multiple social groups, and that the stronger sense of affiliation one has with their social groups the more likely it is that their actions will coincide with the social norms of those groups. The strength of one's group affiliation depends on a person's sense of belonging, including the emotional value attached to their membership. The more people feel connected to their social groups, the stronger the influences on the individuals may be, particularly depending on how their social groups are viewed by society (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Tajfel, 1981; Hogg & Abrams, 1988). Members of highly respected social groups who have access to social power and prestige are more likely to have a positive self-image than those who belong to marginalized social groups (Tajfel, 1981).

Researchers studying discrimination with social identity theory as a guide find that the strength of social group affiliation influences whether individuals perceive situations as discriminatory or not (Pescosolido & Rubin, 2000). Social identity theory contends that strongly-identified group members react positively towards those they see as fighting for positive social representation of the group, and negatively towards group members they see as negatively representing the group to society (Abrams et al., 2000; Branscombe et al., 1993). Kaiser et al. (2009) used scenarios of different people's reactions to race and sex-based discriminatory comments to study African Americans' and Asian Americans' gendered attitudes when a person
ignored or confronted a negative remark. Participants who had a strong sense of belonging to their racial group reacted more positively towards same-group members who challenged verbal discrimination than those with a weak sense of racial belonging. However, the authors did not find the same pattern when analyzing responses from all women participants. Women who weakly-identified with their gender as women tended to express slightly more negative attitudes towards women who did confront sexist discrimination (Kaiser et al., 2009).

Unlike the strongly-identified members of racial groups, strongly-identified women's reactions in Kaiser et al's (2009) study may have been due to the difference in levels of identity between women and the racial groups. The authors found that the average strength of identity level for women was significantly lower than the average strength of identity level for racial groups, which may have been one contributing factor in the differences between reactions by strongly-identified racial group members and strongly-identified women in the study. Other contributing factors may be that women are socialized to avoid disagreement with one another, and that sexism is more accepted in society than racism (Eagly, 1987; Czopp & Monteith, 2003). Kaiser et al., (2009) also found that weakly-identified women were slightly more likely to react negatively towards those who confronted discrimination, which the authors argue is likely due to the fact that women's sense of themselves as a marginalized social group is weak overall. The overall weak sense that women have as a marginalized group may have contributed to why weakly-identified women reacted negatively to those who confronted discrimination, because

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7 Strength of belonging to racial groups was determined by the identity centrality sub-scale developed by Luhtanen and Crocker in 1992, which that tested the importance individuals placed on their belonging to their ethnic group(s) (Kaiser, et al., 2009).

8 Based on Luhtanen and Cocker's (1992) four-item gender identity centrality sub-scale.
they likely did not recognize how their own self-interests were served by the challenge their status as a marginalized group (Abrams et al., 2000; Kaiser et al., 2009).

A Little Context

Much like the women in Kaiser et al.'s (2009) study, transgender people are not part of a social group with a strong sense of cohesion as a marginalized group. The history of transgender inclusion in mainstream lesbian, gay, and bisexual communities and social justice organizations in the United States shows that there have long been misconceptions about how transgender people fit into a community that mainly consists of people who banded together due to similarities in sexual orientation (Meyerowitz, 2008). These misconceptions come from a lack of understanding of the history of the scientific construction of gender and sexuality. For example, some 19\textsuperscript{th} century medical scholars were convinced that those who were sexually attracted to the same sex exhibited a pathological desire to be the opposite sex, which manifested in psychotic attraction (Stryker, 2008). Here the conflation of sexual desires and gendered desires begins, as those with same-gender attractions are told for example, men are attracted to women, so if you are a woman attracted to other women then you really must want to be a man. These implications are the result of biased heterosexual researchers not examining how their own social identities may have influenced their research.

By the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century Magnus Hirschfeld's scientific discourse of transsexuality helped create distinct social identities for homosexuals and transsexuals, yet the conflation of sexuality and gender remains common in our society. Thus, transgender and gender non-conforming people are often punished in similar ways as LGBQA people, and those who are gender non-conforming (regardless of their gender identity) often face anti-transgender negative
treatments. This common history of oppression has created a more cohesive and ever-expanding community of gender and sexual minorities who have been forced to work together due to systematic repression by the State and individual discrimination and prejudice exposed by so much of the public.

For example, transgender people had an integral role in resisting police oppression and brutality in spaces where LGB and T people gathered throughout the 1950s, 60s, and 70s (Stryker, 2008). One example is the Stonewall Inn riots in New York City in 1969, when a racially diverse crowd of transgender, gay, lesbian, and bisexual patrons of the Stonewall Inn bar responded to a routine police raid with three days of resistance outside the bar. Even though an African American, transgender woman, Marsha P. Johnson, is credited with instigating the resistance at the Stonewall Inn, many people fail to recognize the role of transgender people of color at the event described by many queer scholars, activists, and community members as the beginning of a successful LGBT civil rights movements (Stryker, 2008; Wilchins, 2004). As GSM history has been recorded many people in gender minority categories have had their contributions erased in a familiar way where white, middle-class, men's stories are focused on, only in this case they are gay men. The Gay Rights Movement was started and sustained because of the efforts of Black, and often homeless, sex workers, runaways, and other undesirable “street people” who rioted and raised hell to bring attention to their needs throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Undesirable members of society do not make easy political allies though, which is one of the reasons gay and lesbian social activists in some organizations fought to exclude them from the history of “gay rights”.

In the 1970s transgender people became a target for conservative political groups trying
to stop the modest political gains made by early gay and lesbian liberation movements (Stryker, 2008; Rudacille, 2005). Many gay, lesbian, and feminist social justice organizations and movements were hesitant, or outright hostile, to the attempts of transgender people to openly and publicly join their efforts for a variety of reasons. Some gay and lesbian organizations were afraid to be more openly inclusive of transgender people, because of how they could be viewed by social conservatives, who were using transgender expressions as an argument against LGB civil rights. Social conservatives feared that widespread acceptance of homosexuality would irreversibly blur gender roles into what they considered abnormal. Therefore, it was politically risky for mainstream LGB organizations to welcome and advocate for transgender people, and in fact many LGB activists were careful to present in gender-normative fashions in public to avoid potential political harm to the organization's goals (Wilchins, 2004).

Furthermore, even though transgender people had been a part of early feminist organizations, many feminist organizers of the 1970s and 1980s did not accept transgender people. For instance, many radical feminists were particularly vocal in arguing that transgender women are not actually women, rather just men in dresses trying to infiltrate women-only spaces. Janice Raymond (1979) claims that because transsexual women were socialized as boys and men, they do not possess the history of female oppression and degradation necessary to truly be women. Transgender men faced a similar dismissal from feminist and lesbian communities, particularly as more people who had historically identified as masculine lesbians began to identify as transgender men and publicly seek gender-affirmative medical treatments. Many feminists, lesbians, and bisexual women felt that these newly identified transgender men were leaving woman/lesbian social groups and undergoing masculine transition to blend in with the
dominant heterosexual social group in order to take advantage of male privilege for an easier life (Stryker, 2008). These men were seen as abandoning their former communities and the causes for which they fought.

Given that many transgender people were unable to find support in the LGB and feminist movements, transgender activists began to form their own social justice organizations in the latter half of the 20th century (Stryker, 2008). For example, Sylvia Rivera, a Latina transgender woman, and Marsha P. Johnson started an organization called Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR) in 1970, which provided housing, food, and support to homeless transgender youth in New York City for two years before closing due to financial and zoning problems (Matzner, 2004). Throughout the 1970s and 1980s transgender people worked towards more visibility in society, in order to gain social acceptance and increase their access to social power (Meyerowitz, 2002). In the 1990s and throughout the 2000s, transgender people have been able to better incorporate themselves into many national, state, and local LGBT organizations and resource centers (Stryker, 2008). Despite the gains made in the 1990s, lesbians and gay men still hold varied views on transgender inclusion in the LGBT community. Amy Stone (2009) studied lesbians and gay men's attitudes towards transgender inclusion, and found that while lesbians tend to have ambivalent attitudes, gay men's views are much more polarized as either strongly in favor or strongly opposed. Thus, there is no clear consensus on whether LGBT communities are welcoming and affirming towards transgender and gender non-conforming people's inclusion or not. Since there is an overall weak cohesion of the LGBT community as a marginalized social group, it may not be a reliable source of support for transgender people who experience discrimination. LGB people may be less likely to acknowledge subtle forms of
discrimination called microaggressions by members of the LGBT community against transgender people. Tension between LGB and T populations may grow if transgender people are unable to consistently rely on LGB people to support transgender people who experience discrimination, particularly microaggressions, from outside and within the LGBT community.

Emergence of Microaggressions

As researchers explore the impact of discriminatory experiences among diverse social groups, definitions of discrimination evolve as prejudiced individuals and institutions discover different ways to treat populations unequally. The change in common discrimination types from overt and obvious discriminatory actions based on prejudicial thoughts to more ambiguous and subtle forms of discrimination called 'microaggressions' has been explored most thoroughly by racial theorists (Feagin, 1991; Pettigrew & Martin, 1987). After the African American Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s-1960s made it less socially acceptable to intentionally, consciously, and overtly commit racist acts of discrimination, social justice writers identified a subtler form of discrimination they called microaggressions (Lewis et al., 2012). As society overall becomes less tolerant of overt forms of racism, sexism, homophobia, ableism, etc, those in dominant social groups developed subtler ways of showing prejudicial attitudes that are often ambiguous enough to cause different perceptions from members of different social groups.

According to Sue (2010), microaggressions can be categorized in three ways: microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations. Microassaults happen when dominant group members make intentional verbal or nonverbal attacks such as using derogatory racial or gendered language, or only serving a gay customer after serving all the heterosexual customers. Dominant group members may also unintentionally engage in microinsults, including comments
and behaviors that convey demeaning, rude, and insulting messages towards nondominant group members (such as asking women if they got into a university because of affirmative action, or avoiding eye contact when talking with a person of color). The last type of microaggression Sue describes is microinvalidation, which is also unintentional comments or behaviors that invalidate or exclude nondominant group members' experiences. Microinvalidations can range from telling a lesbian couple not to be “so sensitive” when describing sexuality-based microaggressions, such as poor service at a restaurant, or asking an Asian American person where they were born, indicating that they are not really American, but will always be foreign (Sue, 2010).

Studies about microaggressions have proved useful in helping a variety of oppressed people have language to discuss their experiences with dominant cultures. For example, Nadal, Rivera, & Corpus, (2010) proposed a taxonomy of microaggressions based on sexual orientation and gender identity that included eight microaggression themes unique to LGBT people. These include the following: 1) The use of heterosexist or transphobic terminology, such as being called a fag or tranny. 2) Endorsement of heteronormative or gender normative culture and behaviors, like saying all boys have penises or all women have a biological desire to have children. 3) The assumption that all LGBT people have a universal experience neglects how race, class, ability, and other social identities impact individuals' experiences. 4) Exoticization of LGBT people is another unique experience, for example some people fetishize transgender women and see them only as strange and exciting sex objects rather than human beings. 5) Expressing discomfort with or disapproval of LGBT experiences such as family members refusing to attend a birthday party at a LGBT-themed location. 6) Refusing to believe the negative experiences of LGBT people, thus denying the reality of heterosexism or transphobia.
7) Assuming LGBT people have a mental illness or another sexual pathology/abnormality. And lastly, 8) denying one's own individual heterosexism, such as not understanding why it is heterosexist to assume LGBT people have a mental illness (Nadal, 2013, p. 46-47). Identification of these microaggressions unique to LGBT people provide individuals and researchers with more nuanced and precise language to describe how LGBT people tend to be treated.

These subtler forms of discrimination are often ambiguous and unrecognizable to observers, especially when the observers are outside the social groups of the victim (Major, et al., 2002). For example, Nadal (2013) describes the experiences of a young, transgender woman named Destiny who asked her high school principal to make arrangements for her to attend her senior year as a woman. Destiny's principal told her “I can't promise you that it's going to be safe. Kids will be kids. Plus, it's your decision to dress like that, so you can always choose to dress as a normal person if you don't want to get into any trouble” (quoted in Nadal, 2013 p. 100-101). This statement reflected multiple microaggressions, such as the principal clearly expressing disapproval of Destiny's identity as a transwoman (placing the blame for any future harassment by other students on her) and an endorsement of gender normative behaviors (“you can choose to dress like a normal person”). A cisgender person may not realize it can be hurtful to refer to gender normative behavior as “normal” as it implies transgender is “abnormal”. While many microaggressions may not be intentional, they nonetheless send demeaning messages to transgender and gender non-conforming people about how they are viewed in society (Smith et al., 2012).

Multiple studies of microaggressions have found them to have negative impacts on non-dominant groups (Swim et al., 2001; Dion, 2002; Nadal, 2009; Sinclair, 2006; Sue, et al., 2009;
Sue, 2010; Wang et al., 2011). Sue (2010) argues that oppressive microaggressions can actually be more harmful to members of non-dominant groups than overt hate crimes because they are daily occurrences that build up over time. Microaggressions are also viewed as relatively harmless, and often the targets of microaggressions must evaluate the perpetrator’s intention and calculate how to respond, in order to avoid being accused of being “too sensitive”.

Because microaggressions are subtle reinforcements of prejudiced beliefs, it is important to look at the impact microaggressions have on people. Microaggressions have been found to have negative emotional consequences for those who perceived the aggression to be racially-motivated. Facing these daily “digs” can have significant impacts on marginalized groups' health, such as heightened risks for depression and anxiety, and also cardiovascular disease due to frequently experiencing emotions such as anger and contempt when facing microaggressions (Wang et al., 2011). Deitch, et al. (2007) found that Black participants in their study tended to report more negative perceptions of their health than the White participants as well as lower job satisfaction. The authors argue both could be influenced by the stress of everyday microaggressions in the workplace. The cumulative impact of microaggressions has been shown to have negative emotional consequences for women as well, including increased anger, depression, and lower self-esteem (Swim et al., 2001). Due to the ambiguous nature of many microaggressions it is difficult for members of dominant social groups to recognize the range of behaviors that are perceived by various marginalized groups as hurtful microaggressions (Deitch et al., 2007; Sue, 2010).

Studies in counseling and psychology journals have researched the impact of microaggressions from counselors and other medical gatekeepers towards transgender people
and the overall state of transgender inclusion in counseling services (Smith, Shin, & Officer, 2012; Burnes et al., 2010; Signh & Burnes, 2010; Carroll & Gilroy, 2002). Since mental health professionals are the gatekeepers for legal medical and social gender transition processes, they are more likely to interact with and understand the experiences of transgender people (at least able to seek professional medical and/or legal assistance). Overall, more research needs to be conducted about transgender people's lived experiences in order for the gatekeepers working within a cis/heteronormative dominant culture to best serve their clients. Smith, Shin, and Officer (2012) argue that even well intentioned counselors may engage in microaggressions towards transgender clients due to the hetero/cis-sexist language that dominates the field, a general lack of awareness about gender nonconformity within the dominant culture, and the failure to critically assess their own social positions and privileges. Thus, the people who are supposedly in positions to help transgender people navigate their way through transitioning in our society are themselves often not adequately prepared to support transgender people. This can lead to counselors engaging in unintentional microaggressions towards transgender clients. Other researchers have pointed out the need for increased competency within counseling fields to avoid microaggressions against transgender people as well (Burnes et al., 2010; Signh & Burnes, 2010; Carroll & Gilroy, 2002).

The few studies that address how transgender people experience everyday microaggressions find that transgender people who have participated in studies are subject to a significant number of daily microaggressions (Nadal, Skolnik & Wong, 2012). For example, participants in Nadal, Skolnik, and Wong's (2012) study reported experiencing microaggressions in “public restrooms, the criminal justice system, health care, and government-issued
identification” (p.97). Nadal, Skolnik, and Wong's (2012) study identified a microaggression category unique to transgender people when compared to Nadal, Rivera, and Corpus', (2010) proposed taxonomy of LGBT microaggressions (described above). Denial of bodily privacy is a category that seems unique to transgender people, who are often asked invasive questions about their bodies, something that is not reported by LGB individuals. For example, Nadal, Skolnik, and Wong (2012) quote one female to male participant who shared an experience he had when an unknown man stopped him while walking down the street to ask him “Yo, yo, you have a dick or a pussy?” (p.97). Bodies are often a sensitive thing for transgender people, and that kind of rudely asked and invasive question can be difficult for some individuals to cope with. This type of interaction also shows how difficult it can be for people in gender minorities to discern whether or not the other person's actions are a danger to their lives. Microaggressions are typically things that are uncomfortable but do not directly put a person in physical, financial, or any other immediate danger to their lives, but the emotional toll of microaggressions can be great.

People in gender minority categories must learn how to live with microaggressions as they happen, despite the negative impacts they report experiencing after such encounters. Like any other experience, microaggressions are felt differently by people based on their intersectional backgrounds and previous experiences, but overall the academic literature on a wide variety of social identities shows that microaggression experiences are related to a variety of negative consequences. These consequences include: low self-esteem, attempt to conceal one's identity, fear of rejection, depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress, higher blood pressure, and more sick days taken from work, just to name a few (Rostosky et al., 2009; Herek & Garnets,
Given that the academic literature indicates that transgender people are likely to face high levels of microaggressions, it is clear that more research is needed to learn what consequences transgender and gender non-conforming people experience due to microaggressions. This study will include descriptions of microaggressions reported by participants throughout the analysis of their experiences with discrimination.

Complexity of Discrimination

Three categories of discrimination that emerged from participants’ interviews include: institutional discrimination, microaggressions, and intersectional discrimination. The institutional discrimination category includes experiences such as being refused service, losing employment or housing, and being reproached by family, friends, and acquaintances once coming out as transgender or gender non-conforming. The microaggressions category included a variety of experiences including anxiety about using public bathrooms, as well as being misgendered and disrespected. The last major category that emerged in this first round of coding is intersectional discrimination experiences, where participants described being discriminated against more often based on their race or gender expressions (being read as feminine and experiencing misogyny), as well as experiencing gender-identity based discrimination within the LGBT community. This chapter will explore the range of discrimination experiences participants described within these three major categories. It is important to note that these analytic categories are not mutually exclusive, and there may be multiple categories in which an experience could be included.

Institutional Discrimination

As discussed above, institutional discrimination occurs in a variety of contexts and may
be overt and intentional or unintentional as perpetrators uphold social norms and enforce social policies. In this analytic category I included experiences that demonstrated overt discrimination that occurred within a social institution, such as employment, families, government, religion, health care, housing, and public accommodations, through upholding social norms, policies, and procedures. There were multiple sub-themes that emerged within this category as well, including refusals (in service and housing), familial disrespect, discrimination in employment, legal discrimination, and public attacks. This section will describe each of the sub-themes within institutional discrimination examples, and provide information from participants' experiences to explain the sub-themes.

Refusals

It is difficult to separate types of discrimination for analysis because multiple types of discrimination often occur in a single experience. For example, six participants described being refused service in different social institutions, mostly in health care and public accommodations, such as Jay who was referred to a local endocrinologist for hormone replacement therapy only to be told by the office staff the doctor would not treat him. Jay was repeatedly misgendered throughout the interaction with the doctor's receptionist, who finally had him take a seat across the waiting room while she called a supervisor to find out more information about the matter.

When the supervisor answered her she didn't call me back up to the desk, across the waiting room while there were other people there she said ‘You can't see the doctor here you need to see a gynecologist or endocrinologist,’ super loudly so other people can here, violating HIPPA. And I went back up there and I got my license and information and they asked if I wanted them to shred my paperwork and I said ‘No I'd like you to give them back to me,’ and I left. If I could go back I would have fought harder, I know my rights and I know if the doctor had seen me I would have gotten the hormones.... You know I never got to see the doctor so I assume that office is not trans-friendly. As a result of that I had to wait six months to start testosterone, nine months from when I started the process and six months on top of what I thought I would wait. That was really, really
disappointing.

In this example, Jay was denied access to the doctor he was referred to by the receptionist (institutional discrimination), and he was also misgendered multiple times throughout the encounter (microaggression). The misgendering was part of the experience of being denied service within the health care system, therefore Jay's experience being misgendered was due to the institutional discrimination he experienced at that doctor's office. The social institution Jay attempted to engage, health care system, was an integral part of his experience of overt discrimination, and thus I coded this experience as institutional discrimination.

Within the same sub-theme of refusals is an example of institutional discrimination that shows how even well-intentioned people can inadvertently engage in discriminatory actions, as seen in Davison's experience getting a physical for a new job after beginning her transition. Davison had a “pretty cool” interaction with the nurse before seeing the doctor and the nurse even asked her if she wanted a third party present during the doctor's exam. Since she was nervous about this appointment, Davison said yes and waited for the third party to come into the room but the doctor examined her before a third person came, which left Davison wondering why, “I kept looking at the door waiting, like 'Where's this nurse? What's going on?'” After the exam Davison asked the first nurse why no third party came into the room with her and the nurse nervously told her,

“She said (I'm assuming that's the office manager), your um, well I mean, you still have, I mean, well let me ask you, you know, do you still have your...um your parts?”...”Oh well they said you didn't need one, like legally you don't need one” and...I told her why I was you know, the job I'm filling out, and I go, “Trust me, I'm aware, um, but you asked me if I wanted one,” and I said, “Yes, and as customer service it seems odd to me that you would then take it away based on what exactly?...What if there was a boy here who suffered some kind of sexual assault as a kid, from a male, male doctor comes in and what are going to say not to him cause you're a body that can't have that?” and this
lightbulb goes on over her head and she goes, “Oh! I never ever thought about that!”

As we see in the example Davison described, the nurse who refused a service to her did so based on cis-sexist social norms that do not account for things so far out of the norm as male survivors of sexual assault. The nurse discriminated against Davison with no ill-intent, but rather ignorance of the complexity of who could be uncomfortable or at risk while alone with a male doctor during a physical exam.

Davison described another experience that ended in a teaching moment when she was refused access to the women's fitting rooms at a women's clothing store she frequented.

One day, after I mean I’ve bought hundreds if not thousands of dollars of stuff there, I’ve been in and out of the dressing rooms hundreds of times, by the same person who this particular day who said (when I came to the dressing room with an armload of stuff) said, “I’m sorry you can’t use the dressing room, you need to use the bathroom,” and the bathroom is a staff bathroom in this little concrete, dirty room and I was like, “Why?” and she was like, “Well someone called and complained” … I was like, “Really? How many?” And she didn’t want to get into it but I got the sense that it was one person. I was very caught off guard, had that been the first time I was in the store I wouldn’t have been surprise, but like I said it’s been months and months of going to this place, so I was like shocked. I almost cried just because I couldn’t believe I had kind of considered this place a ‘friendly’ spot. What? Were you lying this whole time? But I said, “This is just very, very disappointing to me, on many levels, and I hope you understand the implications of this. I spend a lot of money here and I’m not going to use your bathroom. This is not acceptable to me.” And she apologized, “I know I’m sorry.” I go, “Then why is this happening?” She said, “Well, because someone called to complain.” I got the sense that she was not very good at her job, like maybe she wasn’t being a bigot, but she just didn’t know how to handle the situation. So I like walked her through the process like, “Ok riddle me this then, is the person who complained here? Has anyone here complained to you today?” I’m kind of waiting for the light to go on for her, but I go, “Ok, so if no one here is complaining, you have had one person complain, and I’ve never caused guff and I’ve brought you lots of customers and you’ve seen me do it, dot, dot, dot” and she kind of looks around nervously and she’s like, “Sigh…Ok let’s go, I’ll sneak you in,” and I go, “Thank you for sneaking me in.” And you know I’m trying to be respectful and I can understand if a woman may not expect to hear this voice in a women’s room. It might freak them out. So I don’t want to be secret but I also don’t want to freak people out, so I’ll keep mouth shut in the dressing room that’s not an issue for me. So I came out and thanked her sincerely, I kind of pat her on the shoulder and say, “I appreciate you seeing the light and doing the right thing here,” and she says, “Oh yeah it’s fine.”
Here again we see a store employee attempting to uphold social norms, even though she herself did not seem to believe in them as she kept apologizing for having to implement that policy.

Not all participants who described being refused service indicated the refusal was based on ignorance though, as exemplified by Marcy's experience trying to buy a money order in her hometown grocery store.

I was waiting in line, and people were looking, and they wanted the cashiers over by the, that do the money orders and stuff, they wanted them to come over, and I see the management come over, and they came over to me and said we will take you over here, and they rushed me out the store. It is what it is. At least they are not hollering and screaming names and trying to knock me into the ground.

People who did not know her got the management to come over to her and she was rushed out of the store instead of being able to buy what she needed, because other customers were uncomfortable with her presence. In this example Marcy's existence as a transgender woman so disturbed some members of the small town in which she lived that they did not want to share the same space as she did. The existence of trans people as a problem was also evident in Bobbie Lee's description of her experiences with her neuropsychologist's office, while recovering from a catastrophic motorcycle accident that was the catalyst of her transition. After Bobbie Lee came out to her therapists they spent over two years attempting a form of conversion therapy in her sessions, “They were asking a lot of questions like 'Well when did it come about? Well can't you just be like a gay man or a weak man? Or just a weak and feminine man? Your life would be so much easier as a man.” Finally, after a four-and-a-half-year relationship she was told the doctors' office would no longer help her.

The neuropsychologist had to come in to speak to me. And he came in and he got down to my level and put his hand on my leg and he was kind of condescending and, “I am kind of saying that I recognize you as female now and I can kind of treat you as lesser now and
I can put my hand on you and I can kind of like...,” ya know, maybe some girls enjoy that part, but to me it was condescending. And he read me this letter and it stated I was too complex for them and that they couldn’t write my medication for my automobile stuff and it said that they would continue for 30 days, but they didn’t continue for 30 days, they flat cut me. So I didn’t have any help for PTSD or help to get to sleep and I tried calling around all the different psychology places and not a single one of them would accept me and I think it was because if they knew I was too complex for this one psychologist in town that I would be too complex for them.

Bobbie Lee has found a therapist at a gender clinic associated with the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, but her mom “hates her and wants me to stop seeing her.” Despite the fact that Bobbie Lee loved her new therapist, her family has not been supportive of her relationship with the new therapist or her transition in general.

She [new therapist] was really awesome, she just helped me through a lot and she is just amazing to me and I love her for it, but god my mom hates her and she wanted to sue her. And I'm like she isn’t doing anything, she is allowing me to be who I am and say who I am, it’s me doing it. At one point I stopped going to her for 6 months to see if I could, ya know, stop and see if could stop for family, but still I couldn’t it was impossible to shut myself down and I have not thoughts of doing that ever.

Bobbie Lee's experiences with her family exemplify the most prevalent sub-theme within the institutional discrimination category in which participants described being disrespected by family and friends based on their gender identity, referred to as familial disrespect in this study.

Familial Disrespect

The social institution of family is one that is focused on supporting its members, which can include friends and non-blood/legal relations for many oppressed people. Thus this theme includes experiences in which participants described discriminatory experiences with family members and friends. Nine participants described such experiences, including Mal, whose mother has had a difficult time accepting his transition, and at the time of the interview was still using “she/her” pronouns and Mal's given name in public.
She just keeps saying 'You will always be my daughter' and she uses female pronouns and refuses to change that. ...I've said to her out in public though that I'm not going to be the crazy one or the odd one that looks somewhere in between because people look at your, some people still perceive me as female and I do get some confrontation out in public or stares or looks or comments under the breath but she has continued to call me her daughter in public. She uses “she” or “her” whatever the context, and she started getting some sideways looks and I’m like “See Mom, it’s not me anymore, I can own this!” …it does bother me, but eventually these people will come around or they will come around or they will look silly and I’m not going to be the one that has to deal with it, that's on them.

Mal's mother's disrespect of him as a transgender man does not bother Mal much, as he notes the public embarrassment will fall on her for not accepting him as her son.

Sometimes there is more at risk than public embarrassment when one's family and friends don't accept one's gender identity or misgender them in public though. For example, Davison described an experience she had with a friend early on in her transition.

I was at a table with about seven people, female friend, male friend here, and then a lot of acquaintances who are female, who I used to work with in schools when I used to work here in Kalamazoo. And, some of them are really comfortable and some of them are just kind of whatever, um I recognize that if anyone is really uncomfortable they aren’t going to be there, so I feel like a pretty good space. But I had gone to the ladies’ room with a friend, and we were in there chit chatting for five or ten minutes, so we came out and we were kind of tipsy. My male friend was just plowed, and when we sat down, for whatever idiot reason, I don’t even know what he could have possibly been thinking, but he leaned over the table and he yelled at her kind of and went, “So, did you see his penis in there?” Yeah, so not only misgendering, and completely unnecessary anything, but loud enough, we’re in [a public bar], so there are all these people around too. So, not only was it humiliating, but that’s when it really occurred to me like, “Holy shit! Like now, I’m maybe in danger too, like I have to leave this bar at some point, dickhead!” (nervous laughs). I don’t know if someone is going to be out there waiting.

As Davison points out in this example, trans people have to be aware of how they are perceived by others in order to remain safe. There is no predicting how another person will respond to learning about someone's transgender status, which is one of the reasons coming out as transgender is dangerous for many individuals.
Being recognized as a member of a minority gender category clearly can have serious consequences, which many participants expressed apprehension about during their interviews. For example, when asked about how she coped with her experienced with discrimination Bianca, a black trans woman, stated,

In my purse I carry mace with me, pepper spray or whatever because it’s a big world and there are a lot of people that don’t understand us, and we don’t have laws that protect us or many people that understand us, and I don’t feel like I should wonder—I mean, I have been referred to as a bitch just because I don’t pay attention to a guy on the street, so imagine, I mean things could go one way or another. Imagine if someone says something on the street and I say I’m a transgender woman, I don’t know how that’s going to go; I could have to defend myself, you just don’t know, and I do feel like I shouldn’t have to walk around with that but I do. Because I know anything could happen at any time. I heard a story about a young transgender black woman, and there was a guy who found her attractive and she told him who she was, and he literally shot her in her pelvis because he was so angry and he didn’t understand. So that’s scary, that really is scary. I don’t know how accurate this is, but I’ve heard—I don’t know how it is for trans men but from what I’ve read, if this is correct, the expectancy for transgender women is to live in their 30s, maybe a little after, because we’re out there, a lot of people don’t know it but we’re out there, so this doesn’t apply to everyone but that is a scary thought. At the age of 24 my life is perfect, but I do have days where I wonder if this is the day I come across someone who is crazy and doesn’t understand, and because of that I have to suffer. That is a fear nobody should have to wake up with; will I be harmed because of who I am? So I can say that I have been affected in a major way. I carry my mace in my purse.

Even though Bianca has a supportive family and job, she still lives in a world where media reports of transgender women of color's deaths are relatively common, particularly when we spoke in 2015. At the time of the interview, May 2015, 19 transgender women's murders had made national headlines and 18 of those women were women of color, which weighs on Bianca's mind. “I hurt for those people and I’m scared for them because I know right now there is someone out there right now like me who is probably being murdered right now...” Bianca takes precautions to maintain her safety because of the experiences she, and people she sees as like her, have had facing discrimination, microaggressions, and violence in a variety of ways.
Another factor that emerged within participants’ interviews related to the impact of religious ideology in multiple experiences, showing the interconnected nature of institutional discriminations. Many people who have conservative religious ideologies may engage in institutional discrimination of their family members and friends thinking they are doing the right thing based on their religions. Marcy's family, for instance, is “very staunch religious” and refused to help Marcy or let her live in their home after she was released from an in-patient psychiatric facility and came out to them as transgender.

I came home and went to my parents’ home and sat down and talked to them and basically came out to them and that’s not the way Jesus wants you to live and if that’s the way you want to live you can move back to [the psychiatric facility], it’s like, ya know, it hurt. It’s like they have a three-bedroom ranch home with a finished basement and they said no and I had to live on the street.

As a social institution, families are often viewed as a source of support for individuals, but in Marcy's example we see her family forego the supportive family role in favor of a religious ideology at odds with Marcy's existence. In another example of religion trumping family, Bobbie Lee stated her mother, a highly-devoted Catholic, was not supportive when Bobbie Lee was psychiatrically hospitalized, and “still lets me know how I am basically the devil and I am going to... ya know....” Clearly, it can be difficult for individuals to balance their adherence to opposing social norms, in this case obeying their religious ideologies put them at odds with supporting their trans family members.

Discrimination in Employment

Many participants described fractured or strained family and friend relationships after coming out as transgender or gender non-binary, but the family was not the only social institution where institutional discrimination was present. Seven participants described
experiences with institutional discrimination in employment, including losing a job, being
physically assaulted, sexually harassed, and being intentionally outed as trans at work. Many of
these participants also described simultaneous strained family relationships, so they had these
discriminatory experiences at work and may not have had access to needed support from family
and friends. Clearly we can see how participants faced institutional discrimination in multiple
social institutions at once.

For example, after Davison came out as transgender to some of her therapy patients at her
counseling job she was fired.

I work as a mental health therapist, and so if you’re a psychologist you work under the
umbrella of the American Psychiatric/Psychological Association (APA), and I work
under the American Counseling Association (ACA), just has a little teeny bit of
divergence. But um, the same rules basically apply you know, thou shalt not sleep with
clients, thou shalt not do all these things, well self-disclosure is a big no-no. You’re not
supposed to talk about yourself as a person with these clients, it’s all about them. But I
mean I’m pretty conscientious and I know these rules exist for a reason. But when I knew
that I was starting to change my physical appearance and lifestyle and mannerism,
everything changing, I know it’s going to have an impact on some of these clients who
have trust issues, and abandonment issues, and all these things. So I very kind of
carefully, uh I thought responsibly, chose which ones I was going to start telling, um I did
tell my boss because we did not get along. I knew that it was never gonna fly with
him. Um, so sure enough when he found out I was fired like a month later. And the
contract I signed upon being fired said, you know bad paperwork, slow authorization
requests, shoddy record-keeping, all true [laughs] BUT it was true for every single person
who worked there. Um, so they weren’t being fired, I was being fired. And um, he did
accuse me of being reckless and unethical and not taking this responsibility to heart
because these people deserve, and you know saying things like you know you should
never use them as your 'little therapy'. This all coming from a psychologist, you know so
I mean that really shook me up.

Shortly after she was fired Davison found another counseling job, but she was hurt by that
experience and unfortunately at the time her family relationships were also strained because she
had come out as transgender to them, so she did not have any emotional support from that social
institution.
Other participants described experiences being discriminated against at work based on their gender identity that did not lead to job loss, but created hostile working environments. For example, three participants, Bianca, Marcy, and James, stated they were sexually harassed at work. Bianca and Marcy were both sexually harassed by co-workers, but those experiences had different outcomes for these two transwomen. Bianca was outed as a transgender woman to a group of men that she worked with by a cis-woman co-worker,

There were five guys who were talking to this girl about me, and I guess they were saying how beautiful and attractive I was, and I guess she felt the need to, well in her words she said she had to 'let them know who I was.' That’s my place to let them know who I am, but it shot around the factory like wildfire, and there was one guy who was well aware, who did try to still talk to me. He was ignorant though, so I was not interested and I asked him to please stop talking to me, but he didn’t get it. So, it resulted from him being interested in me to all of a sudden being like, ‘that’s why you are a man.’ It went completely downhill from there—that I was a man. Why then were you were trying to talk to me and you were aware of my T? So I mean it blew up into this big argument. I almost didn’t report it because now I’m used to ignorance when it happens, but part of me could not let that go because I felt that he needed to know that it was unacceptable.

Bianca reported the incident with her co-worker to her supervisor, who was “very supportive” of Bianca.

I went to him and told him what was going on because I wasn’t sure what to do... I just thought he’d get a write up... I come back the next day and see the guy is gone so I asked my supervisor what happened...and he said he had to let him [co-worker] go because he said he had respect for me for being who I was and for standing up for myself like I did and that he was not going to tolerate it [co-worker's behavior] and they considered it sexual harassment. Anyone knows in the workplace to even discuss their personal business and what their sex is sexual harassment and a lot of trans men and women face that, and I’m not aware if individuals who are not trans gender, I don’t know if they get that that is sexual harassment. It does cause problems for us, so supervisor let him go just like that and that was the end of that.

Bianca's supervisor did not position her, as a transgender woman, as the problem, but rather identified the person causing a disruption and hostile working environment for others through his reliance on and attempt to enforce cis-sexist social norms to punish Bianca for not being
interested in going out with him.

Bianca's experience contrasts greatly with Marcy's experience with being sexually harassed by a co-worker who told her to “wear a sweater or something” to cover her chest as she began physically transitioning.

Before work I was in the break room he told me, he goes, cause I would just wear t-shirts, and he goes, “You need to go and cover those things up”, “You need to wear a sweater or something.” I was just like “okay” and I would go on with whatever I was doing. Then about a week later he was out on the floor and he started ranting and raving that gay people are child molesters, and ya know, you’ve probably heard them all, and you know everybody’s heard them.... and it was kind of funny in a way because he was so ignorant about the whole thing and I found out later that one of the females on the line is lesbian and he was basically directing, it was directed to me, but was also spewed at her and she finally got fed up with it and went to HR and turned him in to HR and he got three days’ suspension.

Marcy attempted to ignore the comments she received and continue to do her job. However, although she was being trained to do multiple jobs within the factory, after the other woman reported the harassment Marcy was fired from her job. Unlike Bianca's experience, it seems as though Marcy's employers saw her as a liability as a transgender woman and she was ultimately terminated.

James' experience with sexual harassment at work differs from Bianca and Marcy's, because he is harassed by the owner of the tattoo shop where he works. Unlike Bianca and Marcy, James is not able to report the behavior to anyone, and because he loves the work he does he decided to just put up with it for now. The shop owner regularly sexualizes James at work, telling him “You're the best of both worlds,” and talking about James' body.

He fantasizes and talks about my body. In my interview he was saying how he wouldn't even have known, and was just like talking about chest, and being trans I don't talk about body parts like I don’t ask you what’s in your pants so don’t ask me what’s in mine, and he asked me what I was wearing to make me flat chested and my manager was like, “Wow, no!,” but he couldn't say much being someone who was under him, that’s how it
works at shop, you don’t go against what he says and I just put up with it because I love shop and the environment I just don’t love him. He always says like, “Hey I know what’s going on down there, I’ve researched it,” and you’re just sitting there like appalled by him and his mouth, but he does that with anybody.

James sees no alternative than to just put up with the sexual harassment from his boss for now in order to do the job he loves. There is no one he can report the sexual harassment to who has power over his boss, so he puts up with the behavior to keep his job.

Eric, a transman, described being physically assaulted at work by a supervisor, which was the culmination of series of experiences Eric had with his supervisor while working as a security guard. While his co-workers were generally not supportive of Eric's gender transition, since the company he worked for was based in California they could not legally fire him for being transgender. However, that did not stop the prejudicial feelings Eric received by some co-workers as he transitioned. For example, one supervisor was so explicit in his discrimination towards Eric as a transgender person that other co-workers were taking bets on when Eric would be fired. This supervisor would give Eric the worst job assignments, and make arbitrary changes to Eric's schedule and routines, such as mandating that Eric only use a bathroom far away from his stationed security area. At one time he made Eric park the security truck behind a row of big trees and told him not to move for his entire shift, which meant Eric was not able to complete his required security rounds. Finally, Eric had put up with enough, and confronted this supervisor about his new assignments and bathroom regulations, asking him to put these changes into writing. The supervisor refused to put anything in writing, and the situation culminated with the supervisor physically assaulting Eric at the office.

It started with like little harassments like I would say I would need someone to come relieve me so I could use the bathroom and he would come relieve me and say, “Make sure you lower the lid, hahahahaha.” Then he ate my lunch one day. I was working at a
guard house and my lunch was sitting right there in a brown paper sack and he took my sandwich and ate it. He was ex-military and he said, 'this is how we teach a lesson in the military' and he ate my sandwich. ...I was really upset and I reported him for it. I reported him for every little thing that he did. And then one day I found out there was basically a pool going on about when I would be fired. Like everybody was aware of what was going on, he was asking people about me, he was asking about performance, he was trying to catch me in something. There were people who were concerned who came to me and said, “Hey I’m concerned about this, you're a good worker I don't want to see this happen to you.” They recognized that this was him specifically keying on me and choosing me as the person that he was going to have a conquest over. He was going to win and I was going to lose. ...When he put me on patrol he told me I wasn't allowed to go into any of the buildings, even though I was supposed to, this was going to be something where I was literally put in a truck behind a big row of trees. I had to sit there for 8 hours. I wasn't allowed to say anything to anybody, I wasn't allowed to talk to anyone or see anybody. And when I asked him he said it was a new thing just for me, and when I asked him to put it in writing he refused. So I reported him and somebody came from our regional office in Farmington Hills and had a meeting with him, and the next day... He called me to his office... I went up and he was like, “Did you do this? Did you do that?” and I said, “Yes I did and now I've been told I don't have to do that and I can go back to my old job,” and um, he basically screamed at me, “When are you going to get it through your thick skull that no one here likes you?!?” And I said, “Are you going to put that in writing?” and he attacked me [motions hands up like choking and shoving motion]. They had to break him off of me. I was moved, immediately. He kept his job for another year, but I was moved.

In this situation, Eric just wanted to do his job correctly, but his supervisor's prejudice against transgender people created a hostile work environment that impeded his ability to complete his work. Fortunately for Eric, the company he worked for is based in a state with legal protections for transgender people that he was able to rely on in order to keep his job. Such legal protections have provided comfort for many participants who cited some of the local non-discrimination ordinances as important in providing a needed process of legal recourse for gender-based discrimination. In fact, three participants described a type of discrimination that stemmed from the legal and medical institutions that act as gatekeepers for trans people to access gender-affirming legal paperwork, to legally use bathrooms of their choice, and to have access to gender-affirming medial services.
Legal Discrimination

For example, Frankie described the process of legally changing one's gender marker on their driver's license as discrimination from the government, “Where it is so hard to get your paperwork changed, and you have to fear, 'Oh my gosh is this business going to throw people out who are using the wrong bathroom?’” He described that kind of governmental discrimination as different from discrimination that occurs in interpersonal interactions. These are discriminatory actions that occur through legal and medical social institutions that are attempting to uphold social norms around gender. Marcy also brought up the issue of states considering so-called “bathroom bills” that make it illegal for anyone to use a gendered bathroom that does not correspond with the gender marker on their birth certificate.

I have had no problems using the restroom in public. I get some strange looks when I use it at McDonalds, one woman she had a small child and I was coming out and she was coming in and I kind of went ‘excuse me' and walked around her, and, ya know, it’s like she was startled about it but I haven’t had no problems using the bathroom here in [small conservative city]. ...Um, I heard of several places now that are getting pretty bad. Florida. Now they are trying to push it through in California now...so hopefully Michigan stays out of it.

It is not a safe bet to rely on the legal system to create laws that provide legal protections for trans people, or on the medical system to provide gender-affirming services. Bobbie Lee faced what she described as a “hellish” experience when she was placed in a male psychiatric facility that exemplifies how reliance on social norms in the medical system can result in discriminatory experiences for participants.

At one point Bobbie Lee entered an in-patient psychiatric facility, but she was forced to stay in a male wing with a male roommate, which made her uncomfortable as a transgender woman. After a couple days, she was moved to a higher-security area of the hospital when she
would not comply with their requests that she take a higher medication dose.

I cannot think of another place on earth that is more hellish than that psychiatric ward. It is disgustingly bad. People walking and roaming the hallways and screaming. Walking back and forth constantly, walking into your room, god even asking for snacks and stuff. It was just so invasive, not like the other part of it where it was just so peaceful and I was getting somewhere.

One of the reasons this place was so “hellish” for Bobbie Lee was because she did not like the psychologist she worked with, who consistently asked her if she was sexually attracted to men. The idea that a transwoman must be heterosexual in order to really be a woman is based on gender binary-based social norms that do not reflect the diversity and complexity of human gender and sexuality, which Bobbie Lee recognized.

He asked me if I slept, if I would like to sleep with men and this has happened multiple times since, at least 8 different times. Every psychologist or doctor has asked me that, even my trans therapist. So that has to be part of the Benjamin standards to me. It’s just a standard question that they ask me to find out that basically if you don’t like to sleep with men that they don’t want to allow you, that you’re not really transsexual. And that’s not, who you want to have sex with is not your gender and who you want to be but that is considered a big part of it. Cause if you can fit in to this, okay maybe you’re female because you’re going to be like everyone else.

Like many participants Bobbie Lee does not believe that gender social norms are automatically correct and applicable to every person. The social norms around who women should be attracted to impacted Bobbie Lee's experience in the medical system in a way she resisted.

I am not a cookie cutter of everyone else, I am myself and I am strong and I am trans and I am doing it my way. Like I said everything is going to be completely natural and, ya know, when it happens I would really like for it to be with my girlfriend but if it happens, if something happens and she doesn’t make it I’m, I’m me. I don’t know who my partner will be. I don’t know if they are going to be male, female, a mix of everywhere in-between, ya know, there are so many now, different amazing people and that is expanding, ya know, LGTB+ so many now people being exactly who they want to be instead of having to fit that paradigm of male and female and you have to be just this and you don’t have to fit into that now.
As discussed in Chapter Three, participants expressed overall support of the act of self-defining gender identities and sexualities, which is exemplified in Bobbie Lee's quote. Rather than relying on social norms to dictate who she should be sexually attracted to, Bobbie Lee is open to whatever comes naturally for her in her life even if that goes against social norms the medical system has relied on historically.

As in the legal and medial social institutions, reliance on social norms of gender can lead to discriminatory experiences when obtaining housing as well. People in gender minority categories are vulnerable to discrimination when seeking housing because there are no state-wide legal protections for gender identity in housing. This means a landlord can refuse to rent or sell to, or evict someone simply for being transgender or gender non-conforming. Some municipalities in Michigan have passed non-discrimination ordinances that do include gender identity and expression, as well as sexuality. Unfortunately, Marcy does not live in such municipalities, so it was completely legal for her to be refused housing by a potential landlord after they met and she completed the rental application.

I met him at the apartment, we went upstairs, and I said I was Marcy and on the contract it has to be your legal name so I put [legal name] on there, and um, he goes 'I haven't even really posted it yet, and he goes, ‘You're the first one, so I will get ahold of you on Monday when we see what's going on', and he goes 'okay.' I call him Monday, and he wouldn't answer the phone, and I called him Tuesday, and he wouldn't answer the phone, and I think Thursday or Friday he picked up the phone finally to answer and he said 'Oh I rented that out.'

Marcy had a job at a factory close to the rental property and owned her car at the time, so she believes she was denied that rental because she is a transwoman. Her gender identity and expression did not fit the potential landlord's expectations, so he refused to rent the apartment to her. Marcy attempted get into the local homeless shelters, but both the men and women's shelters
said they could not guarantee her safety as a transgender woman, so she opted to live in her car instead. She parked at a local big box store to sleep, and while she was usually not bothered there were two times when drunk men attempted to proposition her for sex and did not respond well to her refusals. Here we see one type of institutional discrimination leading the way for other types of discrimination, as the last sub-theme within this category is public attacks. These are either verbal or physical attacks that occurred while participants were in public, either living in their car, being at a bar, going to the store, pumping gas, and other examples.

**Public Attacks**

To complete Marcy's story, she lived in her car for about a year while living off her Veteran's assistance payments and looking for work. Sometimes people would see her sleeping with the doors open and call the police to check on her, but she never had an issue with the police who would wake her up and then go on their way. However, there were a couple of instances when she was accosted by strange men while she was parked late at night and had to defend herself.

I did have two instances when I was living in the parking lot at like 2 or 3 o’clock in the morning I had two different individuals, being ex-military I think I can handle myself, and I warned them both more than their fair share to back off and I finally put one individual, both of them I put them on the ground and both instances and hour or so after the police showed up and they go, “Well what’s going on out here we see you out here all the time and you never make trouble what’s going on?” and I said, well I told them, “They came up here and started, and they see me around in short shorts and tights and so they get brave when they have a little liquid courage in them...they came up to the car and started banging on the window and hollering and screaming and calling me a fag and stuff...”

Luckily Marcy had the ability to physically defend herself and a good relationship with the police so neither instance ended in a worst-case scenario. However, Marcy's lack of a home undeniably contributed to her being vulnerable to such public attacks as she lived in her car.
Six participants described experiences that I have classified as public attacks, because they included verbal or physical threatening altercations that occurred in public locations. These incidents tended to occur when others either could not tell participants' gender or interpreted their gender expression in a negative manner. For instance, Dee who is non-binary and femme-identified, described having the phrase “fucking dyke” yelled at them from cars driving by them when in public in Kalamazoo on several occasions. Dee has a personal expression that includes clothing socially defined as masculine, short hair, and told me they often experience misogynistic discrimination because people see them as a butch woman. Elvira, another non-binary and femme-identified participant, said they also experience misogynistic discrimination, because they are read as a woman by others in society. Non-binary participants described the consequences of such experiences as two-fold, which Dee summed up when they said, “It's really uncomfortable on two levels because...one it's misogynistic, it's homophobic, and two I'm misgendered, so I'm insulted in two ways.”

Mal, a transman, stated that most of the discrimination he has experienced happened before his transition, when he identified as a woman with a masculine gender expression. One incident he shared happened when he was horsing around with a male friend at a bar, playfully punching each other in the shoulder,

Suddenly out of nowhere this guy comes up...nobody knew him, and he goes, “Are you going to let a dyke hit you like that?” and he came up on me like he physically came up on me and my physical safety was then threatened simply based on my gender expression. I've had a lot of that...

Mal's safety was at risk because of how this stranger interpreted his gender expression and interaction with another man negatively, not because of anything Mal did to the stranger but simply because his existence aggravated the stranger. The stranger felt entitled to threaten Mal
simply because he did not conform to the stranger's socially constructed ideals of gender.

James had a similar experience when he was getting gas at a station in his college town and a strange man approached him demanding to know James' gender.

The guy next to me was so angered by not knowing what my identity was and he literally came up and yelled at me 'are you a man or a woman?' And I was like what the fuck? And he was like screaming at me and I didn't have anything to say really because I'm not going to provoke him for my own safety reasons so I was just drawing back and he kept getting closer and closer and getting mad and was like 'I don't understand!' and hinting at piercings and tattoos...I'm just shocked that it even happened so finally I was just like, 'well what are you?' and that made him even more mad. Finally, he could see I was backing up and he got in his car and left, but the girl next to me was like 'are you ok?' and I was like 'yeah I'm fine'.”

Despite James keeping to himself a strange man felt entitled to invade James' space and question him about personal and intimate information. Similarly, Kamora's only discriminatory experience based on her gender identity and expression happened when a strange man yelled at her while she was exiting a grocery store.

There is this grocery store I used to go to all the time and I stopped going to this grocery store. I went there one time to go to pick up a money gram my father had sent me and there was a guy that had worked in there and he just kept staring at me. Anybody that knows me, like I hate when people stare at me, like take a picture it will last longer, like if you want to speak, come speak. And he was just staring so hard, and I was getting really irritated. Black man. Black store... And I was like what is he looking at, and I was thinking okay, maybe he’s thinking I’m cute or something, ya know what I’m sayin”? I go to walk outside and there were these three old men and they was hollering at me as I was walking away, and the guy that was staring at me was like, “That is a man, don’t even do it!” And I heard him verbatim and they was like, “Really?! You’re a man?!!” And I was like, “I sure am! My dick is bigger than all y’alls!” And everybody just stopped, and at that moment I was like, what did I do? But I was pissed. I was irritated because he didn’t have no right to tell nobody like, and then somebody said something, no one of the older men started laughing. I was like, “Do you want to see it? I will pull it out for you. And unlike yours, I’m sure it can get hard.” After that it was like, oh this bitch is serious, and it was like, left alone. But that was like the one situation in Kalamazoo where I was actually a little bit scared, because I was in this neighborhood I wasn’t familiar with I was walking, that could have went multiple different ways. But luckily it didn’t, they left me alone...
During this incident, Kamora was harassed because she was recognized as a trans woman by the people in and outside the store, despite the fact that she was just buying groceries.

The common thread in participants’ experiences within this sub-theme is that they were subject to discriminatory behavior while going about their own business. Strangers initiated the confrontations because they felt entitled to know or comment on participants' gender identities or expressions. These kinds of interactions impacted participants in different ways, and as Bianca pointed out the stage at which a person is in when they have these experiences can impact how they respond. For example, when Bianca was starting her transition she was subject to discriminatory actions by a group of teenagers at a local fast food restaurant that left her wondering if she could continue to transition.

I’ve been to Steak and Shake and I was really young, I was transitioning and I went there and it wasn’t a problem with one of the employees but I guess it was because my arms were so big but a couple of the guys “clocked my t”, as they would say, and I was sitting with my friend and I heard them call me “Tranny” and “Shemale.” I had never hit such a low point; that was bad, that was hard because it was so disrespectful but it was so loud that I know—I don’t know how the employees didn’t hear that. You think someone would have said something, but it went on for the rest of the night, and it completely broke me as an individual, and at that point in time I wasn’t sure if I could transition. I’ve accepted now that their ignorance wasn’t my problem but being so young you do feel unsafe and you shouldn’t have to go through that. I was not sure that I could continue with the transition. I didn’t know if it was something I could put up with every day.

This experience almost made Bianca stop transitioning because she didn't know if she could put up with these kinds of public assaults against her. She may have been in danger by others knowing she is trans and that is something she, like many participants expressed, had to take into consideration when deciding whether or not to live their authentic lives.

You hear stories of trans men and women being attacked. There are situations where the guy finds her attractive and then she tells him who she is and it results in violence so, I no longer fear for myself, I can handle myself, but I do fear for other trans men and women who do go through things at their work place and are disrespected.
Bianca echoes similar sentiments as many other participants cited media reports of transgender people, particularly trans women of color, being murdered. Participants were largely knowledgeable about the potential dangers associated with being a visible transgender person, and many grappled with questions of safety as they transitioned.

Microaggressions

Pervasive anti-trans prejudice and discrimination impact how the public interacts with people in gender minorities. However, not all discriminatory interactions are as obvious as a person being killed, denied a job, or a house, in fact many participants described experiences in which they encountered microaggressions due to the enforcement of gender norms. As described above, microaggressions are actions that show disregard for a person based on their social identities, may be intentional or unintentional, and often occur so regularly that they have been described as 'death by a thousand cuts'. The next section of this chapter will explore the range of microaggressions participants experienced, from specific incidents of being misgendered, to developing a fear of using public bathrooms, and a general anxiety around how to address microaggressions in the moment.

Being Misgendered

One of the daily struggles many participants describe is being misgendered, which means others misrepresent a person's gender and this can happen in a variety of ways. Sometimes gender minorities are misgendered by others purposefully, but more often such microaggressions are unintentional. For example, misgendering may happen when individuals rely on normative gendered social scripts to interact with people in public. For example, James described being misgendered as a lesbian by many of his class cohort at his university based on his stance in an
online class discussion.

I’m with these people a lot since we are in the same program but on Black Board it used to be birth name but now it’s changed with the same last name so they are trying to understand it and when I’m talking on BlackBoard and they remember my face but not the last name and we are talking about oppression—it was a topic of comparing butch lesbians being oppressed in the CJ system and lesbians and someone put something like —this I’m assuming cis-man, said something about lesbians not being oppressed and said, “Maybe if they didn’t look this way” and to me it was so ignorant and I couldn’t let it go and I had to respond. We were supposed to respond back, so in the classroom the next day it was brought to attention who wrote that. Our professor didn’t want to target the person but she was just like, “This was the comment and let’s talk about it anonymously,” but he felt the need to say that it was his comment and then it put me in the position where I had to say the other one was comment and I had to say what I thought was problematic. They were talking after class and I heard something like, “It’s because they’re a lesbian and it’s very sensitive to them, using the wrong pronouns.” I was just like, “No. I’m trans and you’re ignorant,” so we got into a discussion right then and there and to me, I had a lot of people around me that understood oppression and one of my good friends from the LGBT center, she’s a lesbian and she was like, “I’m a lesbian and I have a problem with that because it’s ignorant in general.” It was good because I had someone from the community right there, and it’s just like, I didn’t know someone could be that ignorant and he was very offended by it, but also having a professor who wasn’t going to put up with bullshit like that was nice as well.

James’ classmates unintentionally engaged in microaggressions towards James by reducing his reaction to the online discussion as stemming from a lesbian identity, because of course if someone looks like James did at the time then they must be a lesbian. This thought process imposes a socially constructed idea of gender and sexuality onto James and changed the way his classmates interacted with him, from a transman engaging in a critical discussion about lesbians to someone with a lesbian identity being too sensitive. Thus, the other students attempt to invalidate his argument by invalidating James himself.

Frankie described similar experiences in which he is publicly misgendered as a woman, because at the time he had not taken steps transmen usually do to be recognized as masculine in society. Since we are taught to look for visual clues to determine gender identity, many people
do not recognize Frankie as a transman, which does not seem to bother him much.

I don’t do a lot of the things trans men do before, like hormones or therapy, to fit into the mold. I don’t bind. I refuse...It's painful. Like why do I need to hurt myself to make you think different of me, so I am not going to do that. I tried it once and it was horrifying, like screw that, I'm done. And being an active person, I do a lot of work where I twist and turn, working in a kitchen, and I paint also, and that’s not, um, conducive to being in a binder. So, I don’t fit the stereotypical transman, because I can't blend in like that, but I don’t care.

Frankie’s experience shows that relying on one's outward appearance is not always an accurate measure of one's gender identity. Even Frankie's roommate expressed difficulty seeing Frankie as male because he did not bind his chest and breasts are seen as a feminine trait.

My roommate said that he was having way more problem with my gender and calling me 'he' and changing to calling me “Frankie,” than calling my wife “Miranda,” and I said, “Well, why?” and he said, “You have, ya know, big boobs.” I was like, “Well so do you dude, so I guess you’re a chick,” and he was like, “Fine, alright,” and then after that it kind of clicked with him, that that doesn’t make a man or a woman.

Frankie's roommate wants to be supportive, but because of his social training he had a hard time seeing past the normative idea that only women have obvious breasts, which made him misgender Frankie more than his transgender wife Miranda.

Participants who identified as gender non-binary similarly stated they get misgendered because their gender identities and expressions do not conform to social norms. The dominant social norm that tells us we can determine someone's gender based on that person's mannerisms, clothing, and hairstyle will lead to misgendering people who identify as gender non-binary. The fear of having to deal with being misgendered has led to Dee not coming out as their authentic self at work, especially because they work with the public at a retail store. “When it comes to being out, I weigh my options. Why do I need to? How much can I deal with being misgendered?” For Dee, taking on the education of countless strangers who may misgender them
during the day while working is too much of an emotional toll, and it's easier for them to not be out as non-binary at work.

Being misgendered happens in a variety of contexts, many of which may not be obviously gendered contexts to cisgender individuals. For example, one gender non-binary participant, Triston, described a time they were engaging in a team-building exercise that involved guessing each other's shoes from a pile at a job training where they felt like their gender was ignored.

Everyone was like, “These are boys’ shoes, these are girls’ shoes,” and I'm just like “Bruh.” Like, it was very cis-sexist, and like, I really wanted to say something. I actually was wearing, like female flip-flops, but they were size 11 so everyone thought they were like, male flip-flops, even though flip-flops did not have a penis or vagina, they are shoes. Anyways, but that definitely to me was like, ok I'm kind of forced to like pick a lane here. And it's like, I'm not picking a lane though...

Triston felt constrained in their gender expression and identity during that activity, because the comments their new co-workers were making only acknowledged “boys” and “girls”. As a gender non-binary and transfeminine identified person Triston realized they did not fit into their new co-workers’ conception of human gender. Since Triston doesn't want to “pick a lane”, they would have to take on the extra work of educating those co-workers who are willing to learn if they want to attempt to avoid being misgendered at work. This is an extra step Triston must take based on their gender identity and expression that others do not, in order to be comfortable and able to focus at work.

Some participants did describe being misgendered by others on purpose, which exemplifies how microaggressions can sometimes be intentional digs as well. For example, Bobbie Lee described a time when she was in an in-patient psychiatric facility and after seeing other women with their legs shaved she requested that she also be allowed to shave her legs,
I want to shave because my legs were starting to get hair on them and the nurse told me that they couldn’t do that, but I noticed that all the girls in the place, ya know, they were freshly shaved. I asked her again and again about it, and I told her, ya know, I am transsexual, and I need to be able to, I can’t stand having hair on my body and I need to be able to take care of that. And she says, “We don’t even let the girls here do that.” Another nice one huh?

The nurse subtly told Bobbie Lee that she did not see her as a woman in a way that may not seem like a big deal to someone else, but for Bobbie Lee in that moment that was just one of many times her gender was invalidated while she was in the hospital.

James also described being purposefully misgendered by his girlfriend's parents when they first started dating, because being transgender does not align with the parent's religious ideology. “They are really nice to my face and have come to terms that this is who she is dating, so they are trying to be more respectful, but when I used to leave they would use the wrong pronouns on purpose to be like, 'This is what it says in the bible.'” These kinds of intentional, yet subtle or indirect, prejudices can add up when an individual experience them in multiple areas of life. Participants described being misgendered in the workplace, within families and friend groups, in university classrooms, at the doctor's office, by bar employees, landlords, and roommates, which shows how widespread this phenomenon is in their lives. This can make it difficult to find a place where one does not run the risk of being misgendered, even within the queer community itself as will be explored in detail later in the chapter.

General Disrespect

Another common sub-theme within the microaggressions category are interactions that included subtle forms of general disrespect for participants based on their gender identities or expressions. For example, once when Bianca went to a bar her friend in line behind her overheard the security guard checking identification say “What the F is happening in the world?”
after seeing Bianca's driver's license with a male gender marker. Another transwoman, Marcy, stated that she sometimes gets stared at or “funny looks” using women's public bathrooms, but has not had any direct confrontations with others using the same bathrooms. And Dyrk related two incidents when his interactions with public clerks changed when the clerks realized he is a transman, as exemplified by his experience changing his gender marker on his driver's license.

So I have all the documentation in hand, and you show up initially to the gatekeeper and they just make sure you have everything you need before sending you on, she didn't, her demeanor didn't really change when she saw there was a gender marker change, but when she saw called my number and I went up to the clerk who was going to help me. At first she was pretty friendly and engaged, we had eye contact, we had a little chitty chat, she starts going through my paperwork and sees the legal name change. Um, and then something got said, and I said, 'Gender marker something,' and she looked at me, and she's confused, cause I'm sure she just sees this guy who walks in and for some reason getting his name changed, and then I said the gender marker change and I think that really threw her for a loop. And everything about her demeanor started to change. She stood there for the longest time looking at all the documents and then she said 'Well, you can't change your gender marker without a birth certificate,' and she was holding the new birth certificate and I don't know what was happening. I think she was having some kind of internal, like a little mini-meltdown, 'cause she didn't know how to handle it, and I said 'Yes ma'am, there is new birth certificate right there.' And it just became a very awkward exchange for the rest of the time, and this took a while. So I did what I always do, I kind of have this way of creating this little bubble of space for myself, to not be too judgmental of what's happening, but also to not be too naïve of what's happening. So I'm evaluating what all's happening here, but her demeanor became so solemn right then as she figured it out, because she figured it out, oh you've changed from female to male, and there was no more chitty chat, no more eye contact and everything was just quiet. She was very purposeful and there was no, she was not personal at all, until we go over to take new photograph for the actual license, and I decided to lighten the mood. I decided to be kind of jovial, kind of friendly and I don't remember what the comment was but I said something about getting pictures taken and she started to engage, it was still forced and awkward. But, I think that was an example of showing up at a government facility to take care of some official business, showed up, you know I present, I think, polite and well-groomed and money in hand, and citizen of this great state, and I need to have this legal document changed for these reasons. But the human to human interaction totally changed its tone, totally changed its energy, cause I'm transgender and it was a gender marker change.

Dyrk says that he felt like the “human to human interaction” changed when the clerk
realized he is a transman. This sentiment is echoed by Dee's experiences as a gender non-binary person whose gender identity and expression is often unrecognized and feels dehumanized in multiple situations, summed up in the statement, “It's just weird to be treated like you're not a person amongst a group of people.” The kind of general disrespect participants' experiences reflect sends a message to the public that trans people are not welcome, expendable, and perhaps even not seen as human beings. While reflecting on being denied a third party during her doctor's visit, Davison stated,

I felt really kinda dehumanized, in that it was more important, some ink on a paper was more important than my experience as a human being, like I didn't feel like I was seen as a human being in that moment. It really upset me, coming to that realization.

Living with the perception that others do not see one as human has weighed heavily on many participants, along with other microaggressions and institutional discrimination based on their gender identities or expressions. However, many participants also described discriminatory experiences based on intersectional issues as well. Due to the limitations of this dissertation I have decided to focus on the most pervasive types of discrimination and microaggressions that participants described based on their intersecting identities. I have called this analytic category, intersectional discrimination, and it includes examples of both institutional discrimination and microaggressions that stem from a combination participants' social identities. In particular, this chapter focuses on intersectional discrimination that includes race and ethnicity, religion and geographic location, and the queer community.

Intersectional Discrimination

The majority of participants of color described experiencing more discrimination based on their race and ethnicity, sometimes in combination with their gender expressions, than based
on their gender identity alone. For example, Bill who is biracial (white and African American) with light skin, described how his co-workers began to make jokes about black folks and using the word “nigger” around him when they found out about his racial background.

They were like 'Why are you tanning so quickly?' And then they noticed that my hair was kind of curly, and I was like 'Yes I happen to have, um, African American genes which happens to correspond to Africa, which is actually all of us if you want to get technical. So I'm like, thank you for making me make so many assumptions about me and then having you interpret it and now you're making jokes about it? [laughs] It was just like endlessly inaccurate and endlessly uncomfortable and both of those things make me sad, so it was just gross.

James has had similar experiences with co-workers and customers at the tattoo shop he works at who have made inappropriate comments after figuring out that he is Arab American.

The guys at work know my race and they like to make a joke out of it, especially because I go by my last name sometimes. They’ll be like 'What is that? That's an interesting name' and I tell them it's Arab and they're looking at you like, how? Especially ever since 9/11 you are viewed automatically as Muslim...They just assume Muslim and I tell them I'm Christian and they look at you, and they're like 'What are you?' And I tell them I'm trans, and they are just like, 'Can you be trans and Arab?'

James works at a shop that is located in a rural area of southwest Michigan, and as noted above the customers and shop owner consistently misgender him, plus he faces racial discrimination on top of it. Like James, Dee also described facing racial discrimination along with being misgendered, “My presentation also gets me sometimes followed by the police because I look masculine and I’m black, and let’s be real, black and you look suspicious which means, you’re black (laughs), and it’s weird and uncomfortable!” In Dee's case being misgendered as a black man could lead to them being unjustly targeted by the criminal justice system due to racial and gender-based stereotypes.

In addition to experiences related to employment and interaction with the criminal system, Elvira described how the Latino cultural traditions of gender impacted their relationship
within their family. When describing their relationship with their mother Elvira stated,

She would pick and choose when she became concerned to me about what I do when it came to piercings and tattoos. Like, she was totally okay when her son got a tattoo, so it was infuriating knowing she had that gender bias that everyone does when it is like, the masculine presenting one is the more favorable one.

Elvira's parents are both immigrants to the United States, and have deep connections to Latino culture that Elvira described as favoring masculinity over femininity, which caused conflict between them and their family as Elvira explored their gender identity and expression.

Masculinity is just more favored in the Latino culture, like grown men will pick on the little boys to make them grow a spine. And so my mom was really over protective of her son and so like that wasn’t something that he went through as much without my dad getting in trouble, like there are moments of him sneaking in my uncle's house from that side of the family, but that is not an issue, like he is still completely like be cherished and is like fragile in a sense where no femininity can touch it. ...I feel like when it is more accepting depending on the situation of being more of a tomboy for a girl especially for, like when you think of how Latinos are portrayed in movies, especially in American culture they are either like the tomboys or the feisty mistress and so cause we weren’t the feisty mistress is basically how they see it. So there were moments when my dad was like, 'Why are you choosing to wear men’s clothing for a school uniform?' and I wanted to get these shorts that all of these skater guys were wearing at the time because I wanted to look like them and my dad is like, 'The girls section is over there, I don’t know why you are going this way,’ and I was just like...you just see my face all heartbroken because I didn’t expect him to say something like that to me and so like I didn’t think that would be something he wouldn’t approve. He saw my face, but he was still irritated that I wasn’t the girly daughter he wanted even though he has another daughter that is girly, but I guess because of what is socially taught it made it hard for him to understand that there are various forms of dressing up regardless of gender. ...So when it comes to dressing in shorts and pants, and if a female who was assigned at birth is wearing men’s clothing...in Latino community, it’s like 'As long as it’s not my kid that is doing that' and I guess that is where it was a problem with my parents.

Elvira's parents had a hard time reconciling their culturally-based assumptions for their child with Elvira's lived realities, which led to conflict and tension around gender roles and expressions between Elvira and their parents.

For some participants geographic location also seemed to play a role in their experiences
with discrimination based on both gender identity and expression, and race and ethnicity. For example, Kamora used to live in Detroit where she faced multiple types of discrimination as a friend to transwomen, drag queens, and later as an out transwoman herself. When she was 15 Kamora befriended a group of transgender women in Palmer Park, a well-known hang-out for transgender women in Detroit. During that time Kamora had roman candles, bottles, and glass thrown at her from passing cars and was shot at with paintball guns. Compared to living in Detroit as a transwoman, southwest Michigan is a much easier place for Kamora to transition, however she does experience more racially-based discrimination here.

More times than often I get looks and stares, but I don’t feel like they are because I am trans. I don’t feel like, I feel like they are because I am a black woman, and I can be loud sometimes, and it’s just like, ’This bitch is annoying.’ And so I don’t know. I just kind of don’t, I feel like the looks and stuff I get are not justified by my gender identity, like that’s not enough. Yeah, so I don’t know. It could be because I am trans, but that is not the vibe that I get, but that could be because of what I am used to. Because when people were identifying me as trans back in Detroit I was being called by my male name, I was having things thrown at me, things of that nature.

Kamora's past experiences with discrimination in Detroit have impacted how she perceives her safety as a transwoman in southwest Michigan. For Kamora, transitioning in southwest Michigan is a better alternative than transitioning in Detroit, as she is less likely to face the types of gender-based discrimination she grew up experiencing.

The last type of intersectional discrimination I will highlight in this report is that which occurs among LGBTQA+-identified (heretofore referred to as the queer community) and allied people themselves. Multiple participants described experiencing institutional discrimination and microaggressions while interacting with others within or allied to the queer community. As described in chapter two, Dee stated that they feel alienated by the white-dominated queer community they have experienced in southwest Michigan because they are black and non-binary
identified. Kamora, a black transwoman, also stated that she faced racially-based resistance while working at a local LGBT organization, “I attempted to being some black culture in to the pride scene and the people on the committee were not trying to have that because the community was nothing but white people and they were not trying to be inclusive, and that was within the gay community.” Dee and Kamora's experiences of feeling unwelcome or ignored by the white dominated queer community, demonstrate a prevalent problem of racism within queer communities in southwest Michigan.

Another issue that arose among participants’ experiences within the queer community related to anti-trans discrimination and microaggressions. As Marcy told me about having to fend off strange men's demands while living in her car in the summer of 2013, she indicated that she expects to be attacked throughout her life because she is a transwoman.

Yeah some time or another I expect to have to defend myself at some time or another... I think it was last year a friend of mine went to Motor City Pride and she’s transgender and... Earlier in the day two transgender individuals were attacked at Pride, at Motor City Pride. Later, she was right there when the other one happened, three gay guys stripped two transgenders down to their panties and hose, and attacked them. ... I have been watching the political arena and kind of keeping myself up on the political arena, and what I see is a lot of, with the LGBT community the lesbians and the gays are trying to get all these rights and stuff, and the transgenders kind of follow along with that because they are LGBT and so many of the politicians say, “Well if you get rid of this transgender thing we will let this slide,” and they go, “Okay,” and there goes the transgenders under the bus wheels again, and yet we help them so many times, ya know?

Based on her experiences and knowledge, Marcy does not feel safe, physically or politically, as a transwoman even within the queer community.

Davison went to a cisgender individual's house for a trans support group event that welcomed cisgender allies and was misgendered at the meeting by a new cisgender person.

At one point she misgendered me, I sat with that and I asked her you know, “You've never known me as a guy, so why did that happen?” I wasn't trying to fight; I just really
want to know what is it in people's heads.... She started crying because she felt embarrassed and she felt put on the spot...I think she felt guilty too...everyone else rallied around her crying and I was right away vilified for being a bully for making her talk about this thing that happened that was such an accident.

Since this was a trans-focused event, Davison felt it was an appropriate venue to discuss how being misgendered continued to impact her, but many others at the group did not respond positively to her. One of the cisgender individuals in attendance said, “Well I guess I just don't understand, if we're all friends here and we're all supposed to be supportive of one another why an apology isn't enough.” Davison responded to her,

I was like 'Well you have to understand that we are also contending with various levels of defensiveness,' and I tried to kind of break that down without making her defensive. I was trying to make some parallels to like, when white people are trying to like, be allies for people of color, you got to be humble, and if you say something wrong, you let them tell you and you learn it and then you stop doing it. You don't insist that you are right. That makes you a shitty ally, so don't do it.

The other allies at the event continued to support and defend the person who misgendered Davison, all of which left Davison feeling disrespected and unwelcome after the trans support group event.

Davison made a post on the trans support group's Facebook page that addressed her,

...serious concerns about the safety issues at these meeting based on this experience I just had. I did not name a name. I didn't give an event. I didn't give an address. I didn't say where I was...except the person who was highly defensive at the meeting had to be defensive on Facebook too, and run in and start telling me that I had ruined her party. That I was a bully. That I, you know, had made this person cry...then shit just went haywire. [laughs] Every transperson came out of the woodwork you know, and then there was this whole splitting where most of the allies got really offended that they were being told they maybe weren't the best at it, and a lot of them left the group.

Within the queer community, straight and cisgender allies do play a vital role, and as demonstrated in Davison's experiences they can also engage in microaggressions and denial that can negatively impact people in gender minorities.
Many participants also cited experiencing gender identity and expression-based discrimination and microaggressions by other members of the queer community. For example, James described his frustration with being misgendered by a gay restaurant server who continuously referred to his table of friends as “My lesbians”, despite James correcting him.

I go to...a diner all the time, but it’s funny, well not funny, it’s ironic that someone in a queer community can be so discriminating toward you but there is a gay man, and he was identifying as a gay man and he was like, “Oh yeah, my lesbians over here!” and I’m like, “No, I’m trans, so use he/him pronouns,” and he would continue to use she/her. After I already introduced my pronouns, it’s like okay. To me, I don’t understand that, when someone tells you their pronouns, and you use the wrong ones. I think it’s like, people in the LGB world are a lot different than trans, like we are going through a lot. Not to say that we are more oppressed, but they don’t really come to understand the pronouns.

James points out a frustration echoed by all the gender non-binary participants, who stated they were misgendered within the queer community at some point. A lot of the microaggressions they faced are based on assumptions people make about their gender identity because of their gender expressions. For example, Dee described a time when they were misgendered by another trans person online,

...Someone shared my Go Fund Me and they used the image description and in this description they said a 'transmasculine person' and I saw “transmasculine” and I got really upset. I was like, this is not who I am. Do not gender me. You did not ask me.

The wide variety of areas of life where participants described experiencing discrimination and microaggressions, even within the queer community, make it difficult for some to find places they feel truly welcomed and accepted.

Resiliency

The wide variety of types of discrimination and microaggressions participants described, within every major social institution, paint a rather bleak picture of their experiences. However, another theme emerged, which is the resilience these participants exhibited despite their negative
experiences. All the participants who told me about their experiences with discrimination, also shared how they cope with those experiences, which revealed the resiliency imbued in each participant as they strive to live their lives as authentically as possible. For example, as a non-binary identified person Dee has experienced discrimination and microaggressions in most areas of their life. Despite the negative experiences they have had, Dee states,

I have to be who I am, so I can't stop being who I am to fit in or to subscribe to anything, but I use caution, 'cause there are a lot of evil people out there or people who just don't understand. That get confusing, cause I'm also trying to explain something that's hard to explain to myself.

Like Dee, James is determined to be who he is regardless of the social consequences. He explains that his father taught him to put up with anything to get what he wants, which has helped James deal with the close-minded customers who come into his workplace. As he put it, “For me, I'm not going to let comments like that get in the way of my job unless my safety is an issue and my safety isn't an issue...yet.”

Participants’ resiliency is evident in many of their experiences, as they have all faced discrimination and microaggressions of some kind, based on their gender identities and expressions. Participants experienced negative reactions to their living as their authentic selves, nevertheless they persist and continue to defy social expectations, regardless of the consequences. Consequences that may include death, as many participants are aware, in fact a few mentioned media reports about the high number of people in gender minority categories killed in 2015. That year was the deadliest on record for transgender people, especially low-income, women of color, with 18 transwomen killed in the first two months of the year (2016 is now the deadliest year on record as 27 trans people were killed) (Schmider, 2016). For example, as described previously, Bianca stated that she carries mace with her for protection and worries
when she hears about other gender minorities facing violence and discrimination.

It’s ugly and I do try not to think about it because I know I can’t save every one of them and I can’t just stop my life, so I try my hardest not to think about those things because it bothers me, and it doesn’t help because on top of that it does remind me that any day I could be the next one. I hope that is not the case but that does bother me.

Bianca relates to the transwomen who have been victimized by other members of society based on her similar gender and race to many of the victims, however these kinds of media stories also impacted participants who did not share as many social identities. For instance, both Mal and Frankie noted they fear using men's restrooms based on their experiences with abusive men throughout their lives. Mal stated,

Last year I finally started feeling like I could use the men's room, but I'm still afraid of being discovered... the majority of the time when I am threatened it has been by males, so I'm entering this environment that is male oriented and bathrooms in our society are very segregated, and it's this uproar over sex… It makes me really nervous...

As we can see, there are a lot of reasons that someone may not be comfortable using a sex or gender-segregated restroom. The political battles over trans people's access to public restrooms has drawn more public attention to trans people's issues, with both positive and negative repercussions.

Overall though, Eric summed up many participants' fears about the implications of passing anti-trans legislation,

If someone is consistently denied access to basic things like bathroom use, then it creates an environment where it's okay for other people to commit crimes against them. If we consistently say, for instance, women who look like they might be men and men who look like they might be women, can't use gender specific bathrooms because it's not safe for the people who are around them. Doesn't it make sense that those who are being labeled as unsafe, that others will believe that it's okay for them to lash out because they feel unsafe? And the government has already said you are unsafe, and we acknowledge that you feel unsafe, so go ahead and do what you want to these people. And really it's the people who are different who are unsafe in these environments, where people are being given a ticket that allows them to do whatever.
Given the political legitimatization of the public's unfounded fears about people in gender minority categories being dangerous to those in the dominant gender category, these participants' stories exemplify their great resiliency in the face of this social and legal oppression. The multiple states legislatures debate “bathroom bills”, the U.S. President tweets his support for banning transgender people from serving in the military, and the recent re-interpretation of how Title IX regulations relate to gender identity, are just a few of the most recent political decisions being made that impact people in gender minorities. An often-quoted, and increasingly relevant, phrase throughout gender minority-focused organizations and activist circles is “existence is resistance”, which participants’ stories showcase numerous times.
CHAPTER FIVE
VULNERABILITY. VIGILANCE. RESILIENCE.

I'm going to need for heterosexual, cisgendered, white men to pull their heads out from so far up their behind and smell the reality of this planet. We are trans and we are queer and we are here to stay, and I think that is something people need to understand. - Kamora

Getting gas. Buying clothes. Going to school. Visiting family and friends. Walking down the street. Shopping for groceries. Eating at restaurants. Using public bathrooms. Renting a home. Finding employment. Accessing health care. Showing personal identification. Being in a public park. Obtaining government documents. Participating in job trainings. Working with the public. Attending GSM-oriented events. Posting in social media support groups. These everyday events, which are mostly routine for cisgender people, are all potential moments of vulnerability and risk for participants. In an attempt to avoid negative interactions, participants described a variety of coping skills they employ to maintain their physical and emotional safety as much as possible. As this research demonstrates, participants take precautions depending on how vulnerable they feel in any given social situation. Multiple participants described their vigilance in determining potential threats when in public, including thinking about when and where to use public bathrooms, which parts of which towns and cities were safest to be in, and how to respond to a panoply of microaggressions. Having to think so much about how to maintain one's safety in public can limit people's ability to engage in public life. When access to public services, spaces, and rights are obstructed by anti-gender and sexual minority (GSM) social practices and policies, people in gender minority categories no longer have access to the same opportunities as those in dominant gender categories. This final Chapter synthesizes the information highlighted throughout this report, discuss the limitations of this study, outline the recommendations participants made for individuals and institutions, and discuss ideas for future research.
Participants' life experiences illustrate the high level of vigilance they must maintain, always alert to how they are being perceived and treated by others, in order to safely engage in public life. The ideology of the gender binary is firmly ingrained into our society, and the very existence of gender minority individuals challenges that status quo. That challenge is an inherent threat to the current social value placed on those in dominant social categories. Throughout this study, participants described how some individuals and social institutions can make life unnecessarily difficult or dangerous for people in gender minority categories. However, this study also highlights the intersectional influences that impact participants’ experiences, including differences based on generation, race and ethnicity, experiences with family and religion, and even geographic location. These intersectional influences are important to note, because they demonstrate the complexity of the lived experiences of people in gender minority categories. In order to successfully institute social policies and practices that encourage a more welcoming atmosphere for people in all gender categories, one must have a critical and intersectional understanding of these complex situations.

This study showcases the complex realities that influence participants' experiences, which must be understood in order to create productive social policy and individual changes. Several generational differences seemed to emerge, including that Millennial participants' greater access to the Internet at younger ages provided opportunities to explore a more expansive range of gender options than were made available to Generation X participants as they came of age. It may be that Generation X participants had less exposure to diverse gender identities, so they tended to model their gender identities and expressions on socially-determined gender expectations after coming out. Millennial participants, on the other hand, tended to come out at younger ages in life and rely more on self-determined gender expectations. Access to the idea that it is acceptable for one to embrace their authentic self, rather than relying on strict social expectations, may have influenced the wider range of gender identities and expressions among Millennial participants. However, both experiences placed
participants in vulnerable positions, because the very existence of gender identities outside the social norms is a challenge to the gender status quo, cisgender privilege, and social power.

A specific generational difference this study highlights is participants' experiences in education systems, especially in post-secondary institutions. For example, many Millennial participants described seeking out colleges and universities based on how inclusive and supportive the school was for GSM individuals. Additionally, some Millennial participants stated they felt more comfortable living authentically at school, because of the existence of GSM-supportive clubs, offices, and social environments. Generation X participants did not have access to the same kind of institutional support when attending post-secondary institutions. Thus, while many institutions of higher learning participants attended provided at least somewhat supportive environments for Millennials, those same types of environments were places of extreme vulnerability for Generation X participants. All gender non-binary participants were either in college or had significant college experience, and spoke of the importance of being in gender minority-supportive learning environments for their educational success. While their gendered experiences were not perfect by any means, these Millennial participants described having more of a support system to help them navigate living their authentic lives in higher education environment.

Another generational difference emerged among participants when discussing their experiences with family members. Generation X participants were more likely than Millennial participants to describe losing a majority of support from family members when they came out as a gender minority individual. Family support for Generation X participants tended to waiver particularly in strictly religious households, as well as those who grew up in small, conservative municipalities. While some Millennial participants also stated not living authentically with their family to avoid losing their support, most Millennial participants tended to express having at least one family member who supported them. One of the most intimidating aspects of living authentically as a gender minority
individual is facing the fact that one's family, those who are supposed to always be there to love and support them, may abandon or disparage them. This is an extremely vulnerable position to live in, as Bobbie Lee described in her discussion of why she did not live authentically with herself or her family for so many decades. Every day she had to be alert to how others' perceived her, as even when she was doing all the “masculine” things she could, Bobbie Lee's gender identity was questioned both in public and at home.

In addition to showcasing the generational and geographic impacts on participants’ lived experiences, this study highlights the influences of multiple intersectional social factors, including race and ethnicity. Participants' heterogeneous experiences within marginalized racial and ethnic categories showcase the need for researchers to strive to intentionally sample diverse and inclusive research participants. For instance, Dee does not share their authentic self with their father's side of their family, because they believe their highly religious family members would reject Dee's non-binary gender identity. On the other hand, Bianca's family is very supportive of her and has been since she came out, so she is able to live authentically as her gender identity. Bianca's family acts as a respite for her, while Dee's family life is more complicated and leaves them vulnerable and vigilant for abuse even with family members. The juxtaposition of these two participants' experiences emphasize the need to better understand the intersectional differences within racial and ethnic groups, as well as between racial and ethnic groups.

Participants who identify as people of color face additional barriers to their ability to thrive, because of contextual social assumptions placed on their gendered and racialized bodies. For example, when Kamora lived in Detroit she mostly faced discrimination due to her gender identity and expression, but in southwest Michigan she believes she faces more discrimination based on race than on her gender. Kamora theorizes that the white people she is around more often in southwest Michigan cannot tell that she is transgender, so she believes the discrimination she faces here is because she is
seen as a black cisgender woman. Kamora's experience shows the complexity of analyzing individuals' intersectional differences, as her gendered and racial experiences are different depending on the social climates and demographics of her geographic locations. In Detroit Kamora was vulnerable for abuse based on her gender identity, and in southwest Michigan she feels more vulnerable because of how her racial identity is perceived. While she must still remain vigilant of others' perceptions to access her safety in any given situation, Kamora has to focus more on how her race is perceived rather than her gender identity in southwest Michigan.

Intersectional differences are also evident in how some participants experienced living as their authentic gender identity, especially in the experiences of James and Marcy. Because of their intersectional differences, James and Marcy described very different experiences living in gender minority categories in the conservative-leaning area of western Michigan. Marcy, who is part of Generation X, white, and low-income, grew up in an extremely small and conservative town, so she feels safe living authentically and openly in this location. On the other hand, James, who is a Millennial, Arab-American, and attends a local university, came out as transgender after he moved to the location. James does not feel like he is supported and safe being out as transgender in the same locations that Marcy cited as places she felt comfortable and safe. Two people who are similarly categorized as gender minorities, described divergent opinions on the same geographic location, which once again shows the necessity of understanding the complexity of intersectional gender minority identities and issues.

The participants in this study agree to sit down and talk with me about some of the worst experiences of their lives. This is an extremely vulnerable position to put oneself in, but through this research I have also found that vulnerability and vigilance seems to be taken for granted states for people in gender minorities. Some participants described these states as tiring to maintain, but overall participants recognized the importance of remaining vigilant about how others' perceive them because
of their vulnerable social position. That recognition may be part of why many participants decided to take part in this research. As a group these participants are mostly socially active people who use the social privileges and power they have in various contexts to make southwest Michigan a more welcoming place for people of all genders. Based on their intersectional experiences, participants outlined several recommendations they believe would improve the area for all genders that both social institutions and individuals in southwest Michigan could incorporate. However, it is important to remember that this research faces limitations that can impact participants’ various recommendations. Before moving on to participant recommendations, it is behooving to discuss the limitations of this research before discussing the recommendations.

Limitations of Research

This research study is a snapshot of experiences from a relatively small sample, but exemplifies the many reasons that changes need to be made to make southwest Michigan a place where people in gender minority categories can thrive. Ultimately, this is a call to action to all people who have the privilege to risk advocating for gender minority issues. However, there are several limitations to this study, including the small sample size of 17 individuals who do not represent all interests, needs, or experiences of the overall population of people living in gender minorities. Another limitation is in the diversity of participants. Because I engaged in convenience and snowball sampling, participants reflected many of my own privileges, such as being white, highly educated, masculine-identified, and identifying within the gender binary. This research study was limited in scope and time, however without those limitations I would have spent more time reaching out to marginalized communities of gender minorities such as people of low-income, people of color, people with disabilities, and people living without homes.

Throughout this research process I also became aware of previously unacknowledged biases of the sampling process, including the fact that participants are overwhelmingly people without
disabilities. Two participants said they have physical disabilities and one reported an atypical neurological illness, however I failed to engage participants on how their disabilities impacted their experiences even when they mentioned them briefly during interviews. During the transcription and analysis, I found several moments where I wish I would have asked participants to elaborate on something they said related to their disabilities. This experience has shown me the importance of active listening both during and after conducting an interview. Additionally, I have learned the importance of being intentionally aware of the impact of a person's intersectional identities on their experiences throughout the research process. Though I only had a few participants disclose some kind of disability during their interviews, because I did not specifically ask I will never know how many participants may have disabilities and how those disabilities might impact their lives.

Another limitation of my dissertation research is that the majority of people who participated are comfortable being publicly known as living in a gender minority category, a majority of whom identify within the gender binary. The diversity of experiences of individuals in gender minorities who live 'stealth' (not openly as a gender minority) or identify outside the gender binary is missing from this research. There are undoubtedly many individuals living in gender minorities who are intentionally living stealth who would not engage with a research project that asked for participants to share their most negative experiences with the public. Additionally, the call for participation primarily relied on the word “transgender” to recruit participants, which may have carried binary-based connotations for some non-binary identified individuals. This presents an unknowably sized gap in the understanding of how gender minorities experience discrimination and microaggressions, as well as policy recommendations, by individuals who live stealth or identify outside the gender binary. Future research should consider ways of reaching these particular individuals. It may be more effective to conduct an internet survey with open-ended questions that allow individuals to self-define their gender minority identity to recruit more of the desired participants.
A strength of this research are the data collected on participants' recommendations for social institutions and individuals. While this research focuses on the experiences of a small slice of the population of people in gender minority categories, many of these participants have thought critically and considerably, about the oppression and social control of people in gender minority categories. The following section will discuss the variety of policy and personal recommendations participants identified as important.

Policy and Personal Recommendations

This section outlines and explains participants' recommendations for both cisgender-dominated institutions and individuals, as well as for people in gender minority categories. Participants include many socially involved individuals who have dedicated a great amount of their time and energy towards improving social policies, and who therefore have a lot of recommendations for state and federal actors about ways to improve our society. However, some participants have less practice discussing specific social policies, and thus drew upon their own experiences and understandings of how people in gender minority categories are treated to determine what recommendations they would give to policymakers. Additionally, all participants have faced prejudicial attitudes and actions throughout their lives, which have also influenced their recommendations for both the general public and policymakers. While many participants described aspirational goals for southwest Michigan or the nation, many also provided practical steps that could be taken by both social institutions and individuals to attain those goals. This section will describe the types of recommendations participants discussed, including practical suggestions for moving towards their ultimate goals for making southwest Michigan a more welcoming place for people in all gender categories.

Recommendations for Social Institutions – Politics and Public Life

The political system was the most common social institution participants focused on when discussing their recommendations. Legal protections were cited as a major concern for multiple
participants, at both state and federal levels. Many participants brought up the most recent surge of anti-gender and sexual minority (GSM) legislation, specifically a religious freedom restoration act (RFRA) that became law in Indiana in April 2015 (described in Chapter One). The Indiana RFRA was widely criticized as essentially legalizing GSM discrimination based on religious beliefs. Ultimately, the criticism led to the loss of contracts and business such as with corporations, sports tournaments, and conferences that chose more welcoming environments. Marcy believes the backlash sent a message to lawmakers in other states who were considering passing their own RFRA, “It kicked them back on their heels and they went 'Whoa! Wait a minute, we better double think this one.'” While the social backlash against Indiana's RFRA forced other lawmakers to reconsider implementing similar legislation, it did not translate into increased legal protections for gender minorities. Many participants stated they would like to see strongly enforced gender identity and expression-inclusive anti-discrimination laws and penalties to, as Marcy put it, “Basically say, 'Hey we are not going to allow this to happen anymore’”.

The patchwork of legal protections for individuals in gender minorities in Michigan was cited as specifically problematic by many participants, especially in regard to employment. For instance, Frankie stated the lack of legal protections is “BS” and that workers should be judged on their ability to do their jobs rather than their social identities. He described the problem with inconsistent legal protections as such, “Kalamazoo has great laws, but the people right outside of Kalamazoo don't get that, so if you live two miles away and don't get covered by the great 'no discrimination' law of Kalamazoo, that's pretty crappy.” Fortunately, some participants benefited from legal protections in other states. For example, the security company Eric worked for was based in California, where gender identity and expression are protected by state employment non-discrimination laws. Even though Eric's supervisors and coworkers were often hostile towards him, he was still able to transition at work without fear of being fired. In order to avoid the inconsistency in protections, Bianca and Kamora both
described the need for legal protections for gender minorities against job discrimination at the national level.

In addition to employment protections, Mal also argued for state-wide inclusion of gender minorities in Michigan's hate crimes law, including making it illegal for medical service providers to refuse to treat people based on their gender identity or expression. As Mal stated, “Just because you morally believe it’s wrong, we are people. We deserve the right to medical treatment and right now we don't have that protection. Our needs aren't going to be met, because we could be refused services.” Legal protections such as these may help people in gender minority categories feel more secure knowing they have the possibility of rebuttal if they do experience discrimination. Dyrk pointed out another importance aspect of having gender minorities included in non-discrimination and hate crime laws,

If there is no specific law that says it's illegal to discrimination against someone because of their gender identity or sexual orientation, then when a crime is committed against that person, it cannot be counted as being a hate crime or being a discrimination case, because there is no law against it. It could be counted as vandalism, or counted as an assault, if it pertains to violence, but it can't even be counted in statistics, because you can't count something that isn't considered illegal.

People in gender minority categories are vulnerable to discriminatory or prejudicial actions with little or no legal recourse, which can set a social tone that makes those actions seem acceptable. As Marcy said above, having laws that specifically include gender identity and expression sets a tone of inclusion throughout society. The message of acceptance sent to the public about people in gender minorities by the passage of GSM-supportive legislation is important given the current hostility participants have experienced.

One example of this hostile environment can be found in the anxiety participants described related to using public accommodations, especially public bathrooms. At the time of these interviews, the North Carolina legislature was debating a bill making it illegal for people to use public bathrooms
that do not match the gender on their state identification cards. News of this bill spread throughout the nation, as people in gender minority categories and their accomplices attempted to educate the public about the discriminatory nature of these bills. Many participants described feeling anxious to use public bathrooms even before these so-called “bathroom bills” entered the political and social realms. For example, James discussed the anxiety he has over using public bathrooms based on his previous experiences, and how he carefully evaluates his perception of safety when deciding if to use a public bathroom.

Bathrooms are a huge thing, safety has been a bigger deal now that I’m openly trans, especially since I cut my hair. Having to deal with uncomfortable situations that I wasn’t aware I would have to deal with, because I would still use the women’s restroom at that point and it was just the reactions like, 'You’re not supposed to be in here.’ And it’s just like the most uncomfortable situations because it’s like I’m just using the restrooms, we don’t have to talk about it. Now that I’m starting hormones and beginning to pass more I do use the men’s room but whenever now it’s more of a safety thing. Like when I go out I always have to have a plan of when I’m going to use the bathroom so working around that has changed.

Here James exemplifies the forethought many participants engage in when faced with having to use public bathrooms. Bianca also pointed out the need for increase legal protections for gender minorities when it comes to using public bathrooms because, “The trans-man isn’t in the bathroom to look at you. The restroom can be a big deal sometimes.... I definitely do think that we need to be acknowledged and that makes other people aware. With the violence, we do need care and protection.”

Overall participants stressed the importance of incorporating more strongly enforced legal protections for people in gender minorities, specifically related to their safety in public bathrooms and other accommodations, in order to be able to fully participate in public life. For example, Dee, who is gender non-binary stated,

We need to first of all, put it into law that every establishment should have either gender neutral restrooms, or non-gendered restrooms...every restroom for the most part has as toilet and sometimes a urinal. If you stand up to pee go to where the urinals are... Nobody’s coming after your daughter, nobody’s coming after your son, nobody’s trying to infiltrate, we just all trying to pee.
Davison elaborated on the idea of allowing people to use the public bathroom option that makes them feel safest and most comfortable, and pointed out the potential impacts of a political climate that is negative towards gender minority issues such as this one.

I am definitely against the idea of introducing a third option as far as public facilities go, restrooms and whatnot, if they’re not going to go to neutrality then they need to do at least what Planet Fitness has done, even if it’s not officially in their policy, at least saying, “If you consider yourself to be such,” I mean as much as I hate to, I don’t understand or feel it, like I don’t think it’s right, but I can see from this mindset of ‘Well, what if some perverted guy wants to see women, so he says 'I’m trans' and uses their bathroom.’ I don’t know what to tell you except... there are probably creeps who do that without the trans part, not everybody is a creep. The insinuation that everybody who is trans is... it’s very problematic, but it’s also problematic for me to say, “Ok so we got our men, our women, and what our ‘alternative' bathroom?” What is that, everybody else? Not everybody’s trans who might use it, so I don’t know. It’s hard to put into policy, “Be an adult and trust other people and assume best intent,” but, um, all I know is that I have not had a single problem using any facility. I haven’t used the men’s bathroom for about a year, um, never had any grief from anyone for doing so. I don’t know if those businesses had policies or not. So I would say though take a look around and try to vibe what from the social wave seems to be. The state of Indiana the last two weeks has been so, I think monumental and ironically awesome that they would pass this idiotic law for religious freedom, which everyone was just salivating like “Finally, we can tell these faggots to get out of our stores!” And the second one person did they are closed and out of business in two days, because no one wants you to do that. And the government is now the laughing stock of politics in the entire country... other states like Michigan should look at that and say “Wow!” ... You know, I don’t care why they do what they do, I just care about the results, and if they value their political careers or their popularity, just pay attention. People aren’t into that mentality en mass that they thought they were.

As more gender and sexual minority (GSM) individuals live openly and authentically with the people in their lives, more members of the dominant culture come to accept and support the diversity of GSM people. However, the inclusion of gender minorities in state-wide and local non-discrimination laws means little if those laws are not strongly enforced. As Marcy pointed out,

If you are 40-50 years old and you are picking on somebody because they are transgender or gay, they're fat or their hair is a different color, or they got nose ring... ya know, it’s like, if you physically beat someone for that and they have to be hospitalized for that or if you physically hurt them, even if they don’t have to be hospitalized for it, that’s why hate laws I think have to be put in to place and have to be enforced.

Lack of enforcement of non-discrimination laws was a particular concern for participants who inhabit some of the most marginalized identities. For example, even though Dee worked in a city with a
gender minority-inclusive non-discrimination ordinance, they still did not usually come out at work.

Dee did not trust that they would be able to use such laws to fight against discrimination they may face, because there are so many people who do not understand people who identify as gender non-binary.

So even though I know Kalamazoo has ordinances that you can’t be fired from your job for your gender identity or your sexual orientation, I’m still scared of that. So I don’t usually come out at work. I come out to some coworkers, but like, I tried recently and they just looked so, one, she just looked so puzzled. Like it made sense that I was like not straight, but I just brought up transgender issues and she just looked like [makes confused face] ‘Oh?’, so you know some people don’t know and it just gets very taxing and I just don’t want to do it cause I’m afraid or things of that nature. It’s not necessarily that I’m afraid to be out, it’s more of the consequences are, because I’m not in the position, I don’t have the privilege to just be out, even in a city like this.

Like Dee, Elvira reported not coming out to many coworkers because they were concerned about the reactions they may receive.

Working at the haunted house, they weren’t even saying microaggression stuff, it was just gross. There was even a moment when it was just horrifying, and it hurt me personally, because I know, like even though they claim that they care about me and stuff, like they are not going to listen to me. I’m one of the few minorities there. I am closeted as trans there, and like, they know that I am not straight but outside from that I don't tell them much. But it's just weird. Even working in the dining hall, you can't be blatantly homophobic or transphobic, but what is technically blatant for other people, especially those who are both cisgender and/or heterosexual, and it's just like constantly be saying girl, woman, ma’am, miss, all that junk, she, like I didn’t feel comfortable coming out there either cause as much as [my school] says, I mean they are more progressive, I will say that they are more progressive, they are more, um, LBG, sometimes T-friendly, but it's not enough at the moment, at least for me.

Dee and Elvira's experiences exemplify an issue discussed by all participants who identify as gender non-binary, which is an overall lack of public knowledge and understanding about gender minorities outside the gender binary. This echoed a similar critique about the overall lack of public knowledge about gender minority identities and issues from participants who identify within the gender binary as well. Even with non-discrimination laws aimed at providing a legal response for people in gender minority categories in southwest Michigan, participants still largely described living in a rather hostile political, and social, climate. The most common recommendation from participants is to increase public
education about gender minority identities and issues, to try to mitigate social and political hostility based on ignorance.

Aspirational Goals and Practical Tips for Current Social Institutions

Ultimately this study’s participants would like to live in a society where they are treated like equal human beings, regardless of their gender identities and expressions. This is a complex aspirational ideal, and while participants largely remain hopeful it will one day be achieved, it is a long-term goal. People in gender minority categories challenge the gender status quo that privileges cisgender people, which means gaining social and political acceptance will be difficult. However, most participants believe much of the discrimination and prejudice towards people in gender minority categories stems from a lack of knowledge about gender diversity. Many participants described how the current education system could be used to fill the gaps in public knowledge about gender minority identities and issues.

It is important to keep in mind that most participants had at least some post-secondary education experience, and many were currently attending universities at the time of data collection, so their focus on education is not surprising. Some of those who had experienced the benefits of formalized education inclusive of gender minority identities and issues saw the current educational system as having multiple avenues for increasing public knowledge. For example, when discussing public schools sex education curricula Mal argued for inclusion of safe sex practices relevant to GSM as well as heterosexuals.

I understand some schools teach abstinence but that’s not what public schools teach, they teach safe sex along with abstinence and I believe that the LGBT community is often left out and then they are left from knowing what safe sex looks like and how to protect themselves against STI’s so I would want to see that law immediately.

Davison suggested expanding the current support structures in place in some schools to include community education in schools about issues related to gender minorities.

I guess it’s not that surprising but I didn’t realize there was such a thing as Trans day of Visibility or Trans Day of Remembrance until I came out, because I was in denial, but those
things exist for a reason and in schools you know they could very easily incorporate some stuff that’s like a week just to start like a pilot program, “Hey we are going to try this thing.” We kind of know that kids are a reflection of the parents, but we also know that as kids get to a certain age they are going to try to rebel against the parents a certain amount. They can start to see that their parents are problematic in ways by the time they are in middle/high school. There are more GSAs [Gay Straight Alliance] popping up. So um, it would be awesome to start using that instead of just an internal support group for those kids to feel like they have somebody to lean on, and instead use them actually as an outreach into the school. Say we are going to sponsor a dance or we are going to have speakers come in.... People usually go, “Oh we kind of knew this existed, but here is a person who is a working professional who has a story to tell that makes me realize, who if I met that person on the street I would probably rather hang out than slam their head in the car door, [laughs] or whatever.” Just planting seeds. Schools would be a great position for that, and obviously the younger the better.

Theoretically, public school systems are existing social structures that could be used to educate the public about issues related to gender minorities.

Additionally, as one participant exemplifies, it is important for public school employees, students, and their parents to be educated about gender minority issues in order to support students in gender minorities. While living in South Dakota Triston, who is non-binary and transfeminine identified, was bullied “a lot” at their high school because of their gender expression (wearing eyeliner, having a high-pitched voice, and feminine mannerisms). At one point they were pressured by school authorities to conform, “I had the superintendent of my school tell me 'you need to tone it down'...”.

Once Triston moved to southwest Michigan they attended a school with a Gay Straight Alliance (GSA) club, which they said made them feel like they had a better opportunity to explore their gender expression and sexuality. “Just having that, I mean the faculty never made a point to be like 'oh you can definitely do whatever you want' I mean there were definitely some issues there, but you know the GSA definitely helped me be me.” As students increasingly have more choice over which school they attend, it may be advantageous for K-12 schools to embrace more active education about gender minority issues.

Triston, along with James and Kamora, specifically mentioned seeking out institutions of higher education partially because of their inclusive approach to gender and sexual minorities, including
having non-discrimination policies inclusive of gender identity and expression, as well as resource
centers for GSM students. For example, when James, a transman, entered college, he felt like it was a
safer place to come out as transgender,

Everyone was so respecting of your gender and your gender identity and it was just like having
a safe place here to--I mean it was like two different worlds back at home and being at [my
university]. ...being around trans folk and other queer folk being so respectful of pronouns and
identity and oppression opened my world to just being okay with who I was and taking the steps
to say, “Enough bullshit. I’m going to start living life.”

These particular public institutions have created intentionally inclusive policies and places on their
campuses in order to ensure their entire student body feels welcome and protected.

Public education institutions are certainly not perfect though, as gender non-binary identified
participants tended to point out when discussing the role colleges and universities could take in raising
awareness about gender minority identities and issues. Elvira specifically argued that institutions of
public education have the power to determine their own educational standards, and therefore have the
potential of setting certain expectations for their students' educations. Elvira stated that students at their
university should be required to learn,

...about what a social construct is, and make that mandatory for everyone to talk about and
know what it is, and how it is taught, how it is engrained in us. And the importance of
representation, so I guess in the sense as well, media literacy. Um, it's definitely huge as well,
and I guess, there are multiple different ways to go about it especially in a university sense
because they do have the power to enforce what general education courses count and don’t
count, and they have those sections of proficiency levels of like English, foreign language, and
public speaking, and they could like insert one about media literacy if they really wanted to, and
talk about like microaggressions and oppression, and make people less entitled snobs.

Elvira expressed their frustration with the fact that the individuals and institutions with social power are
not always using their privileges to advance social equality. In this example, Elvira points out that
universities and colleges have the power to create requirements that could teach students about, “being
more aware about the different pronouns and gender identities...” This may help students learn that a
person's pronouns are, as Elvira stated, “not optional, it's mandatory, because that is one of the things
that people constantly think... that our preferred pronouns are optional, but they are mandatory.” Lex, who also identifies as gender non-binary, stated a similar frustration with people not respecting their pronouns,

I have to like assert myself more, and be like 'This is what you will be calling me. Do you need examples?' Which I have said to people before, and I usually say it pretty friendly, but if I feel like I'm going to get backlash from them, I'll be like 'These are my pronouns, so instead of saying, “She walked over there’, you would say, “They walked over there;” and I just keep maintaining eye contact and say, “Does that make sense?” And then they keep looking at me and some of them are like [makes blank face], but I usually get an affirmative, whether or not they actually understand. The continued eye contact and the fact that I'm not backing down makes them be like 'Okay...' And that's just something I have had to start doing, because when I say, “These are my preferred pronouns,” people just don't use them. Cause they think of it as an option, like, 'When we're playing the game called transgender, we'll use these pronouns. [Raises hand to mouth and whispers like telling someone a secret] “We're never gonna play that game.” So I've had to change the way I interact with folks, based on how they are interacting with me, to see if I have to be more assertive.... It’s never me trying to be patronizing, I understand that most people genuinely don't know. It's like, they may have a grasp on transgender, assigned male at birth, transitioning to female and vice versa, they generally know that as a thing and have a pretty good grasp of that, but they don't know what gender non-binary is, they don't know of anything in between, and I live in the gray.

Elvira and Lex's comments show their frustration at having to constantly defend their right to exist as gender non-binary individuals and that they feel like they must hide their gender identities due to other people's ignorance. It is painful to live in a society that does not acknowledge, or actively denigrate, one's existence, and many participants believe public education as a social institution could work to mitigate the ignorance about gender diversity in society.

If students learned about issues related to people in gender minorities through the education system that may help normalize inclusion of gender minorities throughout society. As the public is educated about gender diversity, the ripple effects could spread throughout society to make southwest Michigan more welcoming for people of all genders. For example, most gender non-binary identified participants expressed a desire for people in public services to use gender neutral language. For example, Dee works in retail and talked about their experiences using gender neutral language when interacting with the public,
Going to a more micro perspective, we need to in a lot of places, have policy, in stores and restaurants and things of that nature, we to tell wait staff to stop gendering groups of people when they talk to them. Like, because you don’t need to say 'Hey girls', 'Hey guys, ladies, dudes, men'; 'How you doing? How’s everything tasting? Find everything you needed?' Um you know 'Hey, how you doing? Do you all have your order?' We are in Michigan, we say folks, we say y'all, like we are the most south you can get up north. So these are things that we say that are inclusive, because I personally say at work, “How are y'all doing today,” like if the person obviously identifies as female or is like, “Hey I’m a lady,” of course I might be like “ma’am” or “sir”, um because a lot of cis-people come through the workplace, but um for the most part I say “How’s your day going so far? Find everything you needed? Would you like to purchase the blah, blah, blah”, you know? I don’t need gendered language and I don’t think anyone else does.

Institutions of higher education have a platform through which they could help encourage public education about issues related to gender minorities, such as using gender inclusive language in public interactions. As more people incorporate gender neutral language into their everyday social interactions, people in gender minority categories may become more socially accepted. At the very least, using gender neutral language or letting people define how they wish to be addressed in public, could create less vulnerable social situations for individuals who are likely to be publicly misgendered.

Overall, participants want to be able to live their lives like anyone else, and most emphasized the need to educate society about gender minority identities and issues to accomplish that goal. For example, Bianca, a factory worker with limited post-secondary education experience, ended her interview by stating why cisgender people need to know about people in gender minority categories.

I think, for one, they need to recognize that we are here; be aware that we are. Two, there are some of us that are suffering and there are some that need help and protection. As I said though, be aware that we are out here and as far as employers go, stick up for people; we are here to work, we need to eat we need to live. Some of us have families. See us as people and that’s all that should matter.

Social institutions, such as the education system, may provide a means of taking a practical step towards increasing public education about people in gender minority categories. However, clearly individuals do not need to wait for our social institutions to start making changes to better support people in gender minority categories. The following section of this chapter will explore the
recommendations participants have for individuals who want to be a part of creating a more welcoming southwest Michigan.

**Recommendations for Individuals – The Power of Privilege.**

The concept of intersectionality says individuals can simultaneously occupy both privileged and oppressed social identities, which are experienced differently depending on the context of a situation. A few participants brought up examples of people in different social positions using their privileges to help navigate a potentially discriminatory situation in their lives. For example, Bianca was sexually harassed at work by a cisgender man and her supervisor, also a cisgender man, quickly fired the employee after Bianca reported the harassment. This was an extremely positive experience for Bianca, who felt supported in her workplace by her cisgender boss because she could count on him to back her up if other coworkers harassed or discriminated against her.

Similarly, Davison was able to successfully reason with the cisgender clothing store employee, described in Chapter Four, about why she should be allowed to continue to use the fitting rooms despite another customer's complaint. As a reminder, the employee attempted to stop Davison from using the women's fitting rooms at a place she frequently bought clothes. However, at that moment Davison was in a position to engage with and educate the employee, and the interaction ended positively. Later that same day, Davison wrote about the incident on social media and urged her followers to write the corporate headquarters of the company and “thank them for humanitarian decision making and embracing the wave of the future—we're really going to make them feel good about this great decision they made today.” The next time Davison went into that store the manager she had spoken with about the fitting rooms previously told her headquarters had commended them for the positive letters and thanked Davison. However, Davison kind of winked away the notion that she was responsible for the letters and responded,

Well thank you for not succumbing to assholes (laughs), and thank you for, you know
opening the door, and thanks for moving that direction. I would consider us friendly, if we’re not friends, we’re friendly, and I said..., “You saw me that day I was very sad that day. You saw it,” and she’s like, “I know.” “Yeah, it hurt. It hurt to be in a place that I like, and like to come to, and see people I like, and I do come up against shit in the world but I don’t want it to deal with it with you here,” and she got misty and we hugged. She asked for a hug, and she said, “No I want you here, I want you here,” and I’m like, “Good, damn right.”

Davison was able to use her own privileges as a middle-class, educated white person to strengthen her relationship with the clothing store employee and overcome the fear tactics used by the cisgender customer who complained about Davison using the fitting rooms. This is a tactic that is available to many allies and gender minorities who also occupy privileged social positions. In Davison's example, she was able to use her financial influence and knowledge of psychology to communicate with the store employee in ways that would not be available to individuals without those privileges. However, Davison goes on to point out that the tactics available to some individuals are not available to all individuals; thus, while some may be able to use their privilege to create positive social change, not all people in gender minority categories have that advantage.

Cisgender accomplices to people in gender minority categories are often in the best position to engage in interpersonal education of cisgender people in public accommodations. The stakes are lower for cisgender people who have the energy to take the risk required to educate strangers about gender minority identities and issues. Participants risk facing disrespect, discrimination, and violence just by existing in public life, and most are not interested in, nor able to be, on-call educators when in public. Given that many participants live directly in the intersections of multiple marginalized social identities living in this world presents many challenges already. Therefore, cisgender people who are able to take on the additional challenge of directly educating people they encounter in public life can help alleviate this burden for people in gender minority categories.

Some individuals have more privileges than others, including those who hold political offices, and so a few participants specifically called on politicians to encourage more public education and
understanding of gender minority identities and issues. For example, Eric spoke passionately about his belief that politicians should work to represent all members of their constituency.

I think that policy-makers and lawmakers no matter what level they are on; they need to be brave. They need to look at someone as a human being with valid emotions and experiences that they can lend to the world and given the right environment will grow beyond their wildest expectations... Because you don't know who voted for you do you really think it’s right to alienate your voters, you represent your voters and those who didn't vote for you, so make the decisions that will better the community, don't just think of yourself. You need to listen.

The goal of creating a more welcoming southwest Michigan for people of all genders will not be accomplished without privileged individuals, including politicians, being brave enough to educate themselves and use their privileges to change the status quo.

Call for Future Research

Future research should aim to investigate best practices for a variety of institutions and individuals to learn how to most effectively interact with people of all genders. For example, one non-binary identified participant Dee, described how they use gender neutral language in their retail job when addressing customers, and recently Barista Magazine Online published an article titled, “How to make your cafes more inclusive by learning gender-neutral speech” (Joseph, 2017) that echoed many of Dee's suggestions. Dee and Barista Magazine Online make suggestions such as referring to groups of people as “y'all, friends, folks, people, and everybody,” rather than using “you guys” or “hey ladies” (Joseph, 2017). This type of linguistic change seems like the best way to create a more welcoming environment, but scientific research focused on these practices would both benefit the scientific literature, and legitimate a set of actions for those attempting to learn how to create a welcoming environment for all genders.

Additionally, we must develop a more intersectional and critical understanding about the myriad of influences on individuals’ gender identities and expressions, in order know how to progress our understanding of gender in our society. Researchers should intentionally strive to sample diverse
members of gender minority categories, and develop opportunities for marginalized individuals to share their experiences with the public. Those who have the privilege of learning how to create socially legitimate knowledge have specialized skills that may help dominant gender minorities better understand what it is like to live as a gender minority in southwest Michigan. Listening to the voices of those most impacted by the limitations of the dominant, binary-based gender social norms may encourage those in socially privileged and powerful positions to use their social statuses to fight for the inclusion of people in gender minority categories, in both their personal and professional lives.

Conclusion

The participants in this study face vulnerable situations everyday simply because they strive to live up to the ideals of the American culture—life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Many described the vigilance they must maintain in different social situations, because they believe some people do not see them as human, based on their experiences being shamed, silenced, and harmed. This is everyday reality for these participants, who showcase immense resiliency in how they manage the stress of being in potential danger in public, and often in private as well, simply for engaging in their rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Southwest Michigan is an area with a lot of potential, but without both personal and systemic commitments to change, this area will continue to be a place where some people are able to engage in public life, while others risk emotional or physical harm whenever they leave their home, or have no respite in their lives. In order to allow everyone to love where they live, we must work together, quickly and with purpose, to make southwest Michigan a place where people in all gender categories can thrive.
REFERENCES


Schmider, A. (2016). *2016 was the deadliest year on record for transgender people*. GLAAD. Retrieved from: https://www.glaad.org/blog/2016-was-deadliest-year-record-transgender-people


Appendix

HSIRB Approval Letter
APPLICATION FOR CONTINUING REVIEW or FINAL REPORT FORM

In compliance with Western Michigan University's policy that "the HSIRB's review of research will be conducted at appropriate intervals but not less than once per year," the HSIRB requests the following information:

PROJECT INFORMATION

PROJECT TITLE: Speaking Our Truth: Transgender People's Experiences with Discrimination in Southwest Michigan
HSIRB Project Number: 14-07-041
Date of Last Approval (Initial or Continuing Review): 10/22/15
Previous level of review: ☐ Full Board Review ☒ Expedited Review ☐ Administrative (Exempt) Review

INVESTIGATOR INFORMATION

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR OR ADVISOR
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CO-PRINCIPAL OR STUDENT INVESTIGATOR
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CURRENT STATUS OF RESEARCH PROJECT

Please answer questions 1-5 to determine if this project requires continuing review by the HSIRB.

1. Has subject recruitment begun? If no, please provide an explanation
   ☒ Yes  ☐ No

2. Is the project closed to recruitment of new subjects?
   ☒ Yes (Date of last enrollment: 10/15/2015)  ☐ No (Project must be reviewed for renewal.)

3. Have all subjects completed research related interventions?
   ☐ Yes ☒ Not Applicable  ☐ No (Project must be reviewed for renewal.)

4. Has long-term follow-up of subjects been completed?
   ☐ Yes ☒ Not Applicable  ☐ No (Project must be reviewed for renewal.)

5. Has analysis of data been completed?
   ☐ Yes  ☒ No (Project must be reviewed for renewal.)

- If you have answered "No" to ANY of the questions above, you must apply for Continuing Review.

- If you need to make changes in your protocol, please submit a separate memo detailing the changes that you are requesting.

- If you have answered "Yes" or "Not Applicable" to ALL of the above questions, the project may be closed. If the project is closed please use this form for the "Final Report."

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Application for Continuing Review

HSIRB Project Number: 14-07-04

6. Are there any changes in study personnel (add or remove investigators) not previously reported to the HSIRB? □Yes ☒No
   If you need to add an investigator, provide details on an "Additional Investigator(s) Form" (available at http://www.wmich.edu/research/forms/complianceforms.html). To remove an investigator submit a memo to the HSIRB detailing the change.

7. Since the last approval (initial or continuing review) has there been any modifications or additions to the protocol, not previously reported to the HSIRB to with respect to the following?
   a. Procedures □Yes ☒No
   b. Subjects □Yes ☒No
   c. Design □Yes ☒No
   d. Data collection □Yes ☒No

8. Has any instrumentation been modified or added to the protocol that has not already been approved by the HSIRB? □Yes ☒No
   If yes, attach new instrumentation and a memo indicating the modifications made.

9. Are there changes to the consent/assent form not previously reported to the HSIRB? □Yes ☒No
   If yes, attach new consent/assent form and a memo indicating changes made.

Verification of Consent Procedure: Provide copies of the whole consent documents signed by the last two subjects enrolled in the project. Cover the signature in such a way that the name is not clear but there is evidence of signature. If subjects are not required to sign the consent document, provide a copy of the most current consent document being used.

SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH

10. Have there been any adverse events, unexpected or unanticipated study-related problems which have not previously been reported to HSIRB? If yes, provide details on an attached sheet. □Yes ☒No

11. Is there new risk or benefit information not previously reported to the IRB? □Yes ☒No
   If yes, attach a memo indicating the risk or benefit information.

12. Summarize progress of the research using non-technical language that can be easily understood by a reviewer outside the discipline. Please use complete sentences to briefly summarize the research since the last review (initial or continuing). Since the last review I have collected all the data for my research project and am currently analyzing the data for themes related to the discrimination and microaggressions faced by my participants I have begun outlining the chapters for the first draft of the completed dissertation and expect to be ready to defend by summer.

13. List and describe any complaints about the research study since the last HSIRB review (initial or continuing review); include action taken to resolve the complaints (If not applicable, type NA). NA

14. List any voluntary withdrawals by participants from the study since the last HSIRB review (initial or continuing review); include action taken as a result of the withdrawals. (If not applicable, type NA). NA

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SUBJECT RECRUITMENT

15. Have research subjects been enrolled (or subject records, specimens, etc. obtained)? ☑ Yes ☐ No
Provide a letter of explanation if no research subjects have been enrolled (or subject records, specimens, etc. obtained).

16. Total number of subjects approved in original protocol: 50

17. Total number of subjects enrolled so far: 18
   If applicable: Number of subjects in experimental group: Number in control group:

18. Estimated number of subjects yet to be enrolled:

Please remember to include a clean original of the consent documents to receive a renewed approval stamp.

INVESTIGATOR'S ASSURANCE

I certify that the information contained in this HSIRB Application for Continuing Review and all attachments are true and correct. I certify that the research has been and will continue to be conducted according to the protocol as approved by Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. I agree that I will not implement any changes in the protocol until such changes have been reviewed and approved by HSIRB. If, during the course of the research, unanticipated risks or harm to subjects are discovered, I will report them to HSIRB immediately. I agree to follow all applicable federal regulations, guidance, state and local laws, and university policies related to the protection of human subjects in research, as well as professional practice standards and generally accepted good research practices for investigators.

If this is a FINAL REPORT you may return the form electronically (signature is not required).

[Signatures and dates]

Principal Investigator/Faculty Advisor Signature

Co-Principal or Student Investigator Signature

Co-Principal or Student Investigator Signature

Approved for a one-year extension by the HSIRB:

[Signature and date]

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