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INTERSECTIONAL IDENTITIES AND MICROAGGRESSIONS: THE EXPERIENCE OF

TRANSGENDER FEMALES

by

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ABSTRACT

INTERSECTIONAL IDENTITIES AND MICROAGGRESSIONS: THE EXPERIENCE OF

TRANSGENDER FEMALES

Cory Gerwe
Old Dominion University, 2019
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Historically, attention given to privileged LGBT minorities such as white LGBT individuals, renders those who experience multiple minority identities as unacknowledged. There is a scarcity of research exploring the intersectional experiences of transgender individuals and how these experiences impact their mental health and well-being. For that reason, the intent of this study was to learn more about transgender females who hold additional minority statuses, their transition experiences, their circumstances, and the nature of their social environment. Specifically, I investigated trans female experiences of transitioning with a specific focus on the intersection of gender identity, race, socioeconomic status (SES), and age. For this study, the research was conducted using a narrative tradition and an intersectionality theory paradigm. Data were collected through observations, archival data, and eight semi-structured individual interviews. Purposeful stratified sampling was used for the recruitment of self-identified transgender female participants from a local LGBT community center. It is my hope that through this research, counselors can begin to gain a rich understanding of the ways that issues of oppression can be more effectively addressed in the transgender community.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The excess of cisnormativity throughout interconnecting discourses permeates culture and history (Feinberg, 1996). The counseling community, however, has made efforts to align their training with multiculturally progressive beliefs with regard to underrepresented and marginalized populations. Specifically related to the present research, advocates and scholars have created standard competencies for working with individuals who identify as transgender (Burnes, Singh, Harper, Harper, Maxon-Kann, Pickering, & Hosea, 2010). In fact, research on trans identity has greatly increased over the past several years (Budge, S. L., Thai, J. L., Tebbe, E. A., & Howard, K. A., 2016; McCullough et al., 2017; Moradi et al., 2016), including both empirical and conceptually focused articles that address an array of trans-focused issues. Furthermore, society has made strides concerning visibility (McInroy, & Craig, 2015) and civil rights (Bieschke, Perez, & DeBord, 2007) of trans people. Despite these achievements and efforts by the counseling community, there continues to be a lack of research and visibility for individuals who identify as nonwhite and who do not identify with the gender binary (McCullough et al., 2017; Moradi et al., 2016). While transgender research has flourished in the past several decades, numerous trans-focused studies have rapidly become obsolete considering the changing social landscape. More specifically, trans literature focuses on privileged trans experiences at the exclusion of intersectional experiences (Budge, Thai, Tebbe, & Howard, 2016). Also, the research limits the scope of scholarship to focus solely on gender identity, thereby perpetuating assumptions, misunderstanding, and stigmatization of trans individuals (Sánchez & Vilain, 2009). In this study, I attempted to lay the ground work for transgender intersectionality to gain allocated space in the field of trans studies by examining how

transgender identities are affected by intersectional paradigms. What follows is a discussion of the problem as it exists currently, the purpose of and influence of this study, the related literature on gender identity development, minority stress and intersectionality, and the research methods that were used in this study. In the following chapter, I discuss the purpose of this study, the need for this study, terminology related to this study, and the potential contribution of this study.

To frame this study, I reverted to Stryker, & Bettcher's conceptualization of transfeminism. Stryker, & Bettcher (2016) stated,

> In foregrounding the necessity of attending to class and race as well as sex and gender, intersectional feminism raised the question of whether "woman" itself was a sufficient analytical category capable of accounting for the various forms of oppression that women can experience in a sexist society, which in turn opened the question of whether it was sufficient to talk about sexual "difference" in the singular, between men and women, or whether instead feminism called for an account of multiple "differences" of embodied personhood along many different but interrelated axes (p. 7).

This quote is indicative of the need for a trans-positive research lens that is aware of the complex integration of identity. In other words, studies of intersections of transgender identity are needed in counseling research to explore how transgender identity intersects with their cultural racial, socio-economic, religious, and sexual identities. The goal of my study was not to misappropriate the experience of trans individuals for research or intrigue, but rather to advocate for increased understanding in the counseling community through research that illuminates the experience of the trans community. It is imperative that counselors understand that we make social conclusions in a patriarchal gender binary context (Sennott, 2010). Despite my use of narratology to analyze my participants, my aim was to "confront social and political institutions

that inhibit or narrow our individual choices," (Koyama, 2003, p. 247) rather than criticizing or judging any aspect of my participant's decision-making. This is crucial because of my social location as a cisgender, white, middle class, male in the oppressive discourse of trans discrimination. The goal of this research project is to illuminate these marginalized experiences and empower marginalized communities.

Statement of the Problem

Since most counseling settings may serve transgender individuals at some point (Grant et al., 2011), the literature suggests that trans-affirmative self-efficacy is imperative for all counselors (Barden & Greene, 2015; Benson, 2013; Bess & Stabb, 2009). However, attention to privileged minorities, such as white lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) individuals, renders those who experience multiple minority identities as unacknowledged. Such marginalization has been systematically reinforced (Atewologun, & Sealy, 2014); therefore, a consistent struggle exists for those who do not fit within the mainstream transgender population. By not being aware of interlocking identities and oppression, society assumes that the trans community is monolithic. Consequentially, microaggressions occur in the form of expectations and comparisons to privileged transgender individuals. For instance, in the qualitative portion of Galupo, Henise, & Davis's (2014) study, some of the participants experienced pressure to act increasingly cisgender in a way that creates expectations for transitioning that may include clothing, hormones, or surgery. These expectations can be contextually challenging given the individual's combination of identities such as age, SES, gender identity, and ethnicity. Furthermore, Nadal, Skolnik, & Wong's (2012) study suggested twelve themes encompassing macroaggressions that trans individuals experience on a regular basis. These themes include: (1) transphobic terminology, (2) assumption of a monolithic transgender experience, (3)

exoticization or sexualization, (4) denial of personal privacy, (5) understated acceptance of preference of gender normative culture or behaviors, (6) physical harassment, (7) presumption of sexual pathology, (8) denial of the existence of transphobia, (9) denial of the physical space and bodily privacy, (10) suggestive disapproval of the transgender experience, (11) microaggressions that occur in the family , and (12) systemic microaggressions (Nadal et al., 2012). This study provided a foundation for understanding the microaggressions that occur for trans individuals as well as indicating assumptions regarding how they negatively impact trans individuals. Particularly, theme two (assumption of a monolithic transgender experience) suggested that trans individuals experience assumptions of a monolithic experience, despite the diversity that occurs in the trans community. Notwithstanding, there has been a scarcity of research that explores the intersection of experiences of transgender individuals and how that impacts their mental health and well-being. Counseling research with marginalized groups tends to adopt a focus on singular, individual identities, and only lately has the topic of intersectionality received more attention (Moradi, 2016).

As part of a research agenda, Moradi et al. (2016) conducted a content analysis that revealed the transgender participants were not significantly included in almost half of the studies that purported to include them in "LGBT" (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) studies. Unfortunately, this is a common theme in LGBT literature. Moreover, in the same series of research, Budge, Thai, Tebbe, and Howard (2016) suggested that trans-focused intersectionality research has been overlooked, particularly in reference to individuals identifying as transgender females. While many studies have targeted transgender concerns, a large percentage have focused on trans individuals who experience many other privileges in categories such as cultural-racial identity, age, and socio-economic status (SES). A lack of focus on intersectionality

impacts the wellness of trans individuals because counselors may overemphasize or underemphasize the importance or relevance of one part of the individual's identity (Budge, Thai, Tebbe, & Howard 2016). For instance, statistics suggest that people of color experience worse counseling outcomes than white people (Paniagua, 2013). Counselors who make the assumption that a white trans individual will experience similar results as an African American trans individual are excluding their race. An intersectional approach within therapy entails discussing with clients how they recognize their combined multiple identities, as well as examining times when some identities may be more relevant (Budge, Thai, Tebbe, & Howard, 2016). As will be discussed later in the study, the intersection of identity is a significant consideration for those who provide mental health services to the transgender community.

Purpose of the Study

Given the previously mentioned disparities in trans female intersectional research, this study aimed to add methodological diversity to the current body of literature. That is to say, much of the literature related to trans individuals and mental health outcomes only examine a single dimension of their identity (McCullough et al., 2017; Moradi, 2016). There are few known studies that thoroughly assessed multiple identities among trans females through a qualitative lens, particularly with implications for counselors. For that reason this study assessed the intersectional experience of trans individuals through a narratological lens by exploring the subjective experience of those who occupy these identities on a daily basis. From this exploration, this study provides recommendations for counselors who work with transgender individuals.

With the growing visibility of trans communities, it is important to highlight the experience of those who reside at the intersection of historically marginalized identities. The

intent of this study was to learn more about the intersection of transgender female identity and their cultural-racial identity, age, and SES. Specifically, the goal of this study was to understand their experiences, their circumstances, and how these intersections of identity affect their mental health outcomes. Acknowledging that the intersection of trans female identity may have inherently different meanings and impacts on a person's worldview, I used the following question to guide this study while analyzing and revealing the subjective experience and perceptions of trans identity, SES, cultural-racial identity, and age as they navigate the complexities of identity.

> Question: How does one's trans female identity, cultural-racial identity, SES, and age contribute to their ability to transition?

Ultimately, the purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of inclusion of trans persons in a culture dominated by cisgender males. The research question was critical to my understanding of life at the intersection of these identities and underscored the ways in which this marginalized group has experienced oppression. At individual and institutional levels, commonly constructed social positions of gender, cultural-racial identity, SES, and age are a central part of the contexts of social interaction. It is my hope that my findings will serve as grounds for further research as more questions are raised through examination of individual and group discourses.

Study Specific Definition of Terms

Cisnormative: Cisgender denotes an individual whose gender identity aligns with their birth sex and birth gender (ALGBTIC, 2013). Cisnormative behavior refers to the assumption, implicit or otherwise, that all individuals are Cisgender.

Gender Identity: Gender identity essentially describes one's perceptions about one's gender, regardless of one's biological sex (Lev, 2004).

Transgender: The term "transgender" describes individuals whose gender identity and gender expression do not conform to their typically associated birth-assigned sex (Su et al., 2016). Chapter 2 will further explain the complexity of this term.

Heteronormative: Heteronormative is the cultural belief and assumption that everyone should follow traditional norms of heterosexuality. This bias also includes the idea that relationships contain two individuals who have Cisgender identities, where males identify with and express masculinity and females identify with and express femininity. Additionally, homonormative is predicated on the assumption that people fall into two distinct and complementary genders (male and female) with natural roles in life. (ALGBTIC, 2013).

Intersectionality: Intersectionality refers to the multidimensionality of individuals and the interactions that may be a result of the social power differentials that occur between those identities (Crenshaw, 1989).

LGBT: The acronym LGBT means lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender. The acronym LGBTQIQA (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, questioning, and ally) was developed for use in the counseling field, to be more inclusive of various gender, sexuality, relational, and other spectrums of identities (ALGBTIC, 2013).

Socioeconomic Status: Socioeconomic status (SES) is commonly used to describe the combination of an individual's income career, educational attainment, and social standing. Research on SES often explores inequities in access to resources along with issues related to privilege and power. (APA, 2015).

Cultural-Racial Identity: The grouping or classification of human beings based on ancestry, physical traits, genetics, or the social relations between those groups (Templeton, 1998).

Transphobia: The term Transphobia reflects a feeling of unease or even disgust towards those who are gender variant (Hill & Wiloughby, 2005).

Age Identity: The internal and external experience of a person's age and aging process. This includes physiological and psychological aspects that occur with age and ageing (Henderson & Almack, 2016).

Potential Contributions of the Study

Feminists have historically focused on cisgender females in order to understand the operation of patriarchal power and the ways that social constructs and interactions support and reinforce the systemic hierarchies. In the past several decades, transgender individuals have become more visible in U.S. society and transgender studies have grown significantly. Moreover, literature on the importance of intersectionality has significantly increased. Intersectional studies and LGBT studies, however, have mostly ignored the experiences of transgender individuals, and much of the research on transgender people has focused on transgender individuals as a singular entity. Thus, it is crucial to move past these limits to appreciate the full spectrum of transgender experiences. The primary contribution of this paper is to show the importance of spatial and institutional context in trans experiences of SES and age along with mental health implications that may be imperative in working with this population. This project contributes to three areas in counseling and trans studies: understandings of transgender people, understanding of intersectional identities of trans individuals, and mental health considerations based on these constructs. This study augments the rapidly expanding arena of counseling research on transgender intersectionality (Budge, Thai, Tebbe, & Howard, 2016). It does so by adding

previously under-explored knowledge of how trans individuals manage their identities with respect to SES and age. Specifically, this project addressed gaps in the literature by utilizing a qualitative lens with the intention of gathering experiences from those who hold multiple minority statuses.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

As a result of the integration with LGB populations, literature on transgender individuals often categorizes them as having indistinguishable experiences when compared to sexual minorities (Bess & Staab, 2009; Lev,2009; Moradi, Mohr, Worthington, & Fassinger, 2009; Riley, Wong, & Sitharthan, 2011). Despite similarities between the LGB and transgender groups, gender identity often creates distinct experiences that are critical to acknowledge and distinguish from the mainstream LGB community. Consequently, this review of the literature will primarily focus on studies that have centralized the experience of trans individuals. Specifically, this summary of the literature will provide context through gender identity models, language, and the minority stress model. Following this discussion is a description of transgender-focused violence, thereby highlighting the importance of this study. Lastly, this review chapter will illuminate the literature on intersectionality in order to establish the foundational components of this study.

Gender Identity Development

The traditional gender identity spectrum, known as the gender binary, is predicated on the existence of two genders, male and female (Killermann, 2013). The gender binary was first critiqued by critical feminist researchers who identified spectrums such as sex and gender as being socially constructed archetypes of oppression (Jeffreys, 2014). That is, sex and gender are matters that result from a patriarchal society's dictation of what they mean. According to critical feminists, distinctions of this sort are unnecessary and only serve to oppress and inappropriately categorize. In fact, this belief contributes to ongoing tension between traditional feminists and transgender advocates (Namaste, 2000). In contradiction, some feminist researchers have

reconfigured the concept of gender and sex spectrums to be broader and, therefore, more inclusive (Killermann, 2013; Nagoshi & Nagoshi, 2014). Researchers such as Cromwell (1999) explained that the notion of gender being entirely an essentialist or constructionist framework is limiting and reductive. His criticisms of both perspectives provided a lens for a trans-affirming explanation of gender identity. Cromwell suggested that by relying exclusively on constructionist explanations, we are overly reliant on social interactions to indicate the existence of gender identity. Pure constructivism implies that gender identity does not exist when individuals are alone. Through understanding the trans experience, it is evident that a sense of objective gender identity co-exists within the framework of socially constructed gender identity. Tran's identity, while being authentic, is a result of influenced socialized perceptions of what gender means.

Burdge (2007) asserted that the existence of the traditional gender binary is oppressive for the trans community due to the bombardment of the gender dichotomy at a young age. While society assumes that gender identity must coincide with one's biological anatomy, Burdge insists that gender is a socially constructed paradigm. In a similar manner, Eyler and Wright (1997) believed that gender was on a continuum in which individuals could determine their own gender identity. In this way, the authors expanded on the idea of individual identification by providing a nine-point scale that allowed each participant to identify as completely female, a female with some male qualities, mixed gender, neither man or women, some other gender, ungendered, bi-gendered, a male with female qualities, or completely male. Consequentially, their article dissipated the concepts of a polar or binary gender along with the notion that one's gender identity must coordinate with their biological sex (Eyler & Wright, 1997). In contradiction to the gender binary, a transgender person should be able to self-identify with one gender, no gender, both genders, a separate gender category, or no specific category at all.

The harsh binary of two genders, male and female, results in oppression and disconnection with one's identity. Judith Butler (2011) advocated that gender and sex are both socially constructed, thereby making gender expression a manifestation of a patriarchal society. Consequently, this does not leave room for fluid expressions of gender (i.e., girls who wear clothes traditionally designed for boys). Naturally, this perception opposes the concept or definition of transgender identity. However, she recognized the influence of social constructionism and believed that people should have the freedom to live out whichever gender they identify with, without discrimination, harassment, or criminalization (Butler, 2011). Judith Butler's (1990) gender performativity theory communicates that construction of one's gender occurs through their repetitive performance of gender. Rather than identifying gender as a static variable, Butler explained that gender is the act of repeatedly revealing markers that are consistently in a state of intersection. That is, we express various behaviors such as clothing choice and speech patterns that constitute an impression of being male or female. However, these behaviors are constantly in a state of being accomplished and do not define our gender conclusively (Butler, 1990). For this reason, it is imperative that we become aware of how expectations of behavior can be inaccurate and oppressive. Society should endeavor to eliminate further oppression by eliminating gender mandates, labeling, or stereotypes that imply an expectation of gender. As the recognition of the trans community continues to grow, increasing community social constructs are being developed and understood by cisgender individuals. Thus, it is important to understand developmental models that assist in illuminating the transgender experience.

Social Learning Gender Identity Development Model

Identity development for transgender individuals has can be described as the integration of gendered experiences into a person's holistic understanding of self (Barr, Budge, & Adelson, 2016). The phenomena of transgender identity, in a psychological and social sense, only occurs within a social context. This identity develops through social learning assumptions regarding sex and gender. As it pertains to gender, social learning theory is the influential external dynamics that create reinforcement for particular gendered behaviors to occur and be repeated (Bussey & Bandura, 1999). More to the point, children receive praise when they engage in culturally appropriate gender behavior and punishment if they do not. This occurrence not only influences one's decisions regarding gender expression but also encourages children to gain acceptance from the surrounding culture by making accommodations, and thereby denying their authentic gender identity. Consequentially, social learning can lead to gender dysphoria. In addition, social learning gender development theory includes the concept of gender stability or the recognition of consistency in one's gender. Specifically, gender is stable from birth despite one's increasing awareness of gender identity or expression of gender (Bussey & Bandura, 1999). The following description pertains to social learning gender development for trans individuals and provides context for understanding transgender identity development, thereby providing the foundation for a conversation regarding intersectionality.

Various developmental theories provide differential emphasis regarding the parent's influence on psychosexual child development (Lev, 2013). Other theories rely on biological processes to explain gender identity (Bailey, 2003). Regardless of the models' emphasis, many of the past gender development models are cisnormative. In recent scholarship, transgender identity models intentionally addressed transgender identity development in a non-pathological way (Lev, 2013). Devor (2004) created a fourteen-stage identity formation model for transgender

individuals predicated on Cass's sexual orientation development model (1979). Similar to Cass's model, these fourteen stages elicit a format for development that provides context and clarity to the experiences of trans individuals. Unlike Cass's model, Devor's model recognized that individuals may remain at any particular stage without necessarily progressing to full transition. These stages include: enduring anxiety, confusion about one's birth-assigned sex, identity comparison of one's birth-assigned sex, discovery of transgender identity, confusion about transgender identity, identity comparisons about transgender identity, tolerance of transgender identity, delay prior to accepting one's transgender identity, acceptance of one's transgender identity, delay before gender transition, gender transition, acceptance of post-transition gender identities, identity integration, and trans pride (Devor, 2004). Devor's model indicates that as transgender individuals move from feelings of anxiety and hopelessness regarding their non-conforming gender identity, they begin to accept and appreciate their identity, thereby experiencing prideful feelings.

Using Devor's model, Levitt & Ippolito's (2014a) studied the formative experiences involved in the process of transgender identity development. Their qualitative inquiry included seven thematic clusters and one overarching core category. Each cluster focused on participants' experiences within different social contexts and relationships. These clusters were not linear descriptions of the transgender experience; rather they suggested common experiences within the transgender community. Cluster one referred to the pressure that individuals experience being closeted about one's gender identity (Levitt & Ippolito, 2014a). That is, they undergo pressure to present as their birth gender. This can be traumatic for trans-children because they may begin unintentionally demonstrating varying degrees of behavior not considered typical for their biological sex. Commonly, they are not aware that their behaviors are outside socially

constructed gender roles (Reichizer & Andersons, 2006). Levitt and Ippolito (2014a) suggested that school-age development may be particularly difficult for trans individuals due to being ostracized or bullied. This typically happens more frequently with biological boys who act effeminate. As a result, many trans-children experience internalized oppression, which leads to concealing their trans mannerisms. Similar to Reichizer & Anderson (2006), Levitt & Ippolito's (2014) study acknowledged that societal constructs commonly are more lenient for masculine females in that they can adopt the role of tomboy in preschool and early school ages. Currently, no similar feminized archetypes occur for young males despite societal progression on trans issues (Levitt & Ippolito, 2014a).

Cluster two emphasized the importance of language usage and hearing trans positive experiences during the participant's gender formation process (Levitt & Ippolito, 2014a). Transgender individuals, similar to others in marginalized social locations, benefitted from community mentorship. The authors emphasized that trans affirmative spaces can be lifesaving as they provide safety and support in exploring one's gender and promoting self-acceptance while countering transphobia (Levitt & Ippolito, 2014). In a similar fashion, Reicherzer and Anderson (2006) discussed the importance of modeling in their transition model. They suggested that in early adulthood, self-actualizing trans individuals begin to observe and imitate in order to increase congruency (Reicherzer & Anderson, 2006). This often included engaging role models who connect them to trans resources such as hormone therapy. Cluster three represented the ongoing process of gender formation, which results from a balance of gender authenticity and necessity (Levitt & Ippolito, 2014a). Many participants in this study reported that physical transition was a process of balancing health risks, cost, and the personal comfort that comes with gender congruency (Levitt & Ippolito, 2014a). This implies that while gender may be a stable

concept, gender exploration and gender expression are ongoing events. The ongoing process of gender formation may also include a reevaluation of sexual desires and sexual identity. Because of participant's change in social location, they reported a need to adjust their sexual orientation identity and sometimes their sexual interests, including romance and gender attraction (Levitt & Ippolito, 2014a).

In a separate article, Levitt and Ippolito (2014b) examined the four remaining categories. Cluster four included the participants' challenges to understand gender in a different way. This included being aware of their mannerisms and surroundings in order to avoid discrimination and further oppression (Levitt & Ippolito, 2014b). Some studies have referred to this as covering, which results in internalized oppression (Perez-Brumer, Hatzenbuehler, Oldenburg, & Bockting, 2015; Reisner, Greytak, Parsons, & Ybarra, 2015; Reisner et al., 2016). Another reframing of life challenges may include experiences during puberty. Transgender identity models have similar themes in the early adolescent stage, which suggest that gender congruency may be difficult for individuals who are also dealing with the effects of puberty (Reicherzer & Anderson, 2006; Devor, 2004). Specifically, Reicherzer and Anderson (2006) mentioned that female breast development and menstrual cycle along with male hair growth and vocal expansion can be a source of gender incongruence. This incongruence results in resentment towards Cisgender individuals who are unable to empathize with the dysphoria experienced by trans persons (Levitt & Ippolito, 2014b; Reicherzer & Anderson, 2006). Levitt and Ippolito (2014b) maintained that cluster four was characterized by a deep understanding of systemic gender complexity due to the individual's experience of multiple gender identities. Furthermore, cluster five illuminated the challenges that transgender individuals have regarding vocation and economics. Many participants in Levitt and Ippolito's (2014b) study shared how gender was similar to their racial

identity in that both of these identities can present challenges when securing employment. Some participants found that even if they could conceal their gender identity, they would not be Cisgender enough. Other participants found it impossible to conceal their gender identity and, therefore, found it challenging to do in-person interviews (Levitt & Ippolito, 2014b)

Levitt & Ippolito (2014b) described cluster six as focusing on the challenges with social support, while cluster seven focused on the difficulties that come with relationships. They found that repression of gender expression and the transition of gender expression impact social and intimate relationships for trans individuals (Levitt & Ippolito, 2014b). Reicherzer and Anderson (2006) included similar concepts in their conceptual article about transgender identity development. They suggested individuals who transition in middle adulthood typically find that they need to integrate their prior self to their new gender expression. In particular, individuals who transitioned during this time typically had significant parts of their identity that they needed to include in their new selves. This often means carefully navigating long-term relationships such as partners or friends, children, or a career, in order to move towards a congruent expression of gender. In fact, some trans individuals experience a loss in relationships due to societal constructs with regard to transgender folks. This also may accompany an urge to transition immediately for individuals who desire hormone replacement or gender reassignment surgery (Reicherzer & Anderson, 2006). The final piece of this study included the core category, which highlighted the common emerging themes in the seven clusters (Levitt & Ippolito, 2014b). This core relied on the idea that positive trans development is predicated on perceptual adjustment. This included developing constructs that help them externally represent their gender identity, finding ways to communicate one's gender identity both verbally and visually, and navigating the balance of one's need to achieve gender congruency and surviving social, political, and

economic oppressive forces (Levitt & Ippolito, 2014b). This study echoed a paradigm of socially constructed gender identity with undertones of essentialism that implied that trans identities consist of an unwavering gender identity. Social constructivist concepts, such as the previously mentioned developmental models, can be influenced and connected to society's collective use of language, which has the power to affirm and oppress.

Transgender Definitions

For the purpose of this study, terminology pertaining to the transgender community is important. In particular, there needs to be a clear discussion of what is meant by the term "trans female" and "transgender," along with an explanation of who is considered transgender in this study. The transgender community possesses a variety of identities and, therefore, use an array of emerging terms to describe their experiences. Capturing the verbosity of language that describes the diversity within this community would be an impossible feat.

Elkins and King (2006) conveyed that terminology regarding trans identity has fluctuated through time and across various disciplines. As a result, literature suggests that there is little shared meaning of the term 'transgender" (Wentling, Windsor, Schilt, & Lucal, 2008). Positivist literature suggested that having multiple terms for one construct is pointless (Ekins & King, 2006). For the purpose of this study, social constructivism is applied, and this study includes multiple terms that are important in order to understand the complexity of a single concept. While many terms may be appropriate, this study will utilize terminology that appears to be deemed acceptable by the trans community (described in chapter 1).

It is important to note that many gender variant individuals have rejected traditional language as a way to label their gender identity experience. Many, for instance, categorize themselves as genderqueer or gender bender as a means of liberation from the oppressive cis

narrative (Lev, 2007). Other people choose to adopt the label of androgynous or bigendered, which reflects a sense of ambiguity in their gender identity. Some choose to use terms such as FTM (female to male) and MTM (male to female), which acknowledges a transition of one gender construct to another. Moreover, some individuals may choose to abandon labels of any sort in order to describe their gender identity and may prefer pronouns such as Zi, Zir, They, and Their (Nagoshi, & Nagoshi, 2014). Gender identity and gender expression has an array of terms and exemplifies the complexity in capturing the experiences of the trans community.

Language can be used to describe common qualities that make up a particular identity, thereby providing context to substantive dialogues regarding power hierarchies and oppressive forces. As identities co-exist, so does the experience of the person who occupies multiple identities. Intersectionality incorporates all identities and not merely minority identities; however, studies have indicated that socio-structural identities may affect mental health differentially. Literature reveals that individuals with minority identities experience high levels and rates of stress compared to their privileged counterparts (Meyer, 2003). Meyers (2003) created the minority stress model to help clinicians understand the needs of marginalized populations and the disparities in mental health.

Minority Stress Model

The minority stress model is a useful tool for contextualizing stressful experiences related to minority identity and how these experiences can negatively affect mental health (Austin, & Craig, 2015; Cox, Dewaele, Van Houtte, & Vincke, 2010). Meyer, Schwartz, and Frost (2008) noted that minority status leads to increased exposure to externalized stress such as rejection or discrimination, thereby contributing to internalized stress such as anxiety, paranoia, and negative feelings regarding their gender identity. Specifically, transgender individuals experience a higher prevalence of behavioral and mental health concerns as a result of encounters with prejudice and

microaggressions. This model assumes that minority stress is in addition to the stressors that all people experienced and constructed socially such that it is beyond the individual and stems from social processes, institutions, and structures (Meyer, Schwartz, & Frost, 2008). Furthermore, this internalized stress leads to a conflict between an individual's internal self and the expectations of their cultural, social, and political environment. Meyer, Schwartz, and Frost (2008) identified three aspects of minority stress that are relevant to transgender individuals: 1) objective stressful events (environment/external factors); 2) expectations of these events occurring; and 3) internalized stigma (internalized trans-phobia). Some literature has suggested a fourth process of concealing one's gender identity (Austin, & Craig, 2015; Logie, Newman, Chakrapani, & Shunmugam, 2012). Concealing one's gender identity implies covering behaviors, clothing, and other subtle indicators of one's trans identity. These factors exacerbate mental health symptoms. However, they can potentially lead to resources that protect minorities from the adverse mental health effects. For that reason, counselors should be aware of the concepts proposed through this paradigm. This model helps to contextualize the needs of this population and implies the importance of further research on transgender experiences, particularly within the context of multiple minority identities.

Transgender Discrimination

According to Singh, Boyd, and Whitman (2010), transgender individuals, compared to the cisgender population, have experienced incongruent rates of anxiety and depression as a result of persistent trans-bigotry and micro-aggressions. Consequentially, this population also experiences a significantly higher rate of suicide and suicide attempts (Perez-Brumer, Hatzenbuehler, Oldenburg, & Bockting, 2015). Transphobia and trans-prejudice stem from society's lack of knowledge, understanding, and affirmation of transgender people, thereby

inversely impacting societal constructs and norms. As mental health and medical professions progressed, the World Professional Organization for Transgender Health (WPATH) was created to develop the official standards of care for transgender individuals to obtain hormonal or surgical treatment (Colebunders, De Cuypere, & Monstrey, 2015). From its inception in 1970 until 2000, the WPATH standards required counseling and official letters for individuals who wished to undergo gender confirmation surgery or to receive hormone treatment. While there has been a push in the counseling profession to provide culturally sensitive services, literature suggests that counselors continue to hold pathologizing and negative views of clients who do not fit the traditional binary model of gender identity (Austin, & Craig 2015; Bess & Staab, 2009; Mizock & Lewis, 2008).

Multiple qualitative and quantitative studies suggest that mental health professions have been and still are, in many ways, thought to be gatekeepers to medical procedures for transitioning such as hormone replacement therapy, chest surgery, and gender reassignment surgery (Bradford, Reisner, Honnold, & Xavier, 2013; Hagen & Galupo, 2014; Reisner, Gamarel, Dunham, Hopwood, & Hwahng, 2013; Stryker, 2008). Consequently, much of this population perceive clinicians who provide counseling services to be adversarial rather than an ally or advocate. While many transgender persons obtain counseling services as the initial step toward their medical transition, they may also seek services for various mental health concerns. For that reason, counselors need to incorporate the full identity of transgender individuals while treating a variety of pathologies.

Unknowingly, the counseling profession contributes to the pervasive oppression of the transgender community. Bradford, Reisner, Honnold, and Xavier (2013) conducted a mixed methods study of 350 transgender individuals in Virginia in which they explored the

relationships between social determinants of health/mental health and experiences of transgender-related discrimination. The findings suggested that transgender Virginians experienced extensive discrimination and macroaggressions while receiving mental health services. For that reason, transgender individuals are less likely to pursue mental health services, which subtly implies mental health professions disapprove of transgender identity. For the past twenty years, clients who experienced a gender that is incongruent with their birth gender received a diagnosis with pathological undertones called Gender Identity Disorder (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). This diagnosis led to a societal justification in labeling transgender activities as being sexually deviant, thereby resulting in this population's negative perception of mental health services (Winters & Ehrbar, 2010). This diagnosis also connects to the justification of harmful and unethical interventions such as conversion therapy, which inflicts pain and trauma on transgender individuals. Of course, there are other societal factors that contribute to this institutionalized prejudice. Mizock & Mueser, (2014) conducted a quantitative study that suggests that the pathologizing of gender identity variance has been shown to contribute to fear, which prevents transgender individuals from seeking services. Changes in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) are in response to advocacy and social justice with the intention of de-stigmatizing the transgender experience (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). The implication of the new diagnosis, gender dysphoria, provides the therapist an opportunity to appropriately assess the client in a manner that is supportive and affirmative. While it is important to recognize this shift in diagnosis, counselors must remember the history of discrimination and how it continues to impact transgender clients. Consequentially, trans-focused literature is an imperative component to regaining the trust of the transgender

community. Specifically, literature that reflects the experiences of individuals in the trans community and not just privileged members of the trans community.

Intersectionality Literature

Transgender females are not monolithic beings who have a singular sense of experiences and social identity. Instead, they navigate through various circumstances structured by cultural-racial identity, social class, age, and other factors, in addition to gender identity. Consequently, understanding trans experiences requires a complex view of identity and social structure. The concept of isolated socially constructed identities have conventionally centered on a single dimension of identity such as gender identity (Martin, Ruble, & Szkrybalo, 2002), racial identity (Cross, 1995), sexual identity (Cass, 1984), and ethnic identity (Phinney, 1990; Phinney & Ong, 2007).

Based on black feminist ideas, the predicate of intersectionality is the belief that every individual possesses multiple identities. These identities categorize individuals into groups that experience social marginalization as well as hold social power in society (Crenshaw, 1991; Warner & Shields, 2013). Moreover, there is an inextricable link between each element, trait, or social identity that a person occupies and all are critical in fully understanding one's identity (Crenshaw, 1991). In light of the overlooked dynamics in feminist movements, black activist movements, and theoretical perspectives regarding both movements, Kimberle Crenshaw coined the term intersectionality. bell hooks (2014) asserted that such an approach challenged gender as being the determining factor in a woman's life. This inquiry of intersectionality arose from the challenges experienced by black feminists regarding the historic exclusion of black women from the feminist movement (hooks, 2000). In many ways, the introduction of intersectional theory disputed the idea that women were a homogeneous community who essentially shared similar life experiences. This construct ascended from the recognition that white, middle-class women

did not necessarily serve as an adequate overarching representation of what the feminist movement has become (Sturgeon, 2016). Furthermore, McCall (2008) suggested that intersectionality, as a theoretical perspective, is imperative in addressing the experiences of people who occupy multiple forms of salience within society.

As Davis (2008) proposed, intersectional theory provides a way of understanding the interaction that occurs between various categories of identity, such as cultural-racial, gender, sexual orientation, social practice, institutional arrangements, and other cultural ideologies. Specifically, it describes the manner in which power institutionally constructs social interactions that, for many people, lead to experiences of oppression (Crenshaw, 1989; Meyer 2008). The development of intersectionality arose as a response to advocacy models that addressed the needs of privileged groups within marginalized communities, such as African American men and white gay men (Crenshaw, 1991). This oversight in advocacy models prevented policymakers, researchers, and social services from having the ability to understand the nuance and complexity of intersecting relationships (Collins 2002). Collins (1990) surmised that intersections of identity have the ability to create both oppression and opportunity. Privileged positions offer more than avoidance of disadvantage or oppression. Rather, privileged positions provide unearned opportunity and access to status, rewards, and resources unavailable to other intersections. For instance, a financially affluent white, gay male will have varying degrees of opportunity that look quite different from a Latino, gay male who identifies as working poor. This example illuminates the need for intersectional focus in the LGBT community, which historically has focused on the rights of white, middle-class males (Bernstein, 2015).

Research on intersectionality has been extensive in the past several years. However, numerous scholars studied the experiences of women of color in order to clarify the problematic

social positions within discourses of power (i.e., sexism) and how women of color experience classism and racism at the same time (Collins, 1990, 2002; Crenshaw, 1991; hooks, 2000; Davis 2008; Vivar, 2016). Intersectionality has evolved into a singular framework or theoretical orientation that is used to process data or explore experiences. In fact, research has paved the way for the use of intersectionality as a natural central theme in academia and politics (Dhamoon, 2011; Levine-Rasky, 2011; Lutz H, Vivar, & Supik, 2011). On the contrary, Anthias (2013) conceptualized intersectionality as a range of social positions that heuristically serve to better understand life hierarchies and the boundaries that exist from these hierarchies. Gaining an understanding of intersectionality through a heuristic lens provides an opportunity for researchers to make their studies community focused and change driven. Furthermore, Shin et al. (2017) provided insight into intersectionality by analyzing research published in the Journal of Counseling Psychology and The Counseling Psychologist. Their results suggested that most of the articles assessed do not utilize intersectionality in a way that promotes systemic social change, which is the trademark of intersectional research. They systematically reviewed forty articles based on standards suggested by Dill and Kohlman (2012) and found they effectively utilized intersectional jargon without critiquing systems of inequality (Grzanka, Santos, & Moradi, 2017). While the articles focused on multiple identities and how they impact people, they did not illuminate the salience of the intersectional population from the mainstream marginalized population (Grzanka, Santos, & Moradi, 2017). For instance, authors explored the experience of working poor lesbians without differentiating issues this population may experience, such as job discrimination, from the larger lesbian population. This omission excluded essential perspectives from the participants' experiences. In contrast, strong intersectional research analyzes the intertwining relationships that occur between structural

forms of inequality, such as homophobia, ableism, cisphobia, sexism, ageism and racism (Dill & Kohlman, 2012). Similar to what Shin et al. (2017) denoted as transformative intersectionality, this research study hopes to inspire and call for social reform and social justice advocacy in counseling.

Examining how various identities contribute to an individual's experiences of harassment and discrimination involves the use of an intersectional lens through which researchers view lived experiences as crucial in conceptualizing the nuances of these occurrences (Crenshaw, 1991). Scholars run the risk of perpetuating assumptions and over-generalizations when they limit their studies to gender identity when discussing trans issues (Sánchez & Vilain, 2009). Intersectionality constitutes a vital step forward in research and social progress across multiple spheres of inquiry and influence. It is for that reason that the next several sections will dissect the literature on the intersection of identities, including cultural-racial, SES, age, and gender.

Racial identities. Racial identities have often been the centerpiece of intersectional studies. In fact, people of color have participated in the mainstream LGBT rights movement from the beginning, including the development of strong sub-communities within their racial communities. Despite this, false narratives regarding LGBT persons of color have often reinforced the message that racial minorities are not welcomed in mainstream, white-LGBT communities (Moradi et al., 2010). This subtle yet persistent message speaks to the need for LGBT centered intersectionality research and advocacy.

Similar to SES and LGBT identities, race is often defined as many discreet categories (i.e., African American, Caucasian, Asian American, Native American, etc.) (Sturgeon, 2016). Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall (2013) found that, in reality, few scholars include operational definitions of race or ethnicity in scholarly articles and rarely justify the author's selection

choices in measurement. This assumption alludes to the idea that we all have a shared meaning

of race. In fact, scholarship on race and ethnicity is riddled with debates over various ways of

looking at and defining race in academic research (Hong, Chao, & No, 2009; Johnston, 2014;

Morning, 2009; Omi, 2010). Omi (2010) argued racial differences possess varying

conceptualizations throughout continuous social, historical, and political debates of race.

Scholarship in history and anthropology outlines how modern studies perpetuate the notion of

unassailable racial groups and related disparate social outcomes based on perceived biological

factors (Quintana, 2007). This complex matter has shifted over time, with a trend toward the

language being socially constructed race narratives and critical evaluations of how these social

constructs originate, evolve, and refine in research studies (Rivas & Drake et al., 2014).

According to Gillborn (2015), in order to understand how racism operates in our society, we

must acknowledge how cultural-racial identity intersects with other areas of oppression at

various times and settings.

Historically, literature in the counseling field has underrepresented transgender people of

color (Bowleg, 2008; Moradi Et al., 2016; Parent, DeBlaere, & Moradi, 2013); however, existing

research identifies multiple experiences of oppression as significant barriers to mental health

wellness and physical well-being (Bradford, Reisner, Honnold, & Xavier, 2013; Grant et al.,

2011; Saffin, 2011). For instance, Grant et al. (2011) surveyed transgender people throughout a

region in Virginia to explore the barriers experienced by the community. This study suggested

that transgender people of color experience the highest level of barriers that exist in housing,

employment, addiction, incarceration, health care access, mental health care access, and other

areas that may greatly impact this population. Additionally, the National Coalition of Anti-

Violence Programs (2012) reported that trans people of color were more than twice as likely to

experience anti-transgender discrimination and were more than twice as likely to experience

police violence. Similarly, Kattari et al. (2015) conducted a study focusing on the discrimination

regarding access to health care experienced by different ethnicities who identified as transgender.

The result of their study revealed that their nonwhite participants reported statistically significant

higher rates of having experienced discrimination compared to their white counterparts. With

that in mind, the American Counseling Association competencies for working with transgender

individuals acknowledge the high rates of oppression and violence that transgender people of

color experience and suggest that these experiences of oppression will likely influence the

therapeutic dynamic (Burnes et al., 2010). If not addressed, it may also impact the therapeutic

outcome for a client in this community. Consequently, in addition to exploring one's own gender

identity, the ACA called for counselors to explore other aspects of cultural identity, such as

racial background, in order to examine critically how these intersections may influence their

attitudes regarding gender expression and identity (Burnes et al., 2010).

The intersection of the social constructs of transphobia and racial bigotry results in

extremely marginalized spaces, where much-needed gender affirmation does not typically exist

among transwomen of color. Often, transgender women of color experience trauma at a young

age resulting from childhood harassment for gender non-conformity (Graham, 2014),

experiences of discrimination and violence (Bockting, Miner, Swinburne Romine, Hamilton, &

Coleman, 2013), family rejection (Hwahng, & Nuttbrock, 2014), and experiences of being

sexually objectified, including sexual violence (Sevelius, 2013). These experiences can be

imperative in understanding the unique experiences of trans persons of color and what

constitutes and contributes to resiliency for this community. Singh and Mckleroy (2011) studied

the resilience experience of trans people of color who endured trauma and found that resilience

included (a) a sense of pride in one's racial and gender identity, (b) recognizing and navigating racial and gender-based oppression, (c) negotiating relationships with biological family, (d) obtaining financial and healthcare resources, (e) connecting with transgender persons of color for activism efforts, and (f) galvanizing positive thinking and hope for the future. Furthermore, Beth Melander et al. (2010) studied the resilience impact of group membership and connections with other trans persons of color and suggested that these affiliations promote resilience and coping. Despite research on the occurrence of traumatic events and resilience portrayed by trans persons of color, accurate estimates of the prevalence of interpersonal trauma do not exist for this community (Reisner, White-Hughto, Gamarel, Keuroghlian, Mizock, & Pachankis, 2016). This may be a result of limited amounts of standardized reporting regarding the occurrence of trauma among subpopulations, such as transgender persons, on the local and national level (Budge, Chin, & Minero, 2017).

Religious views held by many families of color often include rigid values regarding notions of gender and suggest that gender nonconforming individuals are immoral, thus leading to higher levels of family rejection of children who do not identify with the gender binary (Koken et al., 2009). In fact, Bockting et al. (2013) suggested that transwomen of color are more likely to receive gender affirmation from their friends rather their family. This is particularly problematic because family rejection at a young age often leads to homelessness, dropping out of school, and a persistent cycle of sex work, substance abuse, and incarceration among transwomen (Reisner, Greytak, Parsons, & Ybarra, 2015). Adding marginalized racial identities intensifies this cycle of racism, poverty, transphobia, and violence (Singh, 2012). This cycle is even more intense for African American transwomen (Singh, 2012), emphasizing the interconnectedness of racism, transphobia, poverty, and violence.

SES identities. The income gap between poor and wealthy Americans continues to widen and is a topic of political conversation (McLevey, 2015). With political changes occurring, attention to economic issues becomes more prevalent as counselors increasingly look at social class and classism. There have been numerous studies that correlate mental health concerns with social class (Budge, Thai, Tebbe, & Howard, 2016; Wadsworth, Evans, Grant, Carter, & Duffy, 2016). While studies on the intersectional experience of social class and gender identity are emerging, the occurrence of this type of scholarship is nascent in counseling literature (McCullough et al., 2017; Moradi et al., 2016; Taylor, 2010, 2012). This dearth of literature is consequential because the developing focus on the intersection of class and transgender identity has specific implications for the counseling profession. For example, according to the U.S. Census Bureau (2011), more than 38% of single mothers and their children live in poverty. While that is helpful for the general population, there is little information on transgender parents who are sole caregivers for their children and are working class, impoverished, or occupy other marginalized identities (Burnes, & Singh, 2016). Moreover, LGBT youth from working and poor social class environments reported a more hostile school climate compared to their non- LGBT counterparts. (Kosciw, Greytek, & Diaz, 2009). While bullying is a key political discussion, there is a lack of focus on the intersection of age, social class, and LGBT identity Burnes, & Singh, 2016). This suggests a lack of attention on the part of counseling research regarding the impact of occupying multiple minority identities.

In addition to experiencing oppression and dysphoria that stem from societal constructs and internalized oppression, transgender individuals often experience unemployment or underemployment (Hendricks & Testa, 2012). As previously mentioned, exact or even approximate statistics on this community are not available on a significant scale. Navigating

career concerns can be especially challenging for trans individuals, particularly when multiple forms of oppression are at work. Furthermore, Brown et al. (2012) revealed the occurrence of comparatively low wages for trans individuals in their chosen fields. Low wages can be another barrier for trans individuals acquiring necessary health resources. Literature in management and human resources regarding the wages LGBT individuals earn overall suggested that employment earnings are often a primary economic concern for members of the LGBT community (Ahmed, Andersson, & Hammarstedt, 2013; Anteby & Anderson, 2014; Barron & Hebl, 2013; Gates, & Viggiani, 2014; McNulty, 2017). While these worries are mostly economic in context, issues of social class and access to social capital are direct outcomes of these economic concerns. An overall lack of legal protections for LGBT individuals magnify these unfair labor practices (Spade, 2011). This lack of protection can be particularly devastating for transgender individuals who cannot afford to appear passable due to the prices of hormones, clothing, and other external gender identifiers. Due to their class and gender position, they are more vulnerable to direct discrimination, which in turn contributes to their feelings of dysphoria and ostracization (Bradford, Reisner, Honnold, & Xavier, 2013).

One particular issue that emerged from the literature was the numerous financial barriers that occurred for transgender individuals from either a lack of job protection or lack of employment (Brewster, Velez, Mennicke, & Tebbe, 2014; Brewster et al., 2012; Budge et al., 2010; Dispenza et al., 2012; Schilt, 2006). Brewster, Velez, Mennicke, & Tebbe, (2014) highlighted multiple forms of work stress experienced by this community, including gendered spaces, hostile coworkers, and lack of employee protection policies. This qualitative study of 139 trans individuals found that most of their participants experienced harassment and discrimination within the workplace. The participants also reported that the transitioning process

was a double-edged sword in that it resulted in an increasing comfort with self but also difficulty managing gendered spaces, such as changing rooms, rest rooms, and general dress code (Brewster, Velez, Mennicke, & Tebbe, 2014). Furthermore, discrimination could lead to decreased social capital for trans individuals. Specifically, it is a particular concern for transgender individuals who may fear being "outed" at work, thus decreasing their ability to maintain or create social networks, which may, in turn, impact their ability to earn more or obtain future jobs (Dispenza et al., 2012). Walinsky and Whitcomb (2010) studied the impact of unfair employment laws on transgender people in rural communities. Their study noted that transgender individuals who experienced employment termination based on trans discrimination found it difficult to find a new job due to low social capital in the community, often leading to several months of unemployment.

The lack of employment can prevent transgender individuals from seeking medical support for the transitioning process. For many transgender individuals, gender dysphoria is a persistent and grueling experience, which gender transition alleviates (Levitt, & Ippolito, 2014). In an effort to make their gender expression more congruent with their gender identity, many will decide to access specific interventions. However, issues of socioeconomic class arise, thereby influencing how far their transition can go (Johnson, 2015). SES-focused considerations as such can often put transgender individuals of low-income brackets in harm's way, as they may secure employment that puts them at risk (i.e., sex worker or drug seller) (Nadal, Davidoff, & Fujii-Doe, 2014). Such acts further increase feelings of gender dysphoria, internalized oppression, and reduced self-worth. SES position, as it pertains to the transgender community, is a particularly important aspect of understanding the perspective of trans individuals. Unfortunately, empirical research on transgender socioeconomic class suggested that economic positions of transgender

clients have not routinely been addressed by counselors despite their average income being significantly below the poverty line (Bess & Stabb, 2009; Dispenza et al., 2012; Johnson, 2015).

Gehi and Arkles (2007) assumed that trans individuals are monolithic in terms of their ability to transition when in fact, many trans individuals have limited options when it comes to funding various aspects of gender transition. In a review of intersectional literature, Burnes and Singh (2016) suggested that there is a need for further research on the intersections between marginalized identities and social class identities. LGBT intersectional researchers' critique of mainstream LGBT advocacy efforts found that they primarily focused on the needs of the relatively privileged LGBT people, specifically, those who identify as cisgender male and middle-class, despite their appearance of serving everyone (Meyer, 2008; Ward, 2008). Furthermore, Meyer (2017) conducted a content analysis on the It Gets Better Campaign by assessing the inclusivity of 128 videos produced by the campaign. Meyer's analysis revealed that the overarching progress in the gay right's movement encouraged LGBT people to focus on middle-class practices such as college, traveling, or entrepreneurship, while downplaying social limitations and hardships. This outcome suggests that the LGBT movement has primarily focused on privileged experiences, which results in overlooking the intersections of marginalized identities.

Age identities. When considering research on transgender intersectionality, age was revealed as an underutilized identity characteristic that seldom showed up in the literature (Elder, 2016). While the subject of transgender aging is increasing in popularity, most studies merged transgender aging into publications focusing on the more general topics of LGBT aging. (Aldridge & Conlon, 2012; Arthur, 2015; Stinchcombe, Smallbone, Wilson, & Kortes-Miller, 2017). One study by Witten (2009) suggested that trans persons developed their elderly

transgender identity through one of three ways: (1) coming out later and transitioning later in life, (2) coming to terms with their gender variance early in life, or (3) growing up in a culture that openly accepted non-traditional gender identity and expression. These factors alone could create a vastly different experience for transgender individuals. Witten (2009) suggested that elderly transgender individuals have unique experiences that provide a reference point for civil rights in history while encompassing a diverse cohort. Specifically, she reminded us that the combination of one's age and coming-out experience can create a "historic moment" for the person, thus leading to "potentially different needs, potentially different ways of self-expression, and potentially different social support systems" (Witten, 2009, pp. 37–38). The intersection of age and gender identity are complex and result in varying experiences with internalized oppression and gender identity self-esteem. As trans individuals develop, they are able to use their oppression management skills as a means of building resiliency. Working through internal and external oppression can contribute to resources such as one's ability to culminate support and reframe cognitions.

Despite limitations in the literature regarding issues centered on transgender lifespan, some articles suggested a consistent concern for physical and mental health disparities such as depression (Fredriksen-Goldsen et al., 2015; Foglia & Fredriksen-Goldsen, 2014). Other struggles that occur with old age, such as financial stress and family stress, compound these mental health concerns. Fredriksen-Goldsen et al. (2015) studied the health conditions of various aged groups of LGBT individuals. Specifically, the authors compared 2,560 LGBT adults older than fifty, and results suggested that the influence of discrimination was particularly salient for older LGBT individuals. In fact, compared to cisgender LGB older adults, transgender older adults reported significantly increased financial barriers with regard to health care access

(Fredriksen-Goldsen, Kim, Shiu, Goldsen, & Emlet, 2015). Economic disparities of this type contributed to a lack of insurance, thereby denying coverage for appropriate medical treatment. This may be especially devastating for transgender individuals who felt they could not transition earlier in life.

Moreover, multiple qualitative inquiries highlighted the perspectives of older LGBT individuals who experienced the longstanding negative impact of social exclusion and marginalization when seeking healthcare (Van Wagenen, Driskell, & Bradford, 2013; Siverskog, 2014). Research on health inequities emphasized the negative impact that prior experiences of discrimination have on health outcomes (Fredriksen-Goldsen et al., 2015; Foglia & Fredriksen-Goldsen, 2014; Van Wagenen, Driskell, & Bradford, 2013). Counselors should be aware of the intersection of gender identity and age and how that creates a unique experience for their clients. Despite the comparable increase in transgender populations (Witten & Eyler, 2012), the mental health needs of older trans individuals has been largely overlooked by most mental health professionals (Siverskog, 2014). Current counseling practices may marginalize the needs of this group by making assumptions regarding experience and minimizing the impact of oppression that accumulates throughout one's lifetime. Specifically, counselors who fail to embrace and affirm trans identities will reduce their ability to help the trans population. This results from the historically oppressive relationship with the transgender community and mental health care professionals (Elder, 2016). Consequently, older transgender people appear more likely to continue to avoid disclosing their identity, thereby sustaining inequity of care.

While some transgender individuals avoid divulging their gender identity due to transphobia or limited resources, others wait until later in life to transition because they have increased financial resources (Witten & Eyler, 2012). Other transgender individuals might also

wait until they retire to transition, when they are less concerned about facing job discrimination.

Transitioning is a unique process that can vary considerably regarding how one transitions, how

long it takes to transition, and what time in a person's life they transition. Ettner and Wylie

(2013) noted that transgender individuals who transition early were typically able to integrate

their identity by middle and late adulthood. Their qualitative study suggested that younger trans

individuals will face less stigma attached to their gender identity then those in late adulthood.

Alternatively, individuals who transition in later adulthood have a particularly difficult time.

Ettner and Wylie's (2013) research suggested that this may include feelings of shame, isolation,

and lack of support, along with thoughts about wasted time. These intense feelings can create

havoc in previously stable individuals (Ettner & Wylie, 2013). While the act of transitioning can

be emotionally imperative and life-changing no matter when one chooses to transition, it is

important to acknowledge unintended consequences of transitioning later in life. Specifically,

Bailey (2012) articulated that later life transitioning might increase health concerns, confuse

engrained social roles, and create legal concerns, encounters with age-based discrimination,

dating difficulties, and employment issues. These issues are concerns that counselors who work

with this population should be aware of when assisting older trans individuals through the

transition process.

      LGB intersectionality. The term LGBT makes a few presumptions with respect to

research and counselor implications. First, this term assumes that sexual orientation and gender

identity are in some ways similar. By definition, they are conceptually different and therefore,

have different experiences (Huang et al., 2010). Secondly, researchers who utilize this term

assume that their study will include a representative amount of people from the transgender

community. As Moradi et al., (2016) argued, this typically is not the case. Many articles include

only a small sample of the transgender community, which cannot be generalized to the overall community. For instance, some articles suggest that their results will be meaningful for LGBT individuals, yet transgender participants represent less than five percent of their study (Moradi et al., 2016). These presumptions are important to acknowledge when addressing transgender intersectionality because it illuminates the gap in literature by identifying the need to separate transgender experiences from the larger acronym. For that reason, I have separated LGBT intersectionality and transgender intersectionality literature in the next few sections.

While the traditional research on LGB issues focuses on single identities, the recent trend is to focus on utilizing intersectionality as a theory to explain the complexity of LGB individuals. For instance, Bowleg (2012) conducted a study on the experiences of gay and bisexual individuals. The study investigated the awareness of how the participant's identities intersect to create a unique experience. The participants ranked their identities in order of importance and expressed all of their intersections as a singular identity. The author then argued that power relations shape the salience of social identities. Her study suggested that people unconsciously do "identity work" as they determine the most salient part of their identity in reaction to power dynamics that occur in social situations (Bowleg, 2012). The conclusions of her study can create predictions regarding systemic situational power dynamics and how these dynamics can influence our social identities.

In another intersectionality study, Riggs (2012) investigated how different intersections of social identity establish meaning among multiple identities. Riggs utilized self-categorizing to de-dichotomize the classifying of gay men by showing how intersections reflect a certain status in online dating profiles. Specifically, he considered a sample's identification within an online social dating community as well as the sample's description of other men. Riggs (2012) explored

this platform to examine a space where expressions of openly racist attitudes can exist through the trope of "personal preference." Several participants in the study displayed racism on several different levels, including racism disguised as a personal preference, the emasculation of Asian gay men, and the assumption that saying 'sorry' makes racist remarks acceptable. This study is a prime example of the importance of considering intersectional identities when discussing microaggressions in the LGB community.

Swank and Fahs (2012) analyzed the intersection of gender and cultural racial identity for sexual minorities who engaged in LGB activism and found that there were not substantial racial or gender differences among those participating and those not participating in public protest. They examined the frequency and qualities of activist involvement and how their position influenced that involvement. Swank and Fahs (2012) results suggested that desire for social justice was more prevalent among those who experienced injustice through the lens of more than one stigmatized identity. The study provided context for the discussion regarding the overrepresentation of Caucasian sexual minorities in LGB activism efforts. Swank and Fahs echoed the sentiment of Yuval-Davis (2006) regarding the importance of highlighting intersectionality. That is, in order to accomplish equality for all sexual minorities, other systems of intersection, such as gender identity, SES, and age, need to be confronted as well.

In the discourse of LGB affirmative care, the concept of binary intersectionality has increased. More counselors and counselor educators are attempting to integrate intersectional concepts in their LGB focused work (Grzanka & Miles, 2016). More to the point, they understand how two identities create a different perspective for clients. Take for instance a study by Grzank and Miles (2016) involving a review of over 1200 minutes of counseling demonstration videos. They found that intersectionality was present in most of the videos and

was even a primary focus in some. Participants (counselors) utilized intersectionality to better understand their clients; however, their interventions focused on binary identities as opposed to multiple identities. The authors suggested that it is not apparent if or how these identities were co-constructed or if the therapist was inclusive of all of their clients' identities (Grzanka & Miles, 2016). This is problematic because it implies the possibility of leaving out imperative aspects of the LGB person's identity. For instance, understanding a how a client's cultural-racial identity and sexual orientation create a unique coming out experience is necessary but not sufficient. A client's age could be an imperative aspect of their identity as well, thereby creating a different coming out experience. It is important to note that intersectionality requires us to continuously question the important counseling work that we are already involved in. In order to use intersectionality appropriately, counselors should continue to be actively exploring the ways in which intersectionality can inform existing theories and ways of conducting therapy.

Transgender intersectionality. As clarified throughout this paper thus far, there is more to the identity of an individual than their gender. People who identify as gender minorities are simultaneously members of a variety of other social and biological-based groups that add to the person's individuality. This acknowledgement has contributed to the rapid increase of in the last few decades of general research on the transgender community (Parent,, DeBlaere, & Moradi, 2013). Zabus and Coad (2013) suggested that individuals in the trans community do not experience or express gender separately from other social positions they occupy. As previously mentioned, much of the intersectional studies on transgender individuals have been grouped with the LGBT community, thereby overshadowing the trans-experience. Also, literature on trans individuals has historically ignored the intersection of identities (Budge, Thai, Tebbe, & Howard, 2016; Moradi et al., 2016; Parent, DeBlaere, & Moradi, 2013). Despite the variance of identity

within the population, scholarship on diverse populations has categorized trans individuals as a homogeneous group (Moradi et al., 2016). Consequentially, this categorization leads to assumptions regarding what it means to be a transgender individual. Specifically, there is a societal assumption that beauty, even in marginalized spaces, comes in the form of other privileges such as cultural-racial identity and social class. Take, for instance, Mocarski, Butler, Emmons, and Smallwood's (2013) study in which they assessed the impact of the reality show, Dancing with the Stars, featuring Chaz Bono, which was one of the first presentations of trans individuals in media. The author described Bono's appearance, while being important in terms of trans visibility, as representative of the trans-normativity of a post-operative, heterosexual, white, upper class, trans man. The implications being that Bono's experience is not relative nor reflective of trans men who do not occupy those positions of privilege. Similarly, Nicolazzo (2016) studied the experiences of black, trans, non-binary students and how their experiences greatly differed from norms presented on television. This illuminated the ongoing need for intersectional understating of trans experiences. The author communicated that while particular transgender individuals are gaining social visibility and people are beginning to understand their experience, this does not relate equitably to all trans people. Specifically, the extensive public visibility of transgender people such as Janet Mock, Laverne Cox, and Caitlyn Jenner suggest that to be transgender is to medically transition from one's birth-assigned sex to one's gender identity (Nicolazzo, 2016). This, of course, creates issues for those who do not occupy similar positions of power within the trans community. Socioeconomic class, for instance, can be a deterring factor in affording such transition interventions. Age may also deter someone based on their family and relationship status. For instance, young trans persons who live with their parents may decide not to come out as a trans due to the fear of being homeless.

Kuper, Nussbaum, & Mustanski's (2012) described the experience of trans individuals who did not feel the transgender umbrella represented them because of the emphasis on gender binary expression. The transgender umbrella typically reflects the values of individuals who experience a transgender identity and choose to express it in a binary way. For example, a trans female who feels the need to look "traditionally" effeminate. Participants in Kuper, Nussbaum & Mustanski's (2012) study felt their gender did not necessarily reflect the expectations of cisnormativity, thereby some gender interventions such as surgery may not be appealing to them. This can be particularly problematic when attempting to achieve other forms of congruency, such as a name change on a birth certificate. This is challenging because, in the United States, official document name and gender changes involve proof of undergoing surgery (Westbrook & Schilt, 2014). For example, for a person to change their gender on their birth certificate in Virginia, it is required that the individual present a certified copy proving that they have had a medical procedure (Lambda Legal, 2015). This could present a social challenge for individuals who want surgery but also want to express their trans identity. As an example, consider the experience of a pre surgery-trans female who is presenting full time as a female and is searching for a job. If this job requests multiple forms of identification, as many jobs do, she may struggle with congruency in her identification documents and her physical appearance. This may require her to come out as trans or may even disqualify her for the job. West and Schilt's (2014) demonstrated in their case study analysis that requirements for determining gender differ across varying social situations. In other words, biological and identity-based ideologies have created a system where the criteria for gender determination varies across social spaces. Their participants described unique perspectives to what gender identity means to them and how the binary system has been corrosive and oppressive (Westbrook & Schilt, 2014). In some spaces, it is especially

challenging. The authors suggested that trans female identities are more dependent on genital transition in order to access female spaces. This speaks to the political and social oppression geared towards trans females and how it is internalized by members of the trans community (Westbrook & Schilt, 2014). Thus, internalized oppression is experienced by trans females who do not wish to or cannot obtain genital surgery.

The transgender community represents a diverse group of people of different ethnicities, faiths, ages, socioeconomic, and cultural backgrounds with varying family structures, abilities, languages of origin, and mental health needs. Counselors need to emphasize this diversity in their therapeutic approach and adapt existing theoretical perspectives to best meet the needs of their transgender clients through an intersectional paradigm. McCullough et al. (2017) studied the experiences of thirteen trans individuals who went through therapy with a mental health professional. Consistent with qualitative inquiries about desirable characteristics of counselors providing services to LGB persons (Benson, 2013; Bess & Stabb, 2009; Elder, 2016), McCullough, et al. (2017) found that transgender participants value a warm and empathic atmosphere where they felt counselors valued their identity without overemphasizing the role of their gender identity. In other words, trans individuals in the study wanted counselors to understand and respect their identity without assuming it was the primary focus for the session (McCullough et al., 2017). Similar to Elder's 2016 study, the participants also found that community engagement and support was particularly helpful, though challenging. More to the point, literature suggests that transgender individuals find the most support with other transgender individuals whose identities intersect at similar points (Budge, Thai, Tebbe, & Howard, 2016; Elder, 2016; McCullough et al., 2017; Moradi, 2016). This study determined the importance of community gatherings such as trans people of color support groups or card game

events for older trans females. When providing therapeutic services to trans individuals,

counselors need to recognize the importance of support and connection with friends, health and

mental health professionals, family, and the community.

In addition to societal assumptions regarding the trans community, there continue to be

scholarly shortcomings (Shin et al., 2017). According to a content analysis by Moradi et al.

(2016), intersectional research on trans individuals has yet to evolve comprehensively. The lack

of representation in research has perpetuated misconceptions about the transgender experience

for individuals who do not identify with middle class, young, and white values. As previously

highlighted, this is problematic because multi-minority identities create an alternative experience

when compared to individuals who experience singular minority status. While some scholarship

tends to assume that trans individuals are monolithic (Moradi et al., 2016), other studies have

noted intersectionality within trans populations (Budge et al., 2016). Recently, studies have

examined the intersection between transgender identity and other single identities, such as racial

identities (Dozier, 2005; Schilt, 2006; Singh, 2013, 2012), sexual identity (Bockting, Benner, &

Coleman, 2009; Hill, 2007), or SES (Gehi & Arkles, 2007). Inversely, literature that examined

multiple identities of transgender people (Dozier, 2005; Schilt, 2006) focused only on trans men.

Consequently, there is a lack of comprehensive research on the simultaneous influences and

relativity of multiple identities and how these identities contribute to mental health outcomes

within the trans female population.

Summary of the Literature

In summation, this section aimed at categorically describing the need for intersectional

focused research on trans individuals by discussing the current occurrence of trans oppression,

the developmental models that highlight varying trans experiences, and the existing research on

intersectionality and transgender-focused intersectionality as it pertains to various combinations

of identity. To highlight these points, there are two major contributions in the literature that

illuminate the importance of this study. As mentioned throughout this paper, a content analysis

conducted by Moradi et al. (2016) suggested a substantial amount of LGBT research that

identifies psychological problems, behavior risk, coming out experiences, identity-related

transitions, and diagnosable gender disorders. However, the authors suggested that research on

this population continues to have gaps, including practical application and the impact of

intersectionality. One reason is that transgender individuals fall through the cracks of what has

been termed the LGBT umbrella. As Fassinger and Arseneau, (2007) discussed, it can be

demoralizing and oppressive to assume that transgender individuals can be represented by one

type of transgender individual, much less by the LGBT acronym at large. This lack of

representation in the LGBT research includes studies that have limited transgender

representation yet include the trans community in their description. While intersectionality

research has been well documented for LGBT individuals (Bowleg, 2013, 2008; Burnes &

Singh; 2016; Grzanka & Miles, 2016; Foglia & Fredriksen-Goldsen, 2014; Huang et al., 2010;

Warner & Shields, 2013), it may not be transferable to transgender individuals (Moradi, et al.,

2016). Moreover, research on transgender individuals cannot be generalized without first

utilizing an intersectional perspective (Budge, Thai, Tebbe, & Howard, 2016; McCullough et al.,

2017; Moradi, 2016). Appropriately contextualizing clinical recommendations for this

community includes identifying the emerging issues regarding transgender discrimination in

counseling in addition to acknowledging the impact of societal oppression. In particular, future

recommendations of trans-affirmative counseling should include literature aimed at

intersectional identities of transgender females. For this reason, the subsequent chapter will focus

on integrative community methods to engage and analyze the intersectional experience of

transgender females in reference to the process of transitioning.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

When researching trans populations, it is imperative to consider the role of power and privilege in research. Feminist methodologist Harnois (2013) critiqued the dichotomy of quantitative versus qualitative research. She primarily focused on the misconception that qualitative is subjective to a fault while quantitative research is unbiased and truth-seeking. For instance, some researchers consider quantitative research methods to be more scientific and normative compared to qualitative studies, thereby being accepted for higher impact journals (Grzanka, Santos & Moradi, 2017; Harnois, 2012; Hays & Singh, 2011; Hays, Wood, Dahl, Kirk, & Jenkins, 2016). Harnois argued that quantitative studies may include valuable descriptions and explanations, but they tend to miss contextual details. The value in a qualitative approach is that the research will result in a rich view of the intersectional experience, and may result in future studies of a similar nature.

Qualitative inquiry is a form of research that aims to understand and explore the subjective experience of individuals. Qualitative research includes an inductive analysis, which requires constant reflection on both the research process and the findings (Hays & Singh, 2011). As previously mentioned, this study differs from current trans-focused intersectional studies in that I used a narratological approach to understand the essence of the intersectional experience (Moradi et al., 2016). Along with being audited by a member of the LGBT community, I utilized this approach to adequately articulate the trans female experience in a way that will positively impact the trans community. Through discussions and interviews with members of the trans community, along with archetypal data, this study will gain an increased understanding of their subjective experience, which quantitative instruments cannot obtain. According to Warner

(2013), the logic of gender concepts is deeply ingrained in social institutions, and as a result, queer struggles aim not just at toleration or equal status but at challenging those institutions. Regarding this logic and the proposed study, the ontology of the narratological approach transcends the lines of dominant gender-normative discourses, specifically concerning intersectional discourses. Overall, this approach contradicts traditional research methods and aims to explore the depth of experiences as participants lived them.

Budge, Thai, Tebbe, & Howard (2016) conducted a quantitative study on trans intersectionality in order to assess the role of multiple identities on mental health outcomes. While their study is similar to the current study with respect to the research topic, this author explored the in-depth experiences that coincided with trans individuals experience of intersectionality identities. A qualitative methodological approach may add a critical lens to this intersectional inquiry and as a result, may address some of the shortcomings of the existing trans intersectional research. Moreover, Budge, Thai, and Howard (2016) focused on the intersection of cultural-racial identity, socioeconomic class, and sexual orientation while this study will focus on areas such as cultural-racial identity, age and SES in relation to one's trans identity. The focus of this study centers on the previously mentioned gaps in the literature along with indicators that these particular identities may create a particularly unique yet misunderstood experience for the participants.

Conceptual Framework

This study examined diminished voices, suppressed narratives, and the expansion of counter-hegemonic queer discourse. I explored the role of intersectional identities in the lives of trans individuals through the lens of narratological inquiry. The primary objective of narratological research is to examine the richness of a particular communities' experience, which

is often overlooked in traditional, quantitative research designs. Narrative analysis allowed me to examine how intersectional narratives construct the experience of transitioning for trans females. Essentially, narrative analysis describes a structural theory that can include de-narrated texts, events, interviews, or artifacts that serve to tell a story (Bal, 2009). Through analysis of trans intersectional narratives regarding their experience of transition, narratology has the ability to expose ideological underpinnings of a narrative's construction and articulate its influential function. As the interviewer and primary researcher, it is important to keep in mind that such discourse occurs subjectively and is connected to and formed through the collaboration with my cisnormative experiences. Encapsulating narrative analysis in a broad sense is to understand its suitability for multiple forms of data, thereby allowing me to utilize transcribed interviews along with archival data. Specifically, narrative analysis typically incorporates multiple forms of data, thereby creating an accurate picture of stories created from the data (Savin-Baden & Van Niekerk, 2007).

This method is predicated on illuminating experiences in regard to how individuals interpret those experiences (Andrews, Squire, & Tamboukou, 2013). Consequently, this method increased the rigor of this study and provided an opportunity for a more in-depth examination of participants' experiences. The narratological method also promotes the use of post coding or coding throughout the data analysis process in order to promote multiple perspectives, thereby reducing individual bias (Saldaña, 2015). According to St. Pierre & Jackson (2014), post-coding analysis functions as an open means of analysis that occurs anywhere and anytime throughout the analysis process. Post coding leads to coders coming to a consensus regarding the meaning of the data. In addition, the narratological method employs the use of an external auditor in order to check the coder's work. The final step in the narratological method is the creation of domains

and core concepts that stem from the analysis process. Bal (2009) described these concepts and domains as a "fabula," which is a series of logical events that are chronological in nature. Therefore, the purpose of creating these domains and core concepts is to illustrate the meaning and intention of the trans community narrative. Andrews, Squire, and Tamboukou (2013) described the coding process as directly connected to the participants experience in a way that is accurate and truthful to their experience. To accomplish this, I utilized trustworthy measures and an intersectional lens to clarify the experience of participants. Epistemologically, knowledge about the intersection of transgender identities was deconstructed and reorganized through the narratological theoretical lens and characterized through my research paradigm, intersectional theory. Intersectionality can be used to effectively explore the nature of multiple forms of oppression, and is, therefore, a complementary framework to our narratological lens, which allowed me to illuminate participant's subjective stories.

As previously mentioned, the theory of intersectionality describes ways in which oppressive institutions are interconnected and cannot be separate from one another (Crenshaw, 1991). Thus, in order to fully understand the extent of oppression for marginalized groups, one must investigate the ways in which the structure of one group's oppression becomes shaped by experiencing dual membership in another oppressed group or social representation (Meyer, 2012). With this in mind, it was my intention to bring a voice to a marginalized group within a marginalized group. It is imperative to understand multiple cultural impacts in order to understand trans individuals with respect to cultural-racial identity, age, SES, and gender identity. In pursuit of such understanding, the salience of this study is based on consistent questioning and close examination of bias and perception.

Participants and Sampling

The contextual framework of intersectionality can be used to understand how systemic injustice and social inequality occur on a multidimensional basis with respect to individual experiences (Crenshaw, 1991). I used this framework to establish and adjust participant selection and data collecting procedures. I specifically acquired a diverse sample with respect to cultural-racial identity, age, and SES to support the use of an intersectionality framework. . I also used some aspects of purposeful sampling , including directly asking participants from varying social positions within the trans-female community, which helped me obtain a more diverse participant pool. In particular, I was intentional with my selection process in order to get a diverse sample. The participant selection process helped integrate the intersectional and narratological paradigms into the study by engaging the community, thereby creating space for a diverse voice within this community.

The study took place in the southeastern region of the United States; participants were recruited from a local LGBT community center and asked to participate in individual interviews. I obtained permission from the community center program director to recruit participants. I also made announcements to trans feminine support groups in the area and asked members of the community to help with recruitment.

Stratified purposeful sampling was used to select participants because the study population was a subset (minority status) within a subset (trans female) within a larger community (trans). When gathering intersectionality-focused data, it is important to select participants who will provide rich data (McCormack, 2014). This type of sampling depended on intentional participant gathering in spaces frequented by trans females. Under those circumstances, the criterion for participant selection was based on and required the participants self-identify as being a transgender female or as being under the transgender female umbrella.

The intention of this sampling method was to access the experience of trans females with varying levels of identity. While this study assessed identifying factors, other restrictions on identity would have limited the study, so they were not included. Therefore, this study explored intersectional themes of cultural-racial identity, SES, and age without predetermining the significance of these identities in the experience of transgender females. bell hooks (2014) theorized that studies can gain equally valuable information from individuals in privileged positions along with individuals who are marginalized. In the interest of acquiring participants who have varying identities, I focused primarily on community centers and organizations that are likely to serve the transgender individual who varies in cultural-racial identity, SES, and age identity. The sample was purposive and theory-driven, and sought to include a range of trans individuals (Patton 1990, Creswell, 1998) while conducting the interviews in an in-depth and thorough manner (Bal, 2009). Considering this and the inclusion of archival data, eight participants were included in the individual interviews. Two meta-analyses clarified the use of small sample sizes in qualitative articles, including narrative inquiries that feature a small sample within the range of four to six participants by (Levitt, Pomerville, & Surace, 2016; Hays, Wood, Dahl, & Kirk☐Jenkins, 2016). In another study, Rody (2013) utilized a sample size of five to better understand the unique experience of clients who engaged in counseling for domestic abuse. Much like this current study, their article included thick descriptions of the client's narrative, thereby illuminating the experience of a hard to research population. In a similar fashion, this study's sample size was suitable for the type of rigorous and meticulous interviews that were conducted to gain thick narrative descriptions.

     Demographics. As previously mentioned, all participants in this study were recruited because they self-identified as transgender females according to the previously given definition.

With a total of 8 participants, there were a variety of ages, cultural-racial identities, and SES identities. The ages of the participants ranged from 26 to 51 (26, 28, 29, 35, 38, 41, 49, and 51). Though these numbers represented their current age, the participants' narratives were a reflection of various age points as it pertained to their transitioning process. The racial-cultural identities of the participants included 3 white, 2 African American, 1 Latina, 1 African American-Latina, and 1 African American-Indian. These racial-cultural identities were self-identified and reflected in the participants' narratives. The participants were also asked about their SES, which included 1 upper middle class, 4 middle class, 2 working poor, and 1 lower middle class. This status was reflected what they currently considered their SES to be, though it is relevant to know what their status was when they transitioned, which many shared in their narrative. A graph of the demographics can be seen in appendix E.

Procedure

Observational data combined with individual interviews are effective in obtaining data because of the richness of the individual experience and the opportunity to explore the interaction between participants, which would otherwise be unavailable to the researcher (Hays & Singh, 2011). The contextual challenge of this endeavor was most evident in the process of obtaining participants who identified as transgender. Once participants were selected, data collection began using interviews and archival data.

Interview. The interviews included eight to ten semi structured questions of which will guide the participants to discuss their experience with respect to the various aspects of their identity. This study engaged in these interviews with the intention of digging deeper into the participant's subjective experiences as they applied to cultural-racial identity, gender identity, age, and social class. Demographics such as sexual orientation and ability status were not included in participant criteria; however, the researcher will obtain this information for the

purpose of future research endeavors. Each participant who agreed to participate read and signed an informed consent prior to participating and promised complete anonymity.

Narratology as a research method provides an opportunity to interview in an open and less restrictive manner (Bamberg, 2014). Typically, interviews are conducted in narrative form and serve to provide a space for the participants to tell their story (Bal, 2009). The questions were intended to allow the participants control of the expression of information, thus controlling the creation of their own narrative. The blueprint for the interview questions relied on ideas from narratology as well as intersectionality. Locke (2015) suggested that an intersectional lens will flow throughout every aspect of an authentic study, particularly the interview process, when intersectionality is utilized as the research paradigm. For this study, intersectional experiences naturally emerged whether the participants viewed them as significant or not. That is, while the questions implied that the participants discuss their identity, I was careful not to encourage or imply a premium on marginalized experiences. This form of questioning provided a more authentic discussion of the impact of intersectional experiences through the eyes of transgender females. The interviews began by asking how participants identify themselves with respect to the aforementioned identities. Follow-up questions were used to gather the importance of the identities for participants. The second question focused on what it means to participants to transition. I then asked participants, "How have these identities impacted your experience in transitioning?" Follow-up questions were asked to allow participants to expand upon their explanations. I then asked, "Is there any particular aspect of your identity that was most salient in the transitioning process?" This provided a space for participants to elaborate on any potential multiple identities based minority stressors. The interview was semi-structured and utilized eleven questions (Appendix A).

Additionally, participants were requested to bring any relevant photos that may help describe their transition. The photos were requested in advance and were used in the interview. They were emailed or attached to a text message and were included as data in the informed consent. The pictures were used as an unstructured means to provide volume to the participant's narrative. Bal (2009) suggested that understanding the accompanying structure of narratives can occur in multiple forms, including photographs. By making connections to various events of the participant's narrative, the pictures created a fabula. Several research articles utilized a procedure of including visual stimulation in narrative interviews (Ellsberg, Peña, Herrera, Liljestrand, & Winkvist, 2000; Gockel, 2011; Lloyd, Hewison, & Efstathiou, 2017; Rabu, Haavind, & Binder, 2013; Shorten & Ruppel, 2017; Roach, Keady, Bee, & Williams, 2014). According to Bal (2009), fabulas describe the manner in which a story is structured, and visual aids help participants deepen the context and meaning of their own narratives. The visual aids allowed the study to gain yet another layer of rich data in which to saturate the discussion with context and insight into the participant's story.

Archival data. The collection of unobtrusive data focused on the subjective perception of those who identify as transgender female (See protocol in Appendix A). Bal (2009) encouraged the use of archival data as a means of triangulating the experiential data. Using Bal's (2009) basic theory of narratology, data of all sorts, including archival data, was considered of equal status as it was coded and examined. Through coding, I analyzed the structure of the narratives created from the data. That is, the context in which these narratives arrived provided insight into the meanings of common themes that occurred. Similar to this study, several narrative inquires explored archival data, such as journaling and pictures, to add richness and further complexity to the narratives that emerged during interviews (Foster, & Hagedorn, 2014;

Gockel, 2011; Haines, Poland, & Johnson, 2009; Hays, Wood, Dahl, & Kirk☐Jenkins, 2016; Mizock, Russinova, & Shani, 2014; Mörtl & Gelo, 2015). Archival data was a particularly valuable aspect of this study because it allowed this research to include multiple intersections of identity that may not otherwise be realistically obtainable.

Participants were asked to bring three pictures that represented their experience in transitioning. The use of these pictures was included in the interview as well as archival data. The requirements of these pictures will be explained to each participant (appendix B). Participants were provided with an explanation as to how the pictures would be used (Appendix B), and told they would be kept confidential and only the interviewer and the trans female auditor would have access. All pictures were destroyed after data was analyzed.

Journaling was also included in the study to help incorporate the participant's identity intersections regarding cultural-racial identity, SES, and age. The purpose of journaling was to allow an articulation of the participant's identity in a reflective and meaningful way. The requirements of the journaling activity were explained to each participant (Appendix C). Archival data, as discussed by Hays and Singh (2011), needs to take into consideration the author's experience and expertise of the topic, the credibility of the article, and the context of the documents. Accordingly, I utilized the sources above to obtain credible information to the point of saturation in regard to perceptions of transgender females who occupy multiple identities.

Interpretive Criteria for Data Analysis.

It is imperative that narrative inquirers view themselves as narrators. This process included recursive immersion of the transcripts with the intention of accurately displaying the perspective of the participants. Ongoing data analysis, field notes, and open coding took place throughout the study through a narrative lens, thereby highlighting the intersections of power

such as voice, representation, and interpretive expertise. Analyzing and conducting narrative inquiry requires active listening during interviews and intentionality in coding. It involves a process of connecting with the participants in a way in which you will authentically and accurately hear, collect, and interpret their narrative (Chase, 2005). Specifically, the coding process included a scheme of numbers and letters which were used to designate major categories and subcategories. This provided a foundation for communication between the research team. As the process of constant comparison continued, the researchers used selective coding to identify core categories and multiple interacting categories. Hard copies of all computer-processed data will also be coded using colored pens to mark the margins with the appropriate numbers. Moreover, in order to create data sets of a size that can be analyzed in depth, I created condensed narratives from the interviews. With Bal's (2009) concept of an event and Moustakas (1994) concept of data reduction in mind, I utilized the participant's words while altering only for brevity and clarity. For instance, a participant may go into detail about how their experience of coming out influenced their transition. For data purposes, I may include only the parts that contributed or connected to the event of transitioning or to the participant's identity. Therefore, details such as the color of the participant's first high heels may be excluded upon participant's approval. Essentially, this is where efficiency and strategies for trustworthiness meet. Accordingly, Bal (2009) suggested that an event is characterized by a shift or alteration of one state of being or state of mind to another. If events communicated change or predicted the future, they were included in the assessment process. This analysis process was fundamentally dependent on effective trustworthiness strategies.

Strategies for Trustworthiness

Multiple strategies were utilized to ensure trustworthiness in the study. Trustworthiness is defined by two categories, dependability and credibility. The credibility of this study was established through the use of memos, member checking, a thorough audit trail, and triangulation. Member checking is particularly important when utilizing the principles of event selection and reduction due to the cis-identity of the primary researcher. Dependability was established through member checking and by using external audits. In line with qualitative inquiry, this study strived to eliminate assumptions based on the researcher's preconceived notions regarding transgender intersectional identities. For this purpose, the researcher's assumptions and preconceptions were bracketed, and an enlisted auditor who identifies as a trans female reviewed the data to ensure that the participants had an accurate voice in the research.

Research Team. Hill (2007) suggested that caution should be taken when engaging in trans focused studies. This is especially important for cisgender researchers such as myself. Furthermore, Hill insisted that cisgender researchers maintain a sense of humility when engaging in research in the trans community. Specifically, they should try to reflect on their reasons for doing trans research and on their position in the oppressive discourse. Hill (2007) also suggested that there should be continued and intentional effort to respectfully represent trans voices as the experts on their own lives. Moreover, to make a significant impact, researchers should maintain close and continuous relationships with the community that they are researching. In light of Hill's advice regarding transgender research, I endeavored to illuminate unheard voices within the trans community.

Imperative to both intersectional theory and qualitative research is the examination of the researcher's bias. For this purpose, and in respect to the nature of narratological research, this study bracketed the researcher's bias throughout the collection and analysis of data. Specifically,

both researchers recognized that they have personal experience in the LGBT community and were aware of this bias prior to engaging in this research endeavor. Notwithstanding, it is not the intention of qualitative research to completely ignore and manipulate biases and cisnormative notions. Rather, it is much more valuable to this study that such occurrences were acknowledged and reflected upon in the discussion section.

In the interest of building credibility, this study described the identity of the primary researcher and how this impacted the study. The research team was composed of two individuals, one of which has a master's degree in counseling and one professional who holds a master's degree in library art sciences. As the primary researcher, I was responsible for data collection, analysis, transcription, and writing the results of the study. Various aspects of my identity were important to identify and monitor regarding the impact they may have on the study. First, I am a member of the LGBT community in that I identify as a Caucasian, pansexual, cisgender male. While I do not identify as a transgender female, my identification with the community helped with recruitment and rapport with participants. It is important to note that I am in close contact with the transgender community as a result of my past work as a counselor in this LGBT community center. While there was an obvious bias that may have occurred, this experience helped contextualize this study towards counselors who work with the trans community. I believe that by acknowledging potential bias, I was able to reflect on what ways, if any, it impacted this study. Additionally, the primary researcher did not use any of his counseling clients as participants. This, along with having no preconceived knowledge of the participants, helped limit bias for this study. As mentioned before, pivotal aspects of this study were to include a community auditor. In fact, research indicated that the trans community views their relationship with the research community as one-sided and not beneficial to trans individuals.

(Hill, 2007; Moradi et al., 2009). For this reason, an outside auditor used her social position as a transgender female to help bracket and identify bias that may have occurred due to cisnormativity.

Auditor Edits

Revisions to the coding structure are a natural occurrence in open coding and add to the authenticity and meaningfulness of the study. This is especially true considering the influence of the auditor. As previously mentioned, an outside auditor was utilized to provide an authentic perspective regarding the process and the actual code creation. Though this was not consensus coding because she edited my existing codes, she did make significant changes along with additions to the codes. The auditor, asking to be anonymous, will be referred to by her pseudo name, Amanda. Amanda identifies as a 46 year old white transgender female with a master's degree in education. She currently works in a corporate setting and is pursuing her PhD in an online program. Amanda was incredibly important to the integrity and impact of this study because her identity illuminated the voice of transgender females. She provided a counterbalance to the identity of the primary researcher who identifies as a cisgender male.

Very careful consideration was given to what Amanda reviewed and her suggested changes. Amanda was aware of and had access to documents regarding the context of the study (first two chapters), the overall methodology of the study (chapter 3), the interview process and questions, the transcripts pre and post coding, the journals pre and post coding, and the interview notes. Along with the coding process and themes, Amanda evaluated the trustworthiness of the study. To this end, she made several recommendations. First, she stated that future studies should consider utilizing a different setting where the researcher does not occupy dual roles. She was concerned that my dual roles could influence some of the interviews. She found, however, that

there was no evidence in the interviews that my role as clinical director of the center influenced the interviews. She also suggested that I provide deep detail about how my dual role impacted the study. As per her recommendation, this will be discussed in chapter five. She also recommended including pictures with the research; however, this was not possible due to the need for confidentiality and protecting the identity of participants. Instead, thick descriptions of pictures and participants' reactions to pictures have been included.

Auditing the codes. As the auditor, Amanda provided the perspective of someone who shares identity with the participants. She suggested changes to themes or codes that were created during data analysis. In particular, she edited the context of some of the thematic codes, the presentation or naming of the codes, the definitions of some of the codes and the subgroups of the codes. First, she noticed that almost all of the codes began with the word "trans." For example, "trans racial-cultural identity." Amanda suggested using "trans" with each code was not necessary because this was already inherent due to the population focus. Also, some of the marginalized experiences were not necessarily unique to trans people. For instance, being racially profiled while shopping happens to African Americans. Transgender individuals as well as African American cisgender individuals. She qualified her suggestion by identifying the theme of "trans positivity" as having a different context in that it is exclusively and specifically about trans positivity.

Amanda also recommended changes to thematic examples and definitions. One thematic definition she wanted to change was to race oppression. She suggested adding the following to the definition: "…based on ones *internally and externally* identified racial-cultural identity…." Amanda explained that how one is perceived by others can be just as important as how one identifies their own race, particularly in the context of transitioning. She felt it was too subtle in

its former description. Furthermore, she questioned some of the examples that represented the themes. For the theme regarding privilege, she suggested that one of the examples was best representative of pride rather than privilege. That is, the participant was proud of the way they looked as a matter of self-esteem, rather than occupying a social position that brought them an advantage in transitioning. She also thought that the theme of privilege could have used more examples. As a result, more obvious examples of privilege were included.

Amanda also suggested that some of the themes be adjusted to be more trans focused. Some of the themes that were originally created included exclusion, micro and macro aggressions, self-confidence, support, and passability. Amanda thought these subgroups were limiting and not descriptive enough and suggested making subgroups more descriptive and relevant to the major themes, thereby highlighting the experiences of some of the participants in a more meaningful and descriptive way. Amanda contributed greatly to redefining the subgroups and adding subgroups, which resulted in clarifying the connection of intersectionality within various themes. For SES, these new subgroups included putting transitioning on hold due to SES and SES connected to passability. For Amanda, these subgroups seemed to overlap and helped expose the SES oppression experienced by transgender females. For the theme of race oppression, Amanda clarified the positive influence of race. The subgroup was meant to highlight cultural benefits rather that highlighting privilege. Together, Amanda and I created the themes of trans exclusion in cultural racial spaces and race oppression and familial exclusion. After discussions and a review of the transcripts, data revealed that only a few of the participants identified with these subgroups; however, it was significant to them so we included them. In a similar fashion, Amanda identified the subgroup of age and transgender hesitation, and admitted that her social position may have helped her notice the importance of this category. Amanda also

shifted the initial theme of "transgender standards of beauty" to a subgroup. Consequently, age and transgender standards of beauty also became a sub group. She suggested this change because the word "passability" seemed to be a similar theme of which was more commonly used in transgender communities. Amanda also suggested a subgroup for privilege–privilege in the media. This was initially avoided because participants noted media figures in an external manner. Amanda determined, however, that it was mentioned often enough in a meaningful way that it should be included as a subgroup. Lastly, she suggested a subgroup for privilege. This was privilege and passability. She stated that passability is relatively subjective, since many individuals experience more external reassurance that they look "passable." Therefore, this was considered an important subgroup. With the inclusion of these subgroups, Amanda became an imperative resource for this project.

The overall tone of Amanda's review was very positive. She was impressed by the information that was gathered in the interviews because they provided a lot of rich data. She also stated that she was surprised that the journals did not yield more information, and in future studies, maybe find way to encourage more details in the journals. Her last comment was that participants seemed willing to share information about their experiences, and she was impressed about how much intersectionality showed up in this study. As per the intention of including an auditor, all edits were utilized and are presented in the following chapters.

Creswell (2013) and others (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Maxwell, 2013) recommended using a minimum of three measures of trustworthiness in order to produce a quality study. As discussed in this chapter, this study utilized four quality measures to achieve trustworthiness, which were determined successful. These measures will be highlighted in future chapters. All of the data collection and analysis results are discussed in Chapter 4, and Chapter 5 provides the

interpretation of results and future research possibilities. Data from this study revealed themes along with challenges. The analysis addressed the research question regarding transitioning experience of trans females who occupy varying identities with respect to cultural-racial identity, age, and SES.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results

The central question of this study focused on the lived experiences of transgender females and how various identities such as SES, age, and racial-cultural identity impacted their transition. As previously mentioned, 10 questions were designed for the individual interviews and three questions for the journal. Consistent with the narratological paradigm, questions in the interview were followed up by cues or invitations to discuss more. The goal was to help participants expand and deepen their narrative. Data will be presented thematically with thick descriptions and quotes from participants. The goal is to present the participants' stories in the context in which they happened. Chapter 5 includes a deep discussion of what the findings mean and how they can inform counseling practice.

The findings that emerged from the qualitative interviews with transgender females illuminated the impact of intersectionality on transitioning. I transcribed the audio recording of each interview, which provided more time with the data. The journals were collected with the exception of one participant who did not turn in a journal. After observation and transcription, the thematic coding process began. In analyzing the interviews, the initial strategy was to use open coding to focus on identifying categories and patterns. The collected data were divided into segments and then scrutinized for commonalities that could reflect common themes. In the first review of data, content of the interviews and journals were analyzed for initial codes and patterns; during the second review, careful attention was given to uncover new and emerging thematic patterns. After thorough examination of the data, I engaged in a consensus coding process to enhance trustworthiness and inter-rater reliability of the data (Hays & Singh, 2012).

This involved careful examination of category identification and reviewing any inconsistencies in coding as well as the bracketing of bias as much as possible.

This study identified six themes of trans intersectional experiences during transitioning: a) SES salience , b) race oppression, c) age centered repression, d) privilege, e) and transgender positivity. The first three themes relate to transgender female experiences with perceived discrimination and intersectionality, while the final two themes relate to the participants' experiences within various identities. These themes and their definitions are illustrated in Appendix D. Participants related to the themes in some format, thus producing varying levels of subthemes in their stories. Consistent with narratological inquiry, the participants' narratives were expressed in the context of chronology, which was unique for each participant.

Jamie's Narrative

Jamie's journey began years before she began the process of transitioning. Her contribution to this study was centered on her occupation of multiple marginalized identities. During the interview, she provided meaningful answers and insight to the research questions. Despite her narrative being well represented in her interview and pictures, she was the only participant who did not complete a journal for this study. Chronologically, age repression accurately described her story because of her sense of personal timing and priorities when it came to transitioning. Specifically, she has attempted to transition at several points in her life but chose not to due to cultural racial family expectations and financial concerns. The theme of privilege occurred in the early to middle stages of Jamie's transition and particularly centered on her SES. This facet was a positive experience for Jamie in some ways, because her income level made it financially possible to transition. For Jamie, SES was a fluid concept that initially prevented her transitioning. Once she began to make a higher income, it became one less barrier.

Race oppression was a theme that related to the middle part of her journey. As illustrated in the thematic descriptions, race was both a positive and negative feature of Jamie's transition. Finally, transgender positivity punctuated Jamie's experience. It appeared that she did not always experience feelings of positivity about the transgender identity; however, her narrative evolved into feelings of self-love and respect. The themes below chronologically explore major concepts in Jamie's story.

Age Centered Repression

Jamie's experience with age deeply intersected with other areas of her life. First and foremost, expectations from her family and past relationships prevented Jamie from transitioning on her schedule. In particular, her ex-wife expected her to be the "man" that she married.

Jamie also experienced societal expectations due to her age because transitioning felt less accepted than it does now. Both of these factors were coupled with her inner dialogue that was established by her father's views on how a man should act. As you can see in the following narrative, it was the combination of these three constructs that influenced the beginning of her first two transitions and the hesitation the prevented her from continuing the transition. The third time, she was able to complete her transition by accomplishing what she considered to be important life milestones.

> My age has made me nervous to transition. I started transitioning at age 33. I wanted to transition when I was way younger. It made me nervous to transition. I tried to transition twice before and stopped. I tried once when I was 18 then I tried again when I was 25. And this time, the third time stuck. The reason it didn't work at first is because I met my wife, now ex-wife. I was going through the process. I was starting hormones but I know who I was at a young age. I was also going through counseling. And it was a lot harder at

the time. It was the 90's late 90s maybe 97. Things were a little more difficult. I had to find someone who would talk to me and not try to fix me. Fortunately, there was a counselor at school. She would talk with me and listen to me but she couldn't prescribe hormones. I had to go see a psychologist. We both agreed, yes, I'm into my authentic self and I have gender dysphoria. I met my ex-wife at the time. This is where my family influence comes in. I'm a man, and I need to stay a man and take care of my wife. So, I kind of backed off from that. I processed a lot, but I backed off. She kind of knew what was going on but not really. So, I was dating my wife on and off through college. I moved away and started cross dressing. I started researching more of the process for transitioning. Came back. Married her. Then later I came out to her and said I need to transition. I started taking hormones for 6-7 months. It didn't go well with the ex-wife so I stopped. I got rid of everything. I stayed married for a few more years then got a divorce. When the papers where being processed, I started transitioning again and was able to experience my authentic self. There's one more picture that I wanted to show you, and that's the picture of my son. Remember I told you that my dad always taught me to stand up and that a man is supposed to be in charge and stuff. Well when I had my son, I was able to say to my dad, I did it. My job was done. That meant to me that I don't have to be in this role anymore. It made me come to grips with my dad's view of things. It was a way for me not feel guilty for my transitioning. I did my job I had a son. I didn't disappoint him. How can I disappoint you, I had a son. I actually turned to my dad and said that during my sons' birth. That was also the moment I started rethinking transitioning again, because I got a divorce two years later.

Age and Passability. Jamie's age of transition did not match her awareness of gender identity. She was well aware of her identity yet felt unable to transition due to familial, cultural, and financial concerns. Age was a factor in how she was able to transition. For her, starting hormones in her thirties prevented her from being more passable.

Well the response of the hormones, they weren't as effective as they could have been. As you age, your natural hormones do more damage to you. So someone taking hormone blockers and hormones at 18 are more likely to have better results compared to someone taking hormones in there 40's. I mean there are outliers but my experience was that. And knowing that does make me wonder what it would be like if I took hormones earlier. Even though I don't regret it because I wouldn't have my son. It's just that hormones didn't make as many changes as I would want. It changed my hormone balance but not other things.

Age and Trans Hesitation. For Jamie, age was a catalyst for decision making both in terms of hesitation and motivation. In a more positive way, she utilized her pictures as a point of pride regarding the connection between her age and transition experience. Jamie expressed this sentiment when she was asked about how her pictures connected with age. She then showed me a picture of her son as a baby. As she was showing me this, she smiled and said,

My kid helped me in my transition. That was a conflicting point because of the family tree and continuing the family tree. In fact, that was a factor in me not transitioning early, because I felt the need to have a kid. I was just thinking in the back of my head that I got to do my job and keep the family tree going. Most people think I'm weird for worrying about my family tree. But that's how I was raised. To think about that sort of thing. That's what my dad drilled into me. His birth, helped me to come to grip with... I mean

some people think that they are a big disappointment to their parents. So, I mean, you

can't be disappointed in what I'm doing because I did what you wanted me to do.

For Jamie, her son was a factor with her transitioning in multiple ways. It changed her

timeline for transitioning in that she waited until she had a son to transition. In a way, it gave her

permission to externally express her authentic self. She also revealed that it reinforced her

confidence about transitioning because of the priorities and expectations that her dad instilled in

her. With this, she felt like transitioning was more acceptable.

In a similar vein, Jamie expressed that she would have been even more hesitant if she was

older. This was particularly evident in her interview when she said:

 If I did it at 18, I think I would have more time to blend in. The hormones would have

impacted me better.   For me, I don't think I would have transitioned if I waited until 40. I

would have just been a miserable black man.

Jamie felt strongly about how vital age and passability was important to her in regards to

her self-esteem and overall wellness. Her experience was unique because she started her

transition as one point in her life, and decided to stop in order to please her dad and ex-wife. She

also wanted to have a biological child, which was an important milestone that influenced her

decision of when to transition. It was apparent in our conversations that transitioning was an

imperative part of her life, especially since she was able to start at what she considered to be a

reasonable age.

SES Privilege

As previously mentioned, Jamie's experienced privilege with regard to SES made it

possible for her to transition. This was a significant aspect of the early to middle stages of her

story. It seemed to be one less hurdle she had to conquer in order to validate her genuine gender identity. When she was asked about how her SES impacted her transition experience, she said:

> It has made it a lot easier. My insurance covers my hormones. And my insurance covers my surgery except for chest surgery. And my insurance covered my counseling and the medications for counseling. All at a rate that was in my budget. That was one of things that my dad argued when I came out that I was wasting all this money on medications for transitioning. But it wasn't really that much it was like 18 bucks a month and that's with injectable hormones. They can be really expensive without insurance. So, to answer your question. I was very fortunate to be at my income level while transitioning.

It seemed like she recognized this privilege, perhaps more than other participants. Jamie understood that even though she had many battles that stemmed from other identities that she occupied, she would not have to financially struggle.

Privilege and Passability. As previously mentioned, being passable was important to Jamie. While she didn't always feel like she passed, she did experience financial privilege that contributed to her feeling more comfortable. This was further highlighted when she was asked about one of her pictures and how it connected to SES.

> Yea. In one of the pictures, I was wearing new clothes. That's something I didn't have to worry about affording. In several of the pictures I was trying out different clothes. Like I said, I'm fortunate enough to go out and buy new clothes to make me feel more comfortable. I was even nervous about trying on new clothes at stores so I would just go to the stores, but the clothes and see if I liked them when I got home. I could still return it but I was still able just to throughout 400 or 500 clothes. I've come to learn that I don't like to buy more expensive things, except for makeup. I still spend a lot on makeup. All

in all, having money helps me to feel more comfortable. Especially starting out, I was

able to buy isolation because I could afford to buy clothes that I was just trying on

without like breaking the bank.

She mentioned that she was able to "buy isolation," meaning she was able to look for

clothing that further confirmed her identity without having to be overly concerned with financial

constraints. As she was discussing this, it seemed to bring a smile to her face. She enjoyed the

fact that her social class has allowed her a certain level of control over her transition.

Race Oppression

With respect to Jamie's transition timeline, race seemed to be a heavy influence on her

transition experience both in positive and negative ways. She discussed how her race created

extra barriers for an already challenging experience. When Jamie was asked which aspect of her

identity impacted her transition the most, she responded with the following:

Definitely my race. Not in a positive way. I mean just being colored in general. I'm

already at disadvantage being colored, but now I'm trans and female. I just made a glass

ceiling 3 panes. I don't just have one glass ceiling to go through, but 3. 3 ply glass

ceiling.

Jamie's narrative revealed the unofficial barriers that she experienced both in terms of

professional advancement and social advancement in society. This correlates with her systems of

support, job opportunities, daily living interactions, and other aspects of her life. Essentially,

Jamie's multiple marginalized identities were and are a constant barrier she has to overcome.

Trans bigotry in racial spaces. Jamie revealed that she felt targeted for being an

African American trans female. She felt particularly ostracized because she was excluded by

other African American individuals, thereby reinforcing trans phobic constructs that she

internalized from her father. This feeling of within-group exclusion was illustrated in Jamie's interview when she said:

> I went into a nail salon to get my nails done and I overheard these two African American men says to each other, ugh, what the fuck is going on around here these days. And the guys are like its 2015, and men be doing that these days. I just mind my own business. … but I don't think they would be so angry about it and say it out loud if I was white.

This experience appeared to be particularly hurtful for Jamie and was yet another example of how society does not approve of her being an African American transgender female. This also suggested the variance of trans experiences within different racial communities.

Race and passability. For many transgender individuals, feeling passable is a significant part of feeling comfortable in their own body. As shown in the following narrative, Jamie's passability had a substantial impact on her transition experience and was well connected with her ability to be passable. For her, it added one more layer to the negativity that is expressed towards her.

> To be blunt, being black in America is challenging. I may be educated and have two bachelor degrees. The first thing that people see when I come through the door is a black male before I transitioned. They don't see me as educated, they just see that I'm black. The second thing is that I have a Muslim name. It's like, oh great. a black Muslim. That's even worse. We're living in a post 911 world So coming out as trans and being a trans woman of color in my opinion, put me at more of a disadvantage. I feel like I've been looked over. Not taking seriously. You know, I'm not the most passable. So that.. I'm easily clocked. When I walk in a room. They don't see a woman of color walking in. They see a male. And yah know, they say it's all about attitude which is fine, but I can't

get over the initial impression of people. I just do damage control afterward. That was the biggest part impact of my transition in a negative way because it also gave me more doubt in what I'm doing because I can't blend in.

Jamie shared that she has been outed and discriminated against as a result of her identity and the fact that people can recognize her identity. This discrimination seemed to be her primary motivator for wanting to be passable. For her, race identity is multi-faceted and interlocks with religion. She mentioned being judged for the color of her skin as well as her name. Her legal female name and her last name have often been associated with Islam. In particular, her last name is commonly used in Muslim communities. This narrative added layers to Jamie's experience of oppression and contributes to her anxiety with first impressions.

Jamie discussed her pictures during the interview and alluded to positive feelings of passability. She presented two pictures in which she was dressed in relatively casual yet professional clothing. In one picture, she was smiling while wearing a grey blouse and black slacks, while the other picture showed her smiling with a pink shirt and jeans. She gave insight into these pictures when she said:

> I'm comfortable with what I'm doing, as you can see in my pictures, I'm not really ultra fem. I dressed the way I am but I think my race has made me more comfortable with who I am. As you can see in my pictures, I don't really dress up much I just dress comfortably.

She was particularly alluding to an earlier comment in her narrative regarding her Hindu and India native culture. As mentioned previously, her ethnic identity seemed very important to her. Moreover, Jamie's experience suggested that race contributed to her need to be passable. For her, the African American community is more harsh on transgender females, thereby making it more important for her to be passable. She highlighted this when she said,

It goes back to race, in the black community if I could blend in better it would be easier. Because it's like, don't tell nobody. And people are like oh my god, you a man. That gets me pissed when people do that. When I get outed. But um yea, being passable would make it easier.

Race oppression and familial exclusion. Familial exclusion is a common experience among trans females and transcends various identities (Graham, 2014). In particular, this study found several instances where this sense of exclusion was connected with racial-cultural identity. Throughout the interviews and journals, many participants shared the rejection they experienced from family members with the same racial identification. Jamie experienced familial rejection in a way that influenced her sense of self-reliance. This rejection was packaged in the overall norms of the African American community and is reflected in the following quote from Jamie's interview:

It's also acceptance from your home community. I don't mean LGBT, I mean white and black. Like, my father. I feel my father is a very good representation of the African American community. You're a man, you be a man, you act like a man. If you're not a man, you are a fagot or effeminate. I hate to say that word. But you are lower than anything else if you're a male and you have no masculinity. If you're trans, it's the same. It's like, a gay black man and transgender female are put in the same corner. Whereas if you're a trans male or lesbian female, you get a little more props because your more masculine. Masculinity is so important in the African American community. Someone else may say differently. In my experiences in the African American community, right, masculinity is big.

This was a unique aspect of Jamie's interview that was reflected in subtle ways throughout the narratives of other participants. The social construct of cisnormativity exists at the center of culture and is ultimately influenced by cultural norms. In this case, it is presented under the guise of the cultural preservation context as noted by Jamie's earlier comment regarding the black men who were making comments towards her outside of the nail salon. As Jamie noted, "I don't think they would be so angry about it (her being transgender) and say it out loud if I was white."

Positive influence of race. Several parts of this study illustrated the positivity and feeling of strength that participants experienced as a result of their cultural racial identity. That is to say, many of the interviewees expressed that culture was a positive factor that contributed to their ability to be resilient in tumultuous times. Jamie reflected on the positive influence racial-cultural identity had on her identity as a trans person. Jamie referred to her identity as "half Black half Indian" throughout the interview and indicated that this was particularly meaningful to her. When asked about race during the interview, Jamie stated:

> It made me more comfortable about it, on my mothers' side. Not on my fathers' side but my mothers' side. If you know anything about Indian culture there is a large subculture of trans women. They're not treated well but they are a part of society and there recognized. Some of them are um... I don't know the word off the top of my head, but some of them are witches. If they show up to a wedding you have to pay them money to bless the wedding or they'll curse you. In a traditional Hindu wedding that is.

Despite the negative context in the narrative, it appeared that Jamie valued this Hindu tradition because it meant that trans people were visible in her culture. In fact, she alluded to this several times as a point of pride.

Race oppression and exclusion. Racial oppression and feelings of exclusion in LGBT spaces is common for many transgender people. Another common experience among some participants included the feeling of being excluded as a racial minority in LGBT spaces. This suggested that many LGBT spaces, such as support groups, LGBT pride events, and LGBT clubs, are primarily frequented by white LGBT individuals. For racially marginalized transgender females, this seemed like another obstacle to obtaining support in their transitioning. Jamie expressed this during the interview by stating:

> I never felt like I fit into white LGBT spaces. I mean I moderate the [Transgender support group] meeting and I'm the only chocolate chip in that cookie. I say that jokingly now but it bothers me. I mean, I know that there are trans women of color out there, but, where are they? I'm active in the LGBT community, but I feel like I'm active in a community that I don't fit into. I don't see a lot of people like me. I feel like I can't always relate. I mean they can't relate to me and I can't relate to them sometimes because it feels like we're having two separate experiences about the same issue.

> This was echoed by other participants in that they felt excluded in settings where they expected to feel included. In fact, this happens for racial minorities on a regular basis.

Transgender Positivity

Jamie's feeling of transgender positivity came towards the end of her transition experience. This feeling of self-worth as a transgender female manifested itself through her self-confidence. In particular, it appeared in one of her pictures when she was at work. She explained:

> This last picture is significant. I was at a Trump rally on one of the ships. I'm not a Trump supporter but this is significant because I'm out and I'm trans. At that point, he hasn't yet talked about not having trans in the military but he's there and… actually this was right

after his first tweet about it. He deleted it but he reposted it later. I was a transgender

shipbuilder sitting, looking at him face to face. You know, you say no trans in the

military and I'm sitting her building this ship for you. But this was big in my transition

because I was comfortable enough to be at a rally where people who were there were

against who I was. You know, I'm in the shipyard with a bunch of people who weren't

supportive of what I do. But I was comfortable enough to be myself. A trans woman of

color too. And no offense, in a sea of white males. Everyone there was a white male, and

I was probably the only person of color there, certainly the only trans person of color

there. And that was cool.

In this narrative, she expressed that she was able to maintain her sense of self-worth and

self-esteem despite being in a non-affirming environment. Not only was it non-affirming for her

gender identity, but also for her racial and religious identity. It appeared to be a powerful

experience for her. This moment during the interview highlighted her ability to act on the

courage of her convictions. She expressed that she believed she has made positive choices for

herself and that she genuinely likes the person that she has become.

Race centered transgender positivity. Transgender positivity can be a great source of

strength that comes in a variety of forms**.** Jamie further expressed the warmth and positive

feelings that accompany transgender positivity in her life through her connection with historical

aspects of her culture.

So, what I'm saying is that I didn't have to dress ultra fem because of the comfort that my

mother's heritage provided me. I mean, I know what I'm doing and I don't have to prove

to anyone that I'm transgender. I mean, it's in my culture right, why would anyone be

surprised. Why do I have to do something to make you believe it? I have history behind me. There are Indian transgender women, so get off my case.

Angela's Narrative

Angela's experience was based on the impact of the social-political climate that extended beyond her identity as a transgender female. Intersectional themes began to appear immediately as Angela began to discuss her experience as a transgender female.

It was a long experience. It started when I was around 13. I'm 28 now. But when I was 13 I first started to realize that I was different. I realized I wasn't like the other boys. In fact, I was effeminate. ….I then started to understand that I wasn't gay but I am a female. I just remember being 17 when I put on my first female outfit. As you can see in the picture, it wasn't perfect but I felt good. Over time and dressing like that, I started to feel more complete. You know. Like my inside matched my outside. Now, I dress effeminate every day and I feel great. I feel real, yah know. And over time, my parents did sort of come around to me dressing like a female. After all, they still love me and want me to be in the family.

For Angela, several factors contributed to her transitioning experience. The theme that occurred first was race. In fact, many other themes seemed to stem from her cultural racial identity. Chronologically, the second theme that arose for her was SES salience. Her social class delayed her ability to transition despite being aware of her gender identity. The theme of trans positivity occurred primarily through the sub-theme of support. This seemed to be a constant feature of her experience towards the middle of her transition. Subsequently, age centered repression appeared as more of a thought process after she had transitioned. Along with age, there were undertones of privilege that occurred despite her experience with adversity.

Race Oppression

One of the pivotal themes through Angela's narrative was her racial-cultural identity and how it impacted her ability to transition. Angela immigrated to this country when she was young and is now facing all of the strife experienced by Mexican Americans families who are coming to America for a better life:

> My parents are here and they're legal. They have their papers and I was born here, so I'm good. But we have family that is still struggling to get here, still struggling just to get away from Mexico. They tell me. They tell me that's it's so hard for them there. It's so hard just to make it there. On top of that, it's got even more challenging to get here. You've seen the news. It's horrendous what Trump is doing. (Starts to cry). It's even impacted my cousins. * Pauses* I don't want to talk about it (dries eyes).

> For Angela, this subject was very powerful and it was filled with mixed emotions. She expressed how she missed her family members who were still in Mexico, but she appreciated the fact that America has provided her with the opportunities that she has. Her family's immigrant status appeared to be interconnected to her transition experience in a variety of ways. As Angela explained, immigrating from Mexico was one of the best things that happened to her.

> I don't believe I would be allowed or have the resources to transition in Colima, Mexico. It's where my parents are from and they've told me it's a dangerous place to live. That's why they had to leave. They had to leave for me. And I don't want to sound like I take things for granted. My parents got their green card just before I was born, and they were able to let me be born here. That's the best thing that ever happened to me. Transitioning was a close second.

For Angela, the oppression she experienced in Mexico cannot be separated from her ability to transition. As she continued her story, it is apparent that her racial identity is not monolithic. That is to say, her racial-cultural identity cannot simply be lumped in with other transgender females of color. Her culture includes familial expectations, issues of immigration status, and positive contributions from her culture.

Race oppression and familial exclusion. As previously mentioned, familial exclusion is a common yet often detrimental aspect of identifying as transgender female. In particular, this study found several instances where this sense of exclusion was connected with racial-cultural identity. For Angela, this was prevalent in both her interview and her journal, which decisively connected exclusion with her cultural-racial identity and constructs that uniquely existed in her cultural framework. One instance that stands out in Angela's interview was when she said:

> My parents thought I was gay and tried to tell me to change. They said that if I got more involved with the church, I would be changed. Like a good child, I tried to be obedient because I really wanted my parent's approval. So, I went to Catholic Church all the time. I tried to pray so I could be manlier but it didn't work. I really tried to butch up. I even dabbled in football, though I was horrible at it. It was a painful time for me. So much that I started to feel really sad. I ended up feeling suicidal so my parents decided to send me to a therapist.

While this event contributed to Angela's dysphoric feelings, it appeared that it also added to or at least is parallel to her sense of resilience that served her well, as indicated later in the narrative. In fact, this sense of perseverance may have helped with familial support. This is evidenced when Angela stated, "Now, I dress effeminately every day and I feel great. I feel real,

yah know. And over time, my parents did sort of come around to me dressing like a female. After all, they still love me and want me to be in the family."

Positive influence of race. As many challenges come with identifying as a racial minority, Angela experienced positive associations with her Mexican heritage. Angela reflected a favorable view of how her culture has impacted her transitioning experience. Specifically, she stated:

Being Latina has made it a little more comfortable in some ways because the attention is off of me. My parents are, and I don't think they will ever fully accept my gender identity, but the immigration issues with this country and my family kind of take the focus off me. Being trans isn't always the first thing on my family's minds.

For Angela, her identification with a cultural-racial minority worked in her favor because of the immigration oppression experienced by her and her family. While this is not a form of privilege because Angela also experiences the oppression, she was able to garner family support by way of avoiding the topic of gender identity and coming together on the issue of immigration. She felt more connected with her family because they felt they were up against a more immediate problem that impacted her immediate and extended family. Angela also garnered support by researching her own culture. This was evident when she said:

Much of Mexican culture does not always recognize trans people. I mean there's a sense that men should be men you know, machismo. Male dominance. I think a lot of Mexicans have a hard time understanding why someone would give up that dominance. As I started to get more comfortable with being trans, I started to research the Muxe people in Mexican culture. There considered a third gender which is kind of cool and inspiring as a Mexican trans. If I'm not mistaken, there are even other cultures that have

the third gender or transgender people. Like, it's neat to be represented in history as a positive thing. I just wish that America was more inclusive sometimes.

It was at this moment that Angela smiled during our interview. One could tell that this positive connection with the past empowered her both as a Mexican American and as a transgender female. In this narrative, she was able to conceptualize the negativity that came from her culture while embracing historical self-affirming information. In this way, she was able to understand and embrace the complexity of cultural influence and transgender identity. This is evident in an earlier excerpt when she discussed family priorities.

SES Salience

Angela's narrative produced several instances where SES became a factor in transition. In fact, it was presented as an influence from the beginning of her transition experience. When asked about how her gender identity connected with her SES, she picked up a picture and said,

If you look at the first picture, you see my first dress. I can't even describe how I was feeling in that moment. It felt amazing and relieving. This is why I didn't give up. Eventually, I was able to get hormones from Planned Parenthood because they make them affordable. They truly are a God send. So, the hormones are great. I wish I could afford surgeries but I'm afraid it's just not in the cards rights now, I just don't make enough money. Still, I'm choosing to stay strong and be myself. Love myself despite not being able to have my body exactly like I want it. I mean after all, not everyone can be like Laverne Cox.

As Angela emphasized, her financial status prevented her from transitioning to her comfort level. Fortunately for her, she was able to conceptualize her gender expression in an optimistic manner. She also mentioned that being able to present as female, wearing a dress,

contributed to feelings of resilience for her. Starting the process helped her to continue the process.

Putting transitioning on hold due to SES. Angela experienced feelings of hesitancy due to money. For her, socioeconomic class not only created feelings of uncertainty, but also contributed to thoughts of de-transitioning because it would be easier. For her, she seemed thankful that she did transition and she was able to make things work; however, she was very aware of how income impacted her experience. This is evidenced in her interview when she was asked about SES. She said:

> I guess I identify as middle class now. Or lower middle class. It wasn't always this way though. When I first started transitioning, I was poor. In fact, I had to wait to get hormones. It was a little demoralizing and at the time, I had thoughts of going back. Sometimes, I have thoughts of just presenting as a male because it may be easier.

Despite the keen sense of gender identity she expressed, her SES has caused her to consider presenting as a male. This is a result of the difficulty that occurs for trans females when it comes to being passable. They strive to look like the ideal cisgender female as determined by social constructs. For Angela, this felt like a hurdle because her SES identity made it challenging for her to be passable.

SES and Passability. Angela described how she struggled with being passable at times during her transition. This especially happened during the early to middle parts of her experience. She said it was demoralizing when she had to actively defend her gender identity. In her journal, she expressed this sentiment through the following entry:

> It was hard being lower middle class. Stuff like makeup, hormones, and fem clothing cost money. I've heard that you can't put a price on happiness. Well, try being in the wrong

body and not being able to afford to transition. It kind of sucks. I feel blessed that I was

able to eventually have enough money but still, it sucked to have to wait to start

hormones. I still bought clothing that were effeminate, but I knew that my transition was

incomplete. I knew that I was not passable and others could pick up on the fact that I was

born male. In fact, I remember times when I was shopping in Walmart in the female

section. I was also presenting as female but I didn't buy nice clothing or wigs at that

point. People could tell, they would sometimes give me dirty looks and try to make me

feel like I didn't belong shopping for female clothing. I really had to ignore them and

remind myself that I am female and I am supposed be shopping in that section. I can't let

them hold me back. I can't let anybody stop me.

Angela was able to maintain her sense of self despite being ostracized by individuals who

were judgmental towards her. While she struggled with passability, she managed to turn these

micro and macroaggressions into positive thoughts for herself. This struggle with passability was

both a hurdle and predecessor for greater resilience that was evident throughout her narrative.

Trans Positivity

 Angela expressed feelings of trans positivity and trans centered self-confidence

throughout the interview and in her journaling. For her, transpositivity occurred when her

thoughts contributed to good feelings about her identity as a transgender female. This included

countering the transphobic thoughts that she learned through social constructs, familial

interactions, and religious indoctrination. This sense of self-positivity can best be seen in

Angela's journal when she wrote:

As I was able to afford to get hormones, I was able to look more effeminate. It really

helps being more passable…I think the good feelings I get from being passable have

made all of the struggle of transitioning worth it. It also motivates me to want to

transition more. It makes me want to look as effeminate as I possibly can. Who knows

maybe I'll even get gender-confirming surgery one day in the future.

This reflection showed that Angela felt her struggle was worth the results, and it

illustrated how this type of self-confidence appeared in the middle of her journey. Over time, she

began taking hormones and looking more effeminate. Towards the end of her journey, she

expressed that she looks forward to more confirming of her gender identity on different levels.

Transgender positivity and support. Participants in this study expressed experiences of

support that reflected external transgender positivity. For many, this external reassurance helped

to strengthen their self-esteem and increase their overall wellness. Furthermore, having a sense

of community and family among friends was helpful for participants who felt ostracized by their

biological family. Angela expressed feelings of support in her interview while discussing one of

her pictures:

This third pic is me hanging with my cis Latina friend, Gabriela. It's hard to explain but I

sort of feel my friendship with her was like a replacement for my family's acceptance of

my gender identity. She is my rock when I need her the most. She has always supported

me in what I truly am which is female.

When Angela was asked about how her pictures connected to the intersection between

racial identity and gender identity, she referred again to her source of support. This picture

displayed her in the mountains with her arm around her best friend. She further elaborated on the

feelings of support she experienced:

I would say the last picture I showed you with my friend Gabriela. She reminds me how

important it is to embrace that part of who I am. I'm not just trans, I'm Latina. These are

not mutually exclusive. I'm proud to identify as trans Latina even with the struggles that may come with it. She's a big part of helping me be confident and proud of who I am today.

Angela pinpointed the support and positivity she experienced from her friend. This seemed particularly important to her because her family wasn't entirely supportive of her transition.

Throughout this visual narrative, Angela's feelings of transgender positivity existed in the form of support. Particularly, support from her best friend who affirmed her Latina identity as well as her Transgender identity. Angela expressed that her support system helped her to better connect with her Latina and transgender identity.

Angela further expressed how she embraced transgender positive thoughts when she was presenting another picture of herself in the interview. She was wearing a greenish blue strapless dress. It was apparent that she was happy in this moment and she liked the way she looked in this dress. She particularly showed this when she said, "My first dress is a good representation of my income level. I mean it wasn't that fancy. It was from Walmart. But it works. I like the way my body and my butt looked good in it."

Age Centered Repression

Towards the end Angela's story, her interview revealed some feelings of dysphoria surrounding her age when she began transitioning. It was clear that Angela was happy that she was able to transition when she did; however, she still has feelings of wanting to have transitioned at a younger age. She articulated this through the following blurb:

Being 28, I would say, isn't too bad of an age to be trans. And I started when I was younger, but it was after puberty. I guess sometimes I wish I could have transitioned at

age 12, before puberty. I probably would look even more effeminate that I do now. You know. Like that trans girl on tv… Jazz. She transitioned, and it really looks like she's happy. I've seen some of the show on YouTube. But yea. I really wish I could have beat some of the effects of testosterone like my wide shoulders and voice tone.

While she also talked about age in the context of privilege, it is important to not underestimate the impact that age centered repression had on her life. In particular, she wanted to be able to pass at an earlier age in which she would have been able to express her gender in a way that makes her more passable. Additionally, she mentioned Jazz in her interview because she would have liked to transition like Jazz did. Her expectations and desire to transition at a young age were influenced by transgender visibility in the media.

Privilege

While it's ironic that she experienced marginalization and privilege in the same identity, it underscored the complex nature of intersectionality. Angela's story was highlighted by a reflection of her own privilege that occurred among the hardships she experienced. In this case, she expressed feelings of privilege within her age identity. One sense of acknowledged privilege was revealed in Angela's journal when she said:

I can certainly see how I may have had an advantage over others by transitioning in my twenties. I can just imagine that someone transitioning in there 40's or later, would have challenges I couldn't even relate to. Challenges like being established as a certain gender in one's career. Challenges like fighting against the long-term impact of testosterone. These are things I understand on one level but could never relate to. So, on one hand I have my struggles just being trans, but on the other hand, I understand that things could

have been a whole lot more challenging. I didn't have it easy but I also didn't have it all that bad.

This also showed a cross-section of themes in that there was an undertone of transgender positivity. Angela highlighted a sincere sense of happiness and self-acceptance, which was made possible through age privilege. Angela's unearned advantage of being able to transition at a young age is a fundamental aspect of her narrative and connected the middle and the end parts of her story.

She reflected on similar feelings of privilege during the interviews. Angela presented how privileged she was to transition at such a young age. She reflected on how it helped her to be perceived as more passable. To illustrate this, Angela stated in her interview:

I guess if I'm being optimistic, I'm also lucky that I started hormones when I did, at age 23. I mean, I think doing it at that age will help in the long term. Also, I feel like I'm young enough to where I'll be able to live most of my life as trans. Which is an absolutely beautiful thing. I love being trans and I'm so happy that I can live this way and that people can know me this way. Right? They can be closer to me because they understand me better. It's pretty awesome.

Angela seemed to be well aware of how her age provided her with an advantage in her experience. Her privilege was related to the social climate of when she began her transition along with the fact that she transitioned at the young of 23. She even reflected that the transition experience provided an opportunity for people to be better connected to her because they understand who she was in an authentic way. Despite Angela occupying several marginalized identities, she was able to benefit from her age of transition.

Samantha's Narrative

Samantha provided insight and emotional details regarding her personal experience as it pertained to her transition experience. Her story was well represented in her interview, pictures, which included one non-digital picture, and her journal entries. She answered and expanded on questions as requested. Chronologically, age was thematically appropriate for beginning to describe her story because of her sense of personal timing when it came to transitioning. As will be discussed in the next section, Samantha felt she had to wait in order to transition. The theme of race privilege also occurred in towards the beginning of her transition. This theme was positive in some ways because her narrative included unexpected help and support in the transition. Connected to this, Samantha expressed privilege with regard to race and SES. This privilege helped her begin and maintain her transition experience. While she experienced some privilege in SES, further sections illuminated how her social class identity slowed down her journey, particularly in the middle of her narrative. Finally, Samantha capstoned her gender affirming transition by experiencing a sense of positivity about who she was along with an acceptance of her past and the trial and tribulations she went through.

Age Centered Repression

For Samantha, it was apparent that age was a running theme throughout her narrative. She expressed that she felt repressed both in terms of the time in which she began to understand her gender identity and how her age currently impacted her. Samantha identified as a 49-year-old who grew up in the south. She found that resources and social understanding were very limited, not to mention her own understanding of her identity. This was highlighted when she said,

> I've always known since at least 12 or 13. Always hid the fact except for the privacy of
>
> my own home. Then an unplanned event happened around Christmas. And I completely

changed everywhere. And that's when I knew. It was like a religious experience. That's the only way I could compare it. Then I knew I could never go back. I knew then that I had to do everything I could to transition. To live authentically. To be me. I didn't have the facts early on, because we didn't have the internet. But I knew early on. I tried to listen for trans people on the news or in talk shows. It was always a calling to dress female. And to try to appear or be more fem in some way shape or form. And I don't know why I just never took it a step forward. I guess early on I just thought I never could transition. And hiding behind alcohol made it really easy. It was hard for me to even start this process. *Pauses*

Because it was not acceptable. I had known a few gay people over the years. I knew of the gay community in the Ghent area. I knew of the community but I never made an effort to explore. And there was a lot of misinformation throughout the years. and I was thinking I don't want to do this. And it was just being sacred. This movement is just now starting to be acceptable. In the 90's, unless you were involved in the community or lived in the community, you never interacted with trans people. Now you see them everywhere. If I were to transition now as an 18-year-old now, it would be a lot different. You have so many people, I'm constantly meeting new transgender people. Turning 18 in 1987, I was not exposed to the trans community in any way. Not exposed to the people that may have said. hmm there's something in their personality and maybe they point me in the right direction. Yea and if I go back, for me, in third grade I was not interested in playing with the guys, I wanted to play with the girls. It was the 70's. And unless you're were in New York, San Francisco or Boston, unless you're in a big city, you would not have access to it, access to the information. It would be a hundred times easier to transition here

compared to Danville. I've just heard horror stories of different places. I grew up in Tennessee and I couldn't have done it in Tennessee. I would have been killed. I was bullied everyday, and I didn't know how they knew, I guess they just knew I was different. It still hasn't gotten any better in that community. I remember that I showed up with a motley crew shirt, when their new video came out on MTV. There was a pentagram sign on the t-shirt and I was called a devil worshipper. I got slammed up against lockers, kids took my books, and I didn't tell anybody. I was too scared. The principle didn't care about anyone if you didn't play sports. They didn't give a shit about you. Mm it's an experience. Makes you regret being different. Makes you go and hide. It makes you feel ashamed of yourself.

Samantha expressed how she experienced a tumultuous youth without even including gender transition. The compilation of geography, social constructs during that time period, and her available support created an environment in which she felt unable to be her authentic self. This was pervasive even when she was closer to transitioning.

Not only was this feeling of repression evident in Samantha's interview, it was also relevant in her pictures. One particular picture was one that she cut out of a magazine While the intention of including photographs in this study was to focus on client centered photos, Samantha's magazine picture was an exception. It was exceptional because it clearly was deeply meaningful for Samantha and in many ways, represented the woman she wished she could be. Her tearful reaction to the picture can be summarized with the following:

I know I'll never be that person, in that picture. I'm too old. It speeds up my process. You know I never felt my age. I started at 46. I mean my life is at least three fourth's the way over… and I think you realize (cries). When you start to transition, it's such a wonderful

moment. It's a wonderful experience. In the end, you look around. You start to look at those so much younger than you. I'm a people watcher anyway. You see those who have their whole life in front of them. Especially now being trans. There out at an early age. In some ways, it hurts. *Pauses* The best years of your life, are the younger years. To put it that way. It hurts.

As mentioned, this was a particularly meaningful expression for Samantha in that she deeply reflected on the life she could have had. She cut the picture out towards the beginning of her transition experience because she wanted to have a picture of what she wanted to look like. This was a very emotional part of the interview because it was clear that she had a deep desire to begin her transition years ago.

Age and transgender hesitation. As mentioned above, Samantha experienced hesitation despite having awareness of her gender. This hesitation was not only represented in her early narrative, but also in her late forties when she began to find the motivation to transition. In this context, Samantha expressed that she wished she could have transitioned earlier and that she has been hesitant for a long time. She also discussed all of the feelings that accompanied her hesitation. This feeling is highlighted in her journal when she said:

And I don't know why, I just never took it a step forward. I guess early on I just though I never could transition. And hiding behind alcohol made it really easy. It was hard for me to even start this process.

There seemed to be feelings of regret coupled with a reflection of her hesitation. This hesitation appeared to stem from societal transphobia as opposed to internal struggles with gender identity. While she internalized transphobic constructs, other aspects of her narrative

showed that she understood how her experience was influenced by societal norms and transphobia.

Age and transgender standards of beauty. Throughout the interviews and journals, many of the participants connected their age with transgender standards of beauty. The operational definition of transgender standards of beauty are a systemic common sense of what beauty means for transgender females. In their journals, participants wrote about age on day two. A specific example of the intersection of age and transgender standards of beauty was expressed by Samantha when she wrote:

On the other end, there's a life time of pain and depression to deal with. All the memories of dresses, shoes, etc. That you wanted so much but couldn't have. All of the things you wanted to do. In the back of your mind, you always know your younger self is in the past. Your life is over half the way over. It's been a disguise and there's nothing you can do about it.

This was echoed throughout her interview and journal entries. In fact, it was highlighted when she was asked about the most important part of her identity with respect to transitioning. In particular she said, "But of what we discussed would say age. I saw a top in the store the other day and I know I could never wear it. Because being trans but also just my age." This contributed to her underlying narrative of not being the female she would truly like to be due to marginalized social positions that she occupied.

Age illuminated through pictures. Several of the participants expressed a negative view regarding age as it pertained to their transitioning. In particular, Samantha reflected on this when she talked about the cut out picture that appeared to be from a Sear's magazine. This

picture was of a blond, cisgender female in her twenties who was paid to be a model in this magazine. Samantha's reaction was:

> This is a picture of a dress that came in a flyer. I absolutely love that dress, but I could never wear it. Because of my body I could never wear it. This is the way I would love to perceive myself, but I know it could never happen.

> In this context, she didn't directly mention age. However, it was the underlying context of what she was expressing. More to the point, she suggested that she could never look like the lady in magazine because her body was too old and because she did not take hormones earlier in life, and according to Samantha, "The damage is already done." This is further evidence of Samantha's underlying feeling of age oppression in the trans female context.

Race Oppression

Race oppression was experienced by many of the participants in this study, even one participant who experienced cultural racial identity privilege. In particular, she self-identified as white, yet she experienced within group exclusion and oppression from cisgender white females. In fact, during her interview, Samantha talked about how she felt more supported by African American females because her own race (white) seemed to be less understanding of diversity.

> As far as race goes. If anything, in transition, it brought me closer to African American females. In the beginning they were my biggest allies. Just the vibe between the African American community. Maybe I didn't look at the African American community as peers as much. I'm not saying that one group is better than the other. Were just different and we have different backgrounds. From a social standpoint. You know, there are situations, and I guess for me.. I've never gone out with anyone from the African American community. I mean I've they just weren't in my circle. If that makes sense. And then

when I was transitioning, they were one of my biggest allies, especially African

American females. I think they grew up with more adversity. You know, they didn't

shrug their nose at you or judge you. They accepted your gender identity. Especially in

the beginning, now I feel like I pass more. In the beginning I didn't pass at all. I just went

out as trans, and I said I'm not going to hide it, I am who I am. And black women were

always there in support. They were always complementing my outfit or my hair. I think

they were more supportive because of diversity. I mean, in this area, as opposed to

Virginia Beach and Chesapeake. I feel like they had to struggle more to get where they

were going. Like in Portsmouth, there's a lot that below the poverty line. There you're

more likely to come across a poor working person than someone who is middle class. So,

I think that has to do with it. There's more adversity in their background. And they grew

up with more adversity and it made it easier for them to accept it as opposed to a pure

white community. Most white people are stuck up and they think they're better than

other people. White women look at you different than black women do. More of a

distaste. More judgmental. You see it. You see it in facial expressions. I see it a lot in the

retail industry.

In this exchange, she expressed that garnering support was challenging for her because

white people seemed judgmental, and her support system prior to her transitioning was white.

She disclosed that this motivated her to engage with and depend on support from African

American females, which was a new endeavor for her. Despite her challenges, she was resilient

and persevered through her transitioning.

Racial privilege. Racial privilege, while not a central part of Samantha's identity, was

acknowledged on several occasions during the interview. In many instances, Samantha

experienced social positions of privilege. In fact, this aspect of her identity connected directly to her cultural racial identity, which she alluded to in the middle of her transitioning narrative. This was explained in her interview when she said:

> Race definitely played a part in my transition. Having long blond hair already gave a me a step ahead in the beginning. One less thing I had to deal with. Long hair has always been associated with being feminine and when down, I think it helped hide the more masculine facial features. Having very light-colored facial hair had an advantage to. I don't have a beard shadow to hide.

It is clear that Samantha had some concept of how her physical skin color provided her with some privilege in her transitioning experience. However, it is not apparent if she was aware of the full extent of her privilege as it pertained to race. That is, being a white transgender female allowed avoidance of situations and feelings that other participants experienced and an unearned identity privilege that allowed her to have one less thing to worry about on top of gender identity.

SES Salience

For Samantha, it was clear that having low SES greatly impacted her opportunity to transition. In her interview, Samantha stated, "Lower class or working poor. Though I was vain, especially in the beginning. Everything had to be perfect in the beginning. Perfect makeup, perfect clothing. But I've always classified myself as lower-class income… wanting to be upper class" (laughs). Samantha was reflecting on the fact that she did not have the money to transition in the way she would want. During the interview, she suggested that this was one of the most challenging aspects of her identity, right behind age.

Through Samantha's journal, she provided details that were mildly redundant with subtle yet significant change. In the following excerpt, she spoke more about the limitations of being

low SES and trying to transition. The difference is that she elaborated on the impact of being working poor for a long period of time, with such narrow skills level and limited job opportunities. She illustrated this in the following:

> I've been lucky that I've been financially stable enough most of the time to be able to buy clothes, shoes, makeup, etc. having a long career in carpentry all but guarantees me work. But it also limits me in transitioning. I feel construction is holding me back, slowing me down. Being working poor and only having one career doesn't allow for much leeway. In a way, I have little to lose but it doesn't take much to lose everything. I don't socialize outside of the LGBTQ community with the exception of friends I've made in retail. But I've found people I met in the low/ lower in come range have been supporters and that has helped me move forward. I don't really understand or care about SES. I'm me, you either like me or not. Support me or not. I don't care about nice cars, big houses, etc. Sure, I would like more money. Life would be easier. Honestly, believing in equality and what one does with their life is so much more important.

Samantha's education and financial limitation narrowed her transition options in a few different ways. As she alluded to in the above excerpt, and explicitly stated later in the interview, her ability to transition to her level of comfort was hampered by financial constraints. Additionally, her career in the construction industry created limitations regarding her presentation at work. This was due to the traditionally cisnormative nature of her particular field. While she did not explicitly state this, she did allude to the need for further support when talked about where her support comes from.

SES connected to passability. For Samantha, her income level or SES, made things more difficult than they needed to be. She felt stifled in terms of beginning her transition and in

terms of enacting certain parts of her transition. This feeling of not being passable contributed to her feelings of gender dysphoria, creating one more hurdle for Samantha to overcome. During her interview, when asked about her SES identity as it applied to her transition, Samantha provided the following response:

It made it harder (being working poor). I don't have health insurance. So, trying to get these (points to breast), it would come out of pocket. Forget about bottom surgery. I can't afford it and I can't afford insurance. So, a lot of the things I would like to do for transitioning, I can't. The money is not there for that.

Also, being working poor, I always felt like I had to prove myself. I would always make sure my hair and makeup were as good as I could get them. I really just wanted to pass easier. At times it was a challenge being passable, but things have changed in the way I perceive myself. It's just been an on-going experiment. I just thought I would never pass. My wrinkles, my age, not taking care of my skin, my facial features. I just decided early on, I probably will never pass, but the hell with it. I decided to not care what people think. And it has worked for me and helped me to get where I am today.

Transgender Positivity

The foundation of Samantha's story was resilience and transgender positivity. Even though her narrative seemed to end strongly on this theme, it was one that permeated throughout her narrative. In particular, Samantha discussed one picture during her interview that brought a smile to her face. She showed a picture of herself at a local LGBT festival. She was in charge of a tent that was geared toward transgender visibility. She had a board that was about five feet tall and made of wood. On the board, she had the picture of the transgender individuals in the community, of which she also included a small caption about who they were. The point of this

board was to provide a sense of visibility and an understanding of diversity in the transgender community. This was particularly underscored when she said:

>This is probably the most out I've ever been. I really felt like I accomplished something. I made a lot of mistakes but... I remember that day I really realized how diverse the trans community is. Meeting all the people that day. You really saw… there were 17 names on there. But you really saw... how many trans people are out there. Some of the older ones didn't want to be part of the project. But it was the most trans people I've ever met at once (smiles).

After the interview, when the recorder was off, Samantha told me more about the event. She described her board as an extension of love and acceptance for those who did not feel like they fit into the mainstream LGBT community. This was particularly meaningful to her because she felt this way many times in the past. This was transparently a positive feature that supported and uplifted her gender identity and transgender self-esteem.

Internalized transgender positivity. Samantha's feelings of positivity towards her own gender identity increased as her transition progressed. Her sense of self-esteem has grown and she is able to maintain her optimism during events that may have hurt her feelings in the past. When she was asked about SES, this concept of internalization of transgender positivity presented itself.

>And now I've been doing this long enough. Though it's still awkward at times. Some situations are still uncomfortable. But um now, in just comfortable clothes, I am 90 percent of the time, I'm gendered correctly. Even if I haven't shaved in a bit. I mean I'm always wearing my earrings. So yea. It's different in how you present yourself. I just don't give a fuck. (laughs) and it seems to make things easier.

In this excerpt, she recognized the fact that she was now being gendered appropriately most of the time. When she is not appropriately identified, she is able to brush it off. This implied a sense of self-worth and self-confidence that was not necessarily prevalent at the beginning of Samantha's narrative. Through this increased self-confidence, she was able to better create a network of support and mutual empowerment.

Transgender positivity and support. Others in this study experienced a similar sense of family in non-biological peers. This was particularly evident in Samantha's journal when she described how her job sometimes made her feel isolated and has generally made it harder for her to transition. In particular, she wrote, "I don't socialize outside of the LGBTQ community with the exception of friends I've made in retail. But I've found people I met in the low/ lower income range have been supporters and that has helped me move forward."

Christina's Narrative

Christina's story opened up with the barriers and hurdles associated with diminished social power and experiences of oppression. Her story was well represented in her interview, pictures, and her journal. She answered and expanded on questions as requested. Christina began with SES centered exclusion that impacted the manner and timing in which she transitioned. Her social class identity set the stage for her in terms of her ability to transition and provided a starting group for telling other personal experiences as it pertained to the identities that she occupied. Chronologically, Christina's race was an essential factor in her experience. She occupied a marginalized cultural-racial identity, which provided obstacles along with sources of support during her transition. Next, age was a factor in her experience. Even though she did not transition at a young age like she would have liked, she did not see age as much of a barrier. In particular, this led to the evolution of her story, which illuminated transgender positivity in her

life, thereby reducing the impact of age regression on her experience. This theme was the culmination of her experience.

SES Salience

Christina's experience highlighted the historical impact of low income. These social consequences contribute to deepened and prolonged poverty. Christiana's and other participant's highlighted SES as intertwined and yet a prominent aspect of their identity. For Christina, this was a somewhat linear concept in that she maintained a low income level from the beginning to the middle of her story. To illustrate this, in Christina's interview she said

It's probably obvious at this point * laughs*. But yea, I think income had the biggest impact. Not only coming from a lower-middle-class family but also not making all that much money myself was a factor. The money I did make had to go to help support some family members and truth be told when you put it all together, minimum wage is not enough to support myself, family, have a social life and live on my own. And as I mentioned, living with my parents meant living as a male. It meant being the person that they wanted me to be instead of being my true self.

Low SES contributes to many challenges for transgender people, including education, obtaining housing, employment, benefits, and appropriate identity documents. As evidenced by this excerpt, SES was the most prominent aspect of Christina's identity. Not only did it impact her ability to transition, it created challenges in other areas of her life that added to the stress of gender dysphoria. Christina illustrated this sense of marginalization by the following reflection from her journal:

Money has been a factor since the beginning. I grew up not having that much money, and I think that connects with my parent's education, my upbringing, my education, my

ability to transition and even my parents view on what it means to be trans. The truth is, these things are interconnected. My parents had even less money when they were growing up and therefore never went to college. This means that they didn't have alot of money when they were raising me and they were ignorant on social issues. The strongest sense of values that they ever had was a product of the church which led them to not understand transgender concepts. Additionally, since they never went to college and didn't make a lot of money and I couldn't afford to go to college. I also couldn't afford to move out on my own until later in my twenties. So, money made it impossible for me to leave my parents' house and I believe it impacted their ability and opportunity to learn about trans people.

In addition to money making it hard for me to move out of my parents' house, I also couldn't afford to get hormones and to buy the right clothing. In the 90's it was a lot more harder to get hormones. Not like it is now, in some places you can even get Medicaid to pay for hormones.

In this section of her story, the domino effect of social class in regard to education, familial support, and transitioning is clear. As she put it, "These things are interconnected" and they came together in a manner that made it hard if not impossible for her to transition at the age when she was aware of her gender identity. Christina felt like her low income prevented her from going to college, moving out of her parents' house, and transitioning.

SES centered transition hesitation. As mentioned in previous narratives, being passable is important to many transgender females. This seemed to be a desire for Christina as well. Like many others, she felt that she was stifled by her SES and therefore, unable to

transition despite being well aware of her gender identity. In the interview notes, I describe a moment when the room fell to silence after the following comment:

To be honest, I wish I could have afforded to do it much earlier in my life. I'm just saying, I knew that I was a girl at age 19. I could have started so much earlier. But I guess it wasn't it the cards. It was really a money and family thing more than an age thing. I mean people sort of look at young females different than they do older ones so I guess I wish I had more of that yah know. More of the attention for being a female that I would have gotten at a younger age.

For Christina and several other participants, this was an ongoing theme of not being able to afford to transition despite the realization of their gender identity. This led to feelings of not being as passable due to her age. Being passable was well connected with having the financial resources to invest in Christina's clothing, makeup, hormones, and other items that contribute to societal constructs regarding female presentation.

Race Oppression

Christiana's identity as a Black Latina seemed to be a significant part of her life despite her transition. She experienced and would have experienced certain levels of racial oppression whether she transitioned or presented as a male. As Christiana and Jamie explained in their narratives, occupying a marginalized racial position created another barrier for them on top of their already existing barriers. Christina set the stage for this aspect of her narrative when she wrote the following in her journal:

Race has had an impact, but is not the only definer of my transition experience. Me being black and part of a black family was pretty important. I mentioned how my church and family reacted to my trans identity during the interview. So, I think I'll now focus on the

black community overall. First, I think it's important to talk about the discrimination that occurs for all blacks, including, me. So, activities like shopping, driving, or even walking on the street can be met with people being racist. The God honest truth is that this is not new and not unique to me or any other black trans female. I'm just saying that being black is one more thing I have to deal with. On top of being black, a lot of people have bias against trans people.

Trans exclusion in cultural racial spaces. Racially marginalized individuals in this study expressed a shared experience of feeling excluded as trans females in cultural-racial spaces. Their identity became a focal point and, in some cases, an excuse for racial exclusion. This suggested a type of within-group discrimination leading to ostracization of transgender females in these cultural groups. For instance, Christina stated in her journal:

I used to go to a barber to get my hair taken care of. He was one that a lot of people in my family knew and that I went to since I was a little boy. I knew that once I started being more effeminate, I wouldn't feel as invited in there. And I didn't. When I was around 29, I started to go to a hair salon to get my hair taken care of in a more ladylike way. I didn't go back into the barbershop until I was 33 when I went with my cousin to get his hard fade. I was trying to look a little less effeminate that day but I wasn't about to take out my hair. When I went into the shop, it was like I had some incurable contagious disease. I mean, my old barber nodded and said hi, but he didn't really talk to me otherwise. One of the guys talked me, but it wasn't like it used to be before I transitioned. They did not like the fact that I was effeminate. I think a big reason for that was because we are black and the black community, overall, is not pro trans. Needless to say, I wish I had more support.

This experience seemed to exacerbate her feelings of exclusion and disappointment in spaces that were once safe and welcoming to her. This quote served as parallel evidence of exclusion for similar conflicts that were centered around her being trans in the black community. In particular, Christina also experienced this feeling of exclusion in a church in which she frequented for many years. The church seemed to be a very important source of support for her with general life concerns and to gain a sense of community. It seemed that Black churches were less accepting of her. During her interview, she expanded this by stating:

Truth being what it is, I did have to switch church in my early 30's due to my gender expression. I now go to a church that is relatively mixed in terms of race. Don't get me wrong, parts of my black community support me as I am but the church, I've been at for the past 20 years has supported much more than the all black church's I used to attend. I think that some black people are much more critical of the trans community. I've been told that I am a product of white oppression in that I represent the feminization of black men and am an attempt by society to sterilize of black men. Actually, I've been told that a few times. Of course, I don't agree but I wish that others didn't think that way either. When I came out, I lost friends in the black community because of this belief. Also, I for real did not feel comfortable presenting as female at a black church. So, my first year coming out, I stayed closeted at church. It was the only place where I wasn't my true self. And as hard as it was, I left the black church for that reason. I had to be the real me. Even if it meant I left people that cared greatly for me.

It was clear that this situation was particularly painful for her because of how meaningful religion has been to her. Christina's journal and interview implied that this experience was

profound throughout her narrative because she viewed the church as such a reliable source of support and cultural concentration.

More to the point, Christina had a picture that reflected her experience with her mixed-race church compared to black centered churches. When member checking her interviews, I found that Christina had more to say about one of her pictures. Christina had a picture of her with her "new church family" who accepted her "without conditions." She said it was a great relief for her to switch churches because "black people are so judgmental of trans." This picture was of her with other members of her church. She was wearing what she described as her yellow "Sunday dress." It seemed apparent in the picture that she was happy because she had a very obvious smile. This picture further illustrated her narrative about needing and pursuing trans positive support.

Age Repression

Christina's age seemed to be the least mitigating factor in her experience. She did not experience privilege in this area; however, it provided a connection between the beginning and end of her story. More to the point, she experienced multiple forms of oppression thereby minimizing her dissatisfaction with her age identity. This minimization helped her to optimistically conceptualize her age and eventually led her to a positive transgender identification or transgender positivity. The following excerpt accurately described this constructed connection and how she was able to view it in a positive way:

> I think age is the least impacting part of my process. I mean, it's like I said in the interview, I wish I was younger when I started. I think that would have been a game changer. Also, I think the culture has changed since I started my transition and people are now more accepting than ever. Even my parents are starting to understand a little

more. So, I guess if I could be young right now and start my process, that would be blessed. Either way, I'm blessed in life and even though I would have liked to experience early life as my authentic self, that's not in the cards and now I get to experience older life as my authentic self, which is pretty blessed.

As far as my experience compared to different aged trans individuals, I think the young ladies have an advantage. I just think that society and many parents are increasingly accepting of people being trans. So, if I were young now, there is a chance that my parents would be accepting. If they weren't accepting, I'm willing to bet that they would at least tolerate me being in there house and being a little effeminate. I'm really just saying that the world is different and there is a strong likelihood that trans kids today won't have to know some of the struggles that I know. Even though I can't be young today, this fact makes me smile.

As previously stated, this part of her story was not completely positive. She did reflect on the idea of having a better experience if she was able to transition when she was younger. This goes back to not being able to afford to transition. Her SES influenced what age she could begin the process, thus creating less emphasis on her age identity. Once she was able to transition, she was better able to accept her age identity and be joyful for transgender children who may have more opportunity than she did. From this, she moved towards the last part of her transition experience.

Transgender Positivity

Christina's sense of self improved as her transition progressed. For her, being positive about her gender identity included being passable. As previously mentioned, her age was not nearly as important as the transition process and seeing herself as a passable female. Christina

expressed transgender positivity both internally and externally during her interview when she said:

> That was when I was 40 and when I was more transitioned. I looked and felt like I lady in multiple ways. Many people saw me as a passing female which was very encouraging for me. Lot of this was because I was able to get clothing, HRT and get surgery. Without these sort of gender identifying activities and materials and stuff, I wouldn't have been the happy and confident women that you see in these pictures.

This part of the interview occurred when Christina was asked about her pictures. In the pictures, she has a big smile on her face and was wearing a yellow dress with high heels and makeup. She said that this ability to pass, both internally and externally, has made her happy and confident.

Resiliency and race. For many of the participants, cultural-racial identity was well connected with resilience. In particular, participants felt unified with their culture in a way that brought them strength and a sense of self-respect during trying times. Some participants utilized their cultural connection as a means of garnering support. In her interview, Christina stated:

> I'm a black Latina child of God before all else, and my relationship with father god comes before all else. It's who I am and it's how I identify. This identification and connection with God and God's people have sustained me through some of the tough times of transitioning. I mean that my church community has always supported me as a person even if they haven't also supported the trans part of my identity.

This was followed by the participant explaining that she did eventually go to a transgender affirming church. For Christina, going to a trans-affirming church provided a significant amount of support, which contributed to her ability to be resilient. This all stemmed

from Christina's African American and Mexican American cultural norm of attending church and using it as a form of support. Therefore, Christina's current support and resilience stemmed from aspects of cultural-racial identity.

Ashley's Narrative

Ashley's experience in transitioning from male to female was unique compared to other participants in this study. She occupied multiple positions of social power and privilege despite expressing gender marginalization. Consequently, her interviews were more focused on how she experienced privilege in various aspects of her identity. As previously mentioned, bell hooks (2014) confirmed that researchers can gain equally valuable information from privileged individuals; therefore, Ashley's perspective was essential to this study. Chronologically, her story began with her ability to transition at a young age due to her SES privilege. Her parents made enough money and were socially open to the idea of her transitioning in her early teens. Her social class privilege contributed and led to her age identity. Much of her narrative was positive because she was able to transition at a young age. On several occasions, she acknowledged how important it was for her to express her gender identity in her teenage years. Towards the middle of her narrative, race privilege created a contradicting theme in that she was relatively unaware of her privilege in this social space. Ironically, Ashley vociferously exposed her lack of understanding of how racial identity could impact ones transitioning experience while alluding to a mild understanding of race privilege in her journal. While these sources of privilege included aspects that were negative, a lot of her experiences were positive, thus leading to the conclusion of her narrative, that is, transgender positivity. This final theme encapsulated many of the undertones of her experiences and contributed to her feelings of self-acceptance and transgender centered confidence.

Privilege

As presented throughout chapter 3, privilege was discussed and experienced by many of the participants. For coding purposes, privilege is access to power experienced by a dominant social group, thereby giving them social, economic, political, and cultural advantages at the expense of members of a socially marginalized group. The contrast that Ashley's narrative provided centers on her privilege in various identities. The other participants experienced marginalization in multiple forms, while Christina was lucky enough to experience many types of social power. In fact, based on her tone and mannerisms, she appeared to be slightly defensive when she was asked about her cultural racial identity and how it impacted her transition experience. One particular example occurred in Ashley's journal when she wrote:

> My race is white. I don't know much about my actual ethnicity but I think I'm Irish. I realize that in some ways it gives me an advantage with respect to social aspects in life. I realize that people look at me different in stores and the police view me differently. I mean, I don't get hassled like I see that African Americans do. That said, I don't think my race has impacted my transition one way or another. It's hard for me to understand if it impacted anyone's transition because I don't share experiences with transgender females of marginalized race's. To be honest, I feel like I am a bit ignorant in this respect. It's not intentional but it's kind of the way things have worked out for me. I just mean that I don't have any trans friends that aren't white. I've met a few, but we really haven't talked about race. So, to tell the truth, I'm unaware of how other's race impacts their transitioning. I just don't think it does.

In her journal, there was a sense of not being unaware of her privilege and how it impacted her transition compared to others. When race is centered within transgender identity, it

seemed easy for some of the participants to overlook the privilege that racial-cultural identity may provide.

SES Privilege

The capstone of Ashley's transition was predicated on the fact that she felt comfortable enough to identify as transgender at a young age, her parent's acceptance of her gender identity, and her parents financial ability to support her in her transition. This is directly connected with age privilege and transgender positivity in Ashley's narrative. When asked to generally describe her transition experience, she admittedly described an experience in which she did not have many obstacles. In her interview, one paragraph truly grasped how her privilege influenced her experience:

> My parents were really supportive of me transitioning and they helped financially support my process through buying girl clothing and getting me therapist and doctors so that I could get on hormones. Should I add more, honestly it wasn't that much of a struggle for me. At least not in terms of actually transitioning. I was teased a few times, but I got over it.

This section is unique in that Ashley subtly alluded to the connection between her familial support and how she generally conceptualized her gender expression experience. It suggests an underlining of parental acceptance at a young age. Consequently, Ashley's transgender self-esteem is developmentally similar to the self-esteem of cisgender females her age. This sense of a positive self-view is showcased throughout her interview and journal entries.

Passability due to SES privilege. For some participants like Ashley, it was apparent that SES was significantly connected to their feeling of being recognized as a legitimate female.

She felt that she was more passable because of what she could afford to buy at a young age. It

seemed like it was important to her to be able to transition on her terms in her teens. For

instance, during her interview she said

> I'm not sure. I guess if anything, it's helped me to get the services that I needed like
>
> doctor visits and HRT. I guess I'm kind of lucky in that sense also was able to afford
>
> good clothing at a young age. It's pretty cool that my parents were willing to buy a whole
>
> new wardrobe when I came out as trans. They really didn't even need that much
>
> convincing. My counselor just said that they should support me in any way they can. So,
>
> for my sweet 16 birthday, they took me shopping at the mall and I was able to get the
>
> clothing I really wanted. It was cool because I was able to throw away my boy clothes. I
>
> think having the right clothing and the right look really made my transition experience a
>
> lot easier than it could have been.

Her social class privilege helped her to experience transitioning at a young age and to

experience transitioning in a way that made her feel more passable. In particular, she mentioned

her "sweet 16 birthday" when her parents took her shopping to get her new clothing. This went a

long way for her to appropriately and accurately express her gender identity. She finished our

interview by reinforcing this theme's prevalence in her narrative:

> Ummm. I think that covers my experience. I just want to say that being able to afford to
>
> transition was a big factor in me getting to me. I don't want to sound overly materialistic,
>
> but I could just imagine that if my parents weren't financially supportive, I just wouldn't
>
> have been able to do it. And I wouldn't be the person I am today.

This portion showed her appreciation and need for financial support at a young age. As

mentioned, this support included clothing, professional resources, and other gender confirming

sources of support. Ashley's SES identity was revealed as a fundamental privilege and resource in her journey of gender expression.

Age privilege. Age can be a relative factor in the context of female transitioning. This connects with the concept of socially constructed standards of beauty and societal attitudes regarding transitioning. Some individuals acknowledged their experiences of privilege while others expressed that they were marginalized in this category, particularly in the context of when they felt able to transition. Age privilege was particularly highlighted in Ashley's interview when she said:

> I'm 24. I truly think being young when I transitioned, has helped me to transition. What I mean is that I was able to start hormones before testosterone had its full effect. This means that my estrogen had a bigger impact, according to my doctor. I like the way I look now and I take nothing for granted. If I had to wait later in life, there's a chance I would have more masculine features. And while I would do everything I could to be effeminate... to look like a female as much as possible, it would be a much harder fight.

Ashley practically repeated this excerpt in her journal when she was asked about how age impacted her transitioning experience. She also communicated the potential long-term impact of expressing her identity at a young age. This was underscored in her journal when she said:

> I think being young has gone a long way towards me feeling effeminate. It also helps me to live a more natural life. To some, that may sound counter-intuitive. But it's not. Imagine having a career or skill that is a perfect fit for you and makes you happy. Wouldn't it be better to be aware of this passion at age 20 as opposed to age 40? You would have more time to get yourself engrained in that career and you would likely be more successful in that career. I think it's similar for being trans. Because I'm young, I get

to perfect my identity as female both internally and externally It's something I recognize as a privilege and it's something I try not to take for granted.

It was echoed through her interview and journal that the support she received was not limited to emotional support and acceptance. As mentioned earlier, her parents funded her wardrobe transition as well as doctor visits and hormone acquisition. Social class experience draws a direct line to her age privilege. For Ashley, it was a matter of self-awareness that she was aware of how important transitioning at a young age was to her. While reflecting on one of her photos, she identified a sense of self-acceptance and joy that resulted from her congruence of gender identity and expression. This photo showed her in her bathroom at age 15. She was wearing red makeup and a black miniskirt with a purple top and open-toed shoes. She appeared to be very happy because of her vibrant smile. During the interview, she looked at the photo and expressed this sentiment when she said:

These photos are when I was first starting to transition around age 15 close to 16. All I can say is that this is what joy feels like. I just remember how down I was feeling before that. These pictures reflect the fact that I had the support and love to follow through with the transition process. I guess I feel pretty blessed because I know that not everyone has the opportunity to experience the joy of transitioning at such a young age.

This excerpt is meaningful for Ashley because her feelings of self-love and transgender pride were mixed with her appreciation for her position of privilege. This awareness of age privilege is compartmentalized with her age identity and is not as clearly evident in her racial-cultural identity. As expressed in the next section, Ashley was aware of racial struggles in some sense while being unaware of how marginalized race identity interconnects with one's transition experience.

Race privilege. Consistent with the research for this study, participants discussed their experiences in the context of cultural-racial privilege. Racial privilege implies that participants experienced unearned, often invisible social benefits that impacted their lives despite their awareness of such privilege. One participant highlighted privileged experience when she was asked about how race impacted her transitioning experience. Ashley's interview notes reflected that she seemed unsure and hesitant about this question when she stated:

> I don't really think race made a difference for me. To be open and honest, it doesn't seem like race impacts ones transitioning experience. I mean, I think society can be tough on trans girls whether or not your black, white or candy stripe. I'm not saying that people don't experience bigotry because of their race, I'm just saying I don't think it influences one's ability or experience in transitioning.

> This statement was only part of Ashley's fabula and foreshadowed her expressed experiences in the interview and in her journal. Her unacknowledged race privilege is highlighted in her journey as a connection between the struggles she experienced early on and her feelings of transgender positivity. Ashley continued on a similar path when she wrote:

> I realize that people look at me different in stores and the police view me differently. I don't get hassled like I see that African Americans do. That said, I don't think my race has impacted my transition one way or another.

In this excerpt, she exposed a subtle sense of understanding of how being a racial minority may impact others. However, she didn't seem to be fully aware of how her white privilege may have benefited her through her transition. In context, she is also implying that racial identity may not be consequential to transitioning.

Challenges within privilege. In a similar fashion, Ashley experienced some challenges within the experience of privilege. She described situations and experiences that were a result of their identity despite having privilege in that identity. Despite occupying certain positions of social privilege, she experienced difficulties that could only happen within privilege. Take for instance, in Ashley's interview when she said:

> *Point to other picture* As you can see in this picture, I was in high school presenting as a female. And even though it was only like eight years ago, it wasn't easy to present in public. Some people were cool with it but others would give me a hard time. They didn't want to accept me as a female and teased me about being a sissy. Also, I wish the teachers and guidance counselor were more helpful. I would have liked to use the female's bathroom.

Many of the participants described that they would have loved to transition at a young age. Despite having such privilege, Ashley experienced challenges that stemmed from this privilege. As much as it was a benefit to transition at an early age, Ashley experienced bullying due to her transition.

Transgender Positivity

As mentioned early on in Ashley's narrative, she was privileged with resources and parental support at a young age. Logic suggests that the more resources one has, both in terms of finances and education, the easier it will be for them to be resilient. Ashley's experiences fit this logic quite well. In fact, her narrative reflects her ability to maintain a positive outlook on transition experience along with a sense of resilience.

> I may, eventually, I'll get top surgery, but I think I would be content stopping there. At this point, I'm pretty satisfied with how I look, probably because I was able to start at a

relatively young age. My parents were really supportive of me transitioning and they helped financially support my process through buying girl clothing and getting me therapist and doctors so that I could get on hormones.

This portion of Ashley's narrative suggested a sense of increased self-esteem and strength due to her privilege with respect to SES. She was more emotionally equipped to withstand adversity because she was able to express her authentic self at a relatively young age (16). This is further communicated through Ashley's journal when she said:

Being middle class and having a shopping spree on my 16th birthday helped a lot. I think it was a life-changing shift for me because it allowed me to constantly dress as a female. For me, this was probably the difference between fully transitioning at 16 and waiting until I was 18. I just don't think I would have had the money to buy enough clothing to consistently dress more effeminate and I didn't get my first job until age 18. I think it's possible that without the shopping spree, I still could have gotten clothing for birthdays and Christmas. But my point is that my parent's support and money made a big difference in the timing of my transition and as I said before, transitioning early was important to me. Like I said in the interview, having money to transition was the most influential part of my experience.

Tori's Narrative

Tori's interview and journal entries are accented by an underlying sense of optimism and resiliency. Many of the themes occurred in a subtle manner. Her undertones of optimism can be seen early in the interview. For example, when asked about what being transgender meant to her, she said:

Well, for me to be a transgender female it means hidden desires that I get to express out fully. I come from a family of 9. My mom always encouraged her children to do what they want. To do what makes you happy. Kind of the internal me being expressed externally.

Her story began when she was about 19 and she started her transition. She continued when she moved out of her parents' house and was able to further her transition by starting hormones. This is when she felt she was able to begin her transition. The foremost theme that she alluded to during her narrative was that of age repression. In a parallel manner, she experienced a sense of racial oppression at the beginning of her story. While this was not articulated as a fundamental theme in her experience, it did serve to set the stage for her transition. Sequentially, Tori benefited from being able to afford to transition, which she suggested cost money. She expressed in her narrative that she found her social class identity an important ingredient of which she experienced a certain amount of privilege. That is to say, being middle class in her late twenties was helpful for her. This is congruent with the theme of privilege and in particular, SES privilege. Towards the middle part of Tori's story, she had experiences that were transgender positive; in particular, this included an internal sense of self-acceptance and confidence along with external reinforcement regarding her role as a mentor and the attention she received from men.

Age Repression

Most participants did not suggest or state that age was the most prolific factor in their transitioning experience; however, Tori did reflect on the impact that age had on her life. For coding purposes, age oppression is defined as prejudice and discrimination based on one's age

that particularly impacts and intersects one's transgender identity. This could involve historical social oppression, intersections with other identities, and social constructs regarding transgender standards of beauty. For Tori, age was reflective of the social constructs and fear regarding these social constructs. In particular, she second-guessed her decision to transition based on how peers in her age group might treat her. This was articulated in Tori's journal when she reflected on how age impacted her transition experience.

> I started transitioning at the age of 19. When I came out at that age, I felt like people were going to treat me like I did not belong around anyone. Those feelings made me feel like what I was doing was wrong at one point. Being the way that I was brought up in life, I had to show the world that people in this lifestyle do not have mental issues.

Age and transgender hesitation. For Tori, age represented feelings of missed opportunity and forces against her control. This accentuated when she was asked what aspect of her identity influenced her transition the most. During the interview, she answered this question when she said:

> If I had to pick one, I would pick age. I wish that what is happening to me now could have happened 10 years ago. So, I could experience being a woman at a young age. I think a lot of the women that complete their transition, do so at an older age like 40's and 50's because of the financial reason. It just cost a lot. The women that I see may look like there in there 30's but they're actually in their 40s and 50s. I didn't do some of my journey 10 years because of financial reason. It could be a lot worse, but it also could be a lot better. I just think they should have a program where insurance companies or some program would pay for it.

In this excerpt, she was referring to her ability to take hormones and afford certain clothing and makeup. Her narrative in this section showed a clear intersection of SES identify and age identity. For her, it seemed that the two were well connected. Another interconnecting dynamic of her experience included the societal evaluation of transitioning. This appeared when she mentioned that insurance companies, in her experience, do not assist with transitioning. This is yet one more factor that illuminated SES salience .

Race Oppression

Several parts of this study illustrated the positivity regarding participants' cultural racial identity. That is to say, several participants talked about their culture and race as a positive factor that contributed to their ability to be resilient in tumultuous times. For Tori, there were mixed feelings of optimism and peer negativity. These mixed feelings were expressed in her journal when she said:

> When I started to change into what I felt like, I wanted the world to see me the way that I felt on the inside. Growing up as a black transgender was very difficult for me. I was ridiculed and picked on saying that I was ugly and that I would never make it as a transgender. This negativity came from a group of peers who I thought were going to be good friends to me.

This portion of her story highlighted the challenges she experienced within two marginalized identities. During the transcription process, I asked Tori which groups of peers she was referring to. She said, "I meant other black people." This implied that Tori was expecting to receive more support from her black community. After the interview, I asked her why she thinks they rejected her, and she said, "I think it was because they feel they need to protect. They know that being trans comes with challenges and they need to stop people doing this if possible." This

is similar to other participants; however, it differs in that Tori felt like her friends' motives were protective, even though they were being negative towards her. This reflected her experience of within-group discrimination.

SES Salience

Tori presented a narrative that, at several moments, centered on her SES identity. In particular, she experienced oppression in that she has not entirely transitioned in a manner that was reflective of her gender identity due to money. She focused a lot on being feminized and being identified as a female. For her, this necessitated several factors, including money. This seemed to be particularly highlighted in her interview when she said:

> SES impacts me every day. It makes me want to move back home so don't have to pay overhead and so I can save up money and get it done faster. And be feminized, it's just the lifestyle and just living. It can cost. It can cost. Anything from monthly needs, makeup, to hair. Like I have over four thousand dollars invested in makeup alone. That money can be used for something good, you know. But I want to look better in the face versus all of this (points to chest), yah know. You know other states have a program where you can get feminized and where you can get your breast done. We don't have that here. You would think, as many transgenders as there are here, between here and Richmond. You would think they would have something for us, but they don't. I just don't understand why. Being middle class can be challenging.

SES privilege in the media. Several of the participants mentioned various transgender females who were well known through TV and other media platforms. While visibility is important for many transgender females, it can also present unrealistic expectations. Tori

discussed privilege that she saw in others, particularly with individuals representing the transgender community in the media. She expressed this in her interview when she said:

I also know that money has impacted other girls. You have Kaitlyn Jenner for instance. She's all a sudden became the transgender advocate. But she had the finical backing. And it's like, she's all a sudden coming out here living the life but she hasn't been through the struggle. When I first started out, I was introduced in how to go to the streets to make my money. I mean no one wants to hire a man dressed as a woman. She never got to experience all that. You're not just dating bisexual men. Your dating men for social status. So, your relationship is not genuine and stuff. Honestly, people like her are not a good representation of the community. If she were to start a fund to help girls who have done what they were supposed to do and still can't afford to feminize. It would be different. Than it would be different and I would look up to her. My whole thing is that she created her whole life before she transitioned. So, she started out with it being easier on her. And now she's the advocate. She's of a higher class so she's just going to do what she wants to do and she don't get it.

Tori brought a sentiment that appeared to be shared by several participants. Without being prompted, she and two others reflected on the privileged identity of well-known transgender females. While visibility is positive, Tori explained that people like Kaitlin Jenner are not effective role models for the trans community because they inspire unreachable expectations that are truly steeped in several layers of privilege.

Tran positivity

As mentioned earlier, Tori's story was decorated with optimism and resilience. For her, having a sense of positivity about who she was came through the process of "feminization."

Feelings of positivity were echoed in her narrative and constituted the latter part of her transitioning narrative. This seemed most apparent in Tori's interview when she said:

> Being middle class impacted me being passable at first, but not anymore. I get attention. It's never a dull moment. At the end of the day, girls need to realize that you have to believe in yourself. If you feel insecure about yourself, they're going to see that. They'll put you down. Whereas, this girl… she's self-sufficient. She has her own car. She's living the dream.

For Tori, this excerpt is very much reflective of how she spoke throughout the interview and the underlying tone of most of her responses. She consistently tried to stay positive. She expressed how she was able to bounce back from almost all situations and circumstances. In a similar fashion, Tori reflected in her journal saying, "Being the way that I was brought up in life, I had to show the world that people in this lifestyle do not have mental issues. I went to school as a woman, achieved my degree from college as a woman, and I am currently living my life as a woman."

Internalized transgender positivity. Transgender positivity often manifested internally, thus contributing to participants' sense of self-esteem. For many of the participants, maintaining self-esteem regarding their trans identity was both a challenge and an endeavor. Some even expressed the combination of both in a single paragraph. Tori particularly expressed this when she said:

> For one, you have to love yourself to be doing what I'm doing. I mean, you're going to have some rude remarks, you're going to have people pass judgment on what they don't understand. It can be rough at times. One thing I can encourage girls to know is the further along you go, the better it will be.

Tori represented an internalized sense of being positive about her transgender identity throughout her interview and journal. In the above excerpt, she simultaneously reflected on the internalization of transgender oppression while expressing how she maintained positivity and self-soothing. She also reinforced this sense of optimism when she encouraged young trans females in their struggle.

Brittney's Narrative

Brittney's journey began when she was 16, years before she began the process of transitioning. From age 16 to 24, she struggled with significant drug use, which stifled her ability to transition. One of her most applicable contributions to this study was centered on her occupation of multiple marginalized identities. During the interview and journal, she provided meaningful answers and insight to the research questions. Brittney's story was characterized by several factors, the first of which included SES salience. This particularly highlighted her experience because it influenced the timing of her transition as well as the effectiveness of her transition. For Brittney, it was also the most critical aspect of her identity in terms of influence. She expressed this by saying, " Probably the money thing. Not having money slowed down my transition by quite a bit. I got through it, and I am happy about how far I've come. But the truth is, if I had money or if my family had money, I think my life would look significantly different." Also included in the early stages of her journey was her experiences with racial oppression. This was articulated in her interview when she discussed her experience with family and in her journal as direct oppression. While her experience with racial oppression did not seem to have as much of an impact on her transition as it did with other participants, it did appear that the racial marginalization was a constant in Brittney's life. Trans positivity represented the latter part of her journey in that gender expression and passivity was a precursor to her sense of self-worth as

a transgender female. Reflectively, Brittney also discussed her age identity, both in the sense of repression and as a privileged identity. However, her reference to privileged understanding reflected the latest portion of her experience.

SES Salience

Incidents of SES oppression were overwhelmingly present in participants' narratives. For coding purposes, SES oppression is defined as prejudice and discrimination based on one's social class that particularly impacts and intersects one's transgender identity. Brittney's SES can best be described as a working poor individual who comes from a working low-income family. Even though she has overcome many obstacles throughout her life, SES was an undeniable hurdle that she had to surpass throughout her journey. This was conveyed in her journal when she was asked about her SES experience:

It would be easier if I made a bit more money or if I was raised in a wealthy family. In the interview, I talked about how it was a practical concern because I couldn't afford to transition. Similar to what I said about race, it was also a factor within itself. I mean, while I was transitioning, I remember having to worry about money on a regular Basis. There were times where I had to split my last twenty bucks between gas money and makeup money, I mean priorities right. I'm just saying that despite the practical hardships that being broke brought to my transition, it also brought stress on a regular basis. It was hard trying to balance paying my bills and transitioning at the same time. Going back to what I discussed yesterday, I kind of wished I would have transitioned earlier. I think it's possible that if I would have transitioned earlier, I wouldn't look as masculine at the begging of my transition. I think this connects with my SES because it means I wouldn't have had to spend as much money on makeup and other similar clothing. This may sound

like a small difference in money, but it makes a big difference when you don't have that much to start with.

Brittney's story revealed her social position and what represented priorities in her life. While this is reflected throughout her interview, this section was unique in that she identified the practical aspects of transitioning. She revealed that financial hardships represented a severe barrier for her and prevented her from expressing her gender identity in a manner that felt passable for her and in a time frame that was appropriate for her.

Trans Hesitation Due to SES

Brittney's experience as a transgender female was underlined by her SES and her ability to transition was influenced by her income. Brittney felt that if she had more money, she would have been able to afford clothing that would effectively affirm her identity. She provided insight into her inner narrative about passability. In particular, if she could not transition the right way, she did not want to do it all. This sentiment and her underlying impact of SES was best expressed in the following excerpt.

> At age 16 I realized I was trans and it wasn't until eight years later that I transitioned. It took this long for several reasons. First, New York is expensive, and I didn't have money for clothes and hormones. Decent clothing can be very expensive and If I was going to present as trans fulltime, I didn't want to be a hot mess. Secondly, I got involved in the drug scene and that's where my money and focus went. So, for eight years I just continued to cross-dress in private. I'm not saying I was fully sober at age twenty-four, but I was able to be a more functioning addict at that time. Now that I think of it, it was an interesting give and take for me. The more I used, the less I was able to transition. At the same time, I think my having to look like a man was contributing to my drug use.

Once I eased up on the drug use, I was able to start HRT at age 24. That's also when I

started presenting as a straight trans female full time. And now I don't use at all. I know

being my true self helped me sober up along with recognizing that I didn't want to be a

druggy girl. That's not cute. *Pauses*

In this excerpt, Brittney made the connection between the hesitation of her transition and

her SES identity. She implied that one of the reasons she didn't transition was because of her

SES. She also implicated the influence of drug abuse, which she implied may be a factor of

having to wait to transition in the first place. Later on in the interview, Brittney further revealed

that she had a two year window where she could have started to transition if she could have

afforded it. She even implied that being able to transition may have prevented her from falling

into drug addiction. This was particularly significant when she stated:

Well, I don't make a lot of money and I never did. I think money has been a big factor in

when I choose to transition. I mean, yes I was using drugs for several years prior to

transitioning, but I really didn't start until age 18. So, from age 16 to 18, I was clean and

probably could have started HRT and started presenting as female if I had the money.

Who knows, maybe starting early would have stopped me from getting involved with

drugs. Maybe not. Who knows?

SES connected to passability. Passability is the ability for a transwoman to be perceived

or to feel that they are perceived to be a cisgender female. As expressed by many participants,

passability can present challenges for many transgender individuals. In Brittney's interview, she

discussed this connection when she said:

When it comes to it, money just makes life easier. Like Walmart. I wish I didn't have to

shop at Walmart for anything. But I do. I have to shop at Walmart for everything. That's

just the way it is. It's annoying just to have to do it for food. I've also had to do it for

clothes. I go into Walmart hoping to find something that fits and that makes me look like

a female should. The reality is that, while I can find a few decent things that fit, it's not

like I'm getting stuff from the mall, at H and M or charlotte rouse. I would love to shop in

those places, but the fact is, I can't afford it. I even think that more expensive clothing

could make me look a bit more effeminate, but it's not in the cards.

This represented Brittney's frustration with balancing her status as lower income with her desire

to still want to pass as a female. Being of a certain SES influenced their ability to transition with

specific attention on her passability or the perception that she was a cisgender female. This

seemed most evident in Brittney's interview when she was asked about SES and she said:

Sure. I said a bit about how it slowed down the start of my transitioning. It kind of

sucked. I wanted to transition but wasn't able to do it. So I had remained stuck in a body I

didn't feel comfortable in. This included HRT. Luckily, there were organizations to help

with HRT in New York. Otherwise, I would have never gotten it. I also think I finally

had to make it a financial priority especially since I was making minimum wage at age

twenty-four. To be honest, I was lucky to be in New York with those resources and with

transportation. I live in Suffolk now and I currently struggle with getting to see my doctor

and getting my prescription because the public transportation around here sucks.

Brittney's narrative regarding passing-desirability was reflected throughout her interview

and journal. She presents as an optimistic person throughout her narrative; however, she was

unable to avoid wanting to be passable. It was an underlying desire and barrier to authenticity

that followed her and contributed to her not feeling comfortable in her own body. She also

expressed feelings of personal responsibility in wanting to make it a financial priority despite her

low income. This also included an appreciation for local resources she had access to when she was in New York and how her current geographical location has made journey more challenging.

SES reflected in pictures. To compliment the participant's interviews, they were asked to bring photos that were a part of the discussion. Many of the participants had pictures that directly reflected the impact of SES on the participants transitioning experience. For example, during Brittney's interview, she showed a picture of her in male clothing before her transition and a picture of her after she transitioned in leggings and a female top. She narrated these two pictures when she said:

It's (SES impact) reflected in my pictures because of the before picture. What I mean is, there wouldn't be a before picture at that age if I had money to start HRT at age 16 and money for decent clothes. After all, money makes cis females look better. It can be used to buy good makeup, get your nails nice, and buy top of the line clothing."

This was a moment where Brittney was reflecting on the fact that she had to present as a male for longer than she would have liked. Her picture showed that she felt obligated to maintain socialized gender norms despite her own discomfort and dysphoria.

Race Oppression

Throughout the participant's narratives, examples of racial oppression were present. For coding purposes, race oppression is defined as prejudice and discrimination based on internal and externally identified racial-cultural identity that particularly impacts and intersects one's transgender identity. As expressed by many participants, race oppression presented many challenges for transgender people.

Feeling ostracized as a result of race was seen early on in her transition because it is an identity that she constantly occupied throughout her life. When asked how she identified in terms

of cultural racial identity, Brittney responded by saying, "I'm black or African American." For her, this identity did not have a dramatic impact on her ability to transition. Rather, it appeared to be an obstacle that impacted her overall daily functioning.

    Race oppression and stereotyping. Like many participants in this study, Brittney experienced feelings of oppression and exclusion in spaces that race privileged individuals do not typically experience. For Brittney, this was an experience that transcended her gender identity and would have existed even if she was cisgender. An example of this feeling of oppression came from Brittney's journal when she said:

> My experience in a local store last week. This was actually the first time this happened. I was in there and to be honest, I was dressed down a bit in PJs and a shirt. Anyway, I was in the store and I was there to buy some hair products. As I'm looking at some products, I look up and see that a staff has followed me and my friend to the aisle. Even when we switch aisles, he conveniently appeared right next to us. It was obvious that we were being followed for being black. But my point is that being black is just one more obstacle I have to deal with while transitioning. Being trans is hard enough without having extra struggles to deal with. Besides that, I think black men are more hateful towards black trans. It's as if they think were betraying our race or something.

This narratological example is one that is particularly geared towards Brittney's African American identity and not necessarily her identity as a trans female. It does; however, add another challenge that Brittney needed to overcome. In fact, Brittney expressed an underlying sentiment of frustration with these experiences. She articulated this in her narrative when she said:

UGH.   Now I know this technically has nothing to do with transitioning. But my point is that being black is just one more obstacle I have to deal with while transitioning. Being trans is hard enough without having extra struggles to deal with.   Besides that, I think black men are more hateful towards black trans. It's as if they think were betraying our race or something.

Brittney expressed a sense of exclusion in society overall along with being excluded by the African American community because of her identity as a transgender female. During the interview, there seemed to be a tone of frustration and emotional exhaustion that resulted from several combinations of oppression and feelings of being excluded. Brittney felt excluded in primarily African American spaces and primarily cisgender spaces. This created a void of support for her because she felt excluded from multiple spaces in which she was expected to be accepted in. In member checking, Brittney added to this explanation of exclusion by stating, "It's really hard to feel included in this area. It's difficult because there is a low number of individuals who identify as transgender females of color." This final statement further clarified her experience of being marginalized on multiple levels in society.

Transgender positivity

For many transgender people, self-acceptance and making the decision to transition leads to an immediate improvement in self-esteem, confidence, and mental state. The growth that Brittney experienced after transitioning appeared to be nothing short of life-affirming. For her, the experience was significant enough where she can accept the aspects of her body that are perfect because she feels like she appears effeminate. Her feeling of positivity was particularly expressed during her interview when she said:

I guess I've learned to live with the fact that I'll never get breast surgery. But the truth is I like the size of breast anyways. The only change I would make is to make them is symmetry. I just want my breast to look as good and as real as possible. So, I guess it's impacted, kind of what my experience would look like, but that doesn't mean I'm unhappy with my transition.

This reflection provided a decisive perspective on what extent Brittney felt she needed to transition. It appeared to be a mix of acceptance regarding her circumstances and an appreciation of what she accomplished in terms of gender expression. Since she will not likely be able to obtain surgery, she decided to accept the growth that she has experienced.

Internalized transgender positively. As previously mentioned, transgender positivity represented the middle to latter portion of Brittney's narrative. This reflected her feelings of self-esteem and overall positive self-concept. During the interview, Brittney was asked to reflect on her pictures in reference to various identities. In reference to age identity, she presented a picture of her at age 23 that showed her presenting in a manner that she described as masculine. This picture showed her wearing skinny jeans and a neutral looking shirt with no makeup or jewelry. The "after" picture showed her with a big smile, wearing a light blue summer dress with makeup and jewelry. Her feelings regarding this picture were articulated when she said:

I think they mainly capture a snapshot of what transitioning looked like for me. I brought before and after pics. The before was at age 23 and the after was at age 26. Basically, these pictures show what a difference the hormones and a wardrobe change could make. Along with the physical difference, I think you can see the difference in how I felt. I mean my facial expression is pretty different in these two pictures. What can I say, I transitioning was one of the best things I've ever done and I love how I look.

This represented her feelings of freedom and self-expression. Brittney's picture provided insight on how important her transition was for her in terms of how she viewed herself and how she felt others viewed her. It clearly allowed her to experience a sense of joy and comfort in her own body. The picture also provided a visual of the significance of her journey on her overall sense of wellness.

Age Centered Repression

During Brittney's interview, she expressed that her age identity was necessarily the most important aspect of her journey. When asked how her age impacted her transitioning, she said, "I'm 29. I'll have to think about that. I'm not sure that age was a factor, at least not a negative factor." While this sense of privilege was evident in her interview, she expressed different thoughts in her journal. For example, she wrote:

> I still don't think age was a factor. I will say, I think those that transition earlier, Like Jazz, have a big advantage. I mean they can take hormone blockers before testosterone can kick in. They can be females at age 7. And nowadays, I think that schools are much more understanding of trans people. I could be more passable than I am now. Don't get me wrong, I felt happy and blessed to have transitioned when I did, but it could have been a bit better. I'm just saying younger is better. Also, If I was younger when I started, I feel like I would be further along with other goals. I would be further along with career goals and relationship goals. I just think that if I was able to be my true self at a younger age, I could have focused my energy in other eras of my life.

Brittney's transition started at age 24, which for her was beneficial despite the fact that it could have been more beneficial if she was able to start earlier. She suggested that she would have been more successful in other areas of her life because she would have developed more

authentic relationships. This excerpt incorporated her SES and age identity along with a predominant sense of positivity and optimism.

Age Privilege

As alluded to early in her narrative, Brittney experienced a sense of age privilege. This seemed mostly reflective and pinpointed the late stages of her story. During the interview, she felt that it was prudent to elaborate on her experience with age since she could not relate to some of the challenges that other transgender females experienced. In particular, this was highlighted in the following narrative:

I wonder if testosterone would have done so much to my body that I wouldn't be passable like I am now. So, I guess when I look back at it, yea, I'm pretty lucky to have started transitioning in my twenties. I can also tell you that I'm much happier than I would be if I had to wait later in life. I feel much more genuine and real because I can be who I am supposed to be. I think this also contributes to the positive energy that I put out in the universe. Me being trans helps to shape my outlook and my relationships with others for the better. So yea, I'm lucky to be able to have transitioned when I did.

Along with having a desire to be passable, some of the participants reflected privilege in their ability to be passable. For Brittney, this excerpt illuminated her privilege in passability. This passability occurred both internally and externally according to various participants. More to the point, internalized passability is when they felt that their appearance matched what they believed a cisgender female looked like. External passability in this context is when they believe that others view them as a cisgender female.

Morgan's Narrative

Morgan began her story at age 17 when she first discovered that her gender identity was female. This was a challenging time for her because of her financial resources and her support. Her sense of isolation and feeling under supported can best be viewed at the beginning of her interview when she was asked to generally discuss her transition experience. It was especially highlighted when she said:

> I like to think I was always trans. I believe I was born this way and I started realizing this about myself when I was 17. I remember a few years before that, I identified as being gay but I really didn't tell that many people. I mean it was the 90s and many people were more accepting of gay people. But I came from a small town where it was taboo to be gay, not to even mention being transgender. Being in a small town, everyone knows everyone. Everyone knows your business. Anyway, I started to realize I was trans around age 17 and I kept it to myself and a few close friends.

Morgan's experience was challenging due to her geographic location and the time frame in which she began identifying as a female. Also, an essential aspect of the early part of her experience was her SES. Growing up in low SES circumstances that continued into her early twenties, created multiple barriers in terms of being able to begin her transition process. These barriers fell into the themes of transition hesitation and passability. Chronologically, age identity appeared in her chronicle. She experienced 13 years between when she realized she was a female and what she considered to be the beginning of her transition. This was particularly meaningful for her because it impacted pivotal life experiences and relationship development. That is, she had to spend her twenties as a male even though she identified as female. As she discussed the middle portion of her story, optimism and self-determination seemed to play a role. This was expressed in her career ambition, which increased her SES, along with the decision to

take certain steps in transitions such as taking hormones and breast augmentation. Morgan expressed a sense of reflection of privilege in the latter portion of her journey. This was apparent in the contrasting narrative she expressed from interviews and journal entries. She particularly expressed little understanding of white privilege during our interview while conversely expressing in her journal how her social position influenced and provided benefits to her transition.

SES Oppression

Without hesitation, Morgan identified SES as the most imperative identity in her transition when she said, "I would say that my income level was probably most influential." While it is the premise of narratology to avoid redundancy in the participant's narrative (Moustakas, 1994), certain aspects of the impact of SES marginalization were expressed with mild variations. Morgan experienced SES oppression in a variety of forms during the early part of her transition biography. As will be displayed in the next participant quote, she expressed that she struggled with self-acceptance and general comfort as it related to financial concerns. Later in this section, this study shows how she felt a need to delay her transition due to financial reasons along with pictures that display how her improved social class helped her to feel more authentic. The operating difference is that the excerpt below illuminated Morgan's general financial struggle in her early twenties and explained how it connected with her overall feeling of wellness.

> Like I stated during the interview it's been a mixed bag. At first, I really struggled with funding for my transition. I was poor. I was almost food stamp poor. This meant I couldn't afford what I needed for my transition and I felt uncomfortable for a while in my own shoes. I hated feeling that way. I mean who the hell wouldn't? It was like an itch I

couldn't scratch. It honestly felt unbearable at times. I just couldn't really afford to buy

fem clothing that would be decent. Looking back, I guess I could have opted to purchase

cheaper clothing to get my buy, but I was really focused on being a least a little bit

passable. I also knew that my face is one that needs makeup. Truth is, a lot of makeup. I

couldn't even afford the cheaper end stuff. Later down the road, I was making a little

more money and I was able to transition to my comfort. I was able to afford some

clothing and some makeup that was halfway decent. I can't even explain how happy I am

now that I can live as a female. Don't get me wrong, I started too late in life to be

passable. I just have to accept that, but dressing effeminate and taking HRT has helped a

lot. I think it's been a game changer for me. It helped me love me more and appreciate

how I look in the mirror.

SES connected to passability. Experiencing marginalized SES influenced the ability of

several participants to transition with specific attention on the participants' internalized and

socially recognized passibility. Simply put, participants such as Morgan felt there were times in

their narrative where they could not afford to transition in an effective way A similar sense of

frustration and decision making occurred during Morgan's interview when she said

It's made a difference. Both in a good and bad way. Like when I first started to wear

female clothing when I was twenty-five. I wasn't making that much money, and I guess

you could say I was working poor because I was barely making it. I was working in

retail, and I absolutely despised retail because people are rude and I got paid minimum

wage. Really, I was doing it just because to put myself through college which was hard

and expensive. Needless to say, during that time, I found it a hard time finding

affordable girl clothes. I mean, I'm not a small gal. And it seemed like the prettier clothes

in my size always cost more. Over time, I've been better at finding more affordable good-looking clothing. But I should tell you that not having money to buy the right clothing and makeup, stopped me from transitioning at twenty-five.

This supported Morgan's journal when she discussed her desire to be passable and how money has always influenced her ability to make it happen. To put this in context, at age 25, Morgan started "cross-dressing," or dressing as a female, when she was alone in her house. She could not find attractive clothing that was in her size. For her, transitioning was equivalent to being passable, at least passable for her own standards. In her perspective, this required money that she did not have because she was making minimum wage

SES reflected in pictures. As previously mentioned, participants brought pictures in order to elevate the conversation and better express their personal history. Several participants had pictures that clearly reflected the impact of SES on the participants transitioning experience. This also presented in Morgan's pictures in that her pictures showed her dressed in androgynous clothing. Her facial expression seemed rather neutral with a mild smile. She was wearing pants and a neutral blue shirt. She expressed her thoughts on these pictures when she said:

I was already presenting as a female for five years, but there were times when I was more closeted and I dressed in neutral clothing because it was easier than having conversations with some people. Once I was on HRT, this sense of being neutral, while still an option, felt more disingenuous. Like it's one thing, to withhold a truth it's another thing to tell a lie. If I'm covering up or hiding my breast or other features, then that would be a lie to me. So yea, that picture represents my privilege of having a little extra money to help with my dysphoria.

This picture showed her smiling and wearing a miniskirt. She reflected on her feelings like she needed to switch identities or dress in a way in which people would not identify her as a transgender female. It was clear that she felt more passable in this picture and that having some money to transition helped her to feel that way. It helped her to reduce her need to be "neutral" or to hide her identity.

AGE Centered Regression

Morgan's age was a functional barrier to her transitioning experience in the sense that she felt frustrated that she waited thirteen years to transition. Being 30 when she transitioned made various aspects of her life more challenging. First, she experienced a sense of hesitation that felt disingenuous and dysphoric. Secondly, she expressed that it made her less passable for various practical reasons. Lastly, she articulated an appreciation for her ability to transition at the time she did. These three themes can be seen through her interview and journal entries and are described in the following journal excerpt:

> Age was a huge factor. Though, I could have started earlier in life. Starting at 30 was pretty good and I'm happy where I'm at with my transition. Though I would have much rather started at in my early teens. I think if I could have started in my teens, I think my muscle structure, my facial features, my breast, and my hair would be a lot more effeminate. Then, maybe I would be more passable. The truth is, I just have to accept where I'm at and the cards that have been dealt to me. I also, try to think about a few friends of mine who I've met at the center. One of them is 52 and just now starting to transition. This means that her road is just going to be that much more challenging. She's got to overcome a lifetime of testosterone damage. I feel sorry for her and as bad as it sounds, I sort of feel lucky to have been able to do it when I can.

Age and transgender hesitation. In many cases, several participants expressed that coming out at a certain age was coupled with the consideration of social expectations. These expectations were a result of how society viewed transitioning at various points in the lives of the participants. The commonplace existence of transphobia made it especially difficult. Some even expressed a sense of hesitation regarding their transition. Take for instance Morgan's interview when she said, "Age has had a big part in transitioning, having hide who I am for so long even though I knew when I was 17. Finally making the decision to come out and start transitioning was a powerful time." This sense of age-centered regression is portrayed throughout Morgan's story. In particular, Morgan painted a determined picture of her experience with age in her interview when she said:

> Yea, it's in the pictures. Particularly if you consider the fact that I would have loved to begin hormones when I first started transitioning. Due to many circumstances like family and society, I didn't start until I was 30. For me, this means that my body was more influenced by testosterone. If I did it earlier, I probably wouldn't have as deep of a voice or as wide as shoulders. You can see how wide my shoulders are in the first pic. It was challenging to find a top that would fit on my shoulders. Something you can't see in the pics is my deeper voice. I've been working on it but it would be nice if I didn't have to work so much. It'd be nice if I didn't have the testosterone to already form the way my voice sounds.

This excerpt identified several intersections that were centered on age. In particular, Morgan expressed a sense of dysphoria due to her hormone balance and how this balance impacted her ability to be passable. The picture she pointed to while expressing the above narrative was of her wearing a yellow dress and a brunette wig. Morgan seemed to like this

picture even though she expressed not looking passable. She connected this feeling of not being passable with age because if she could have transitioned earlier in life, she would look more effeminate.

Age and passability. Morgan expressed that her age identity connected directly with her ability to be passable. This subtheme highlighted how she struggled with presenting as a cisgender female due to the age in which she was able to transition. For Morgan, this is connected with hormone distribution during developmental years and the impact of testosterone. For instance, in her journal she said:

> Though I would have much rather started at in my early teens. I think if I could have started in my teens, I think my muscle structure, my facial features, my breast, and my hair would be a lot more effeminate. Then, maybe I would be more passable.

> While it is hard to accurately identify a hypothetical alternative reality, Morgan predicted that her experience would have been improved if she was able to transition earlier. This seemed to be common among participants. That is, the idea of missing out on transitioning opportunities at a young age, and thereby, still be haunted by the effects of testosterone.

Transgender Positivity

Examples of resilience and transgender positivity frequently appeared throughout Morgan's interviews and journals. In this context, transgender positivity and resilience referred to psychological methods and behaviors that transgender females used in promoting personal assets and protecting one's self from the potential adverse effects of stressors. Similar to other participants, Morgan often considered resilience as an imperative quality for transgender females.

It's hard to explain this feeling of being more passable. At first, I thought it was sort of vain that these things were making me happy but when I really sit down and think about it, I realize that these external modifications help me to better fit into a world where I have always felt like a black sheep.

This portion of her interview exposed how Morgan expressed her gender identity and used this expression to feel more accepted in society. This was a key part of her story that connected the beginning and end portions. Morgan further expressed her feelings of optimism when she discussed how her challenges from work evolved to feelings of love and connectedness.

Because I wanted to transition all at once, meaning clothing hormones, everything, I waited to start hormones or dress up in public. It was hard for me to wait. After a while, I had enough with being fake. I had to be real with myself and others. In fact, prior to beginning hormones, I was really depressed. I guess that's because I had to be fake all the time. Then at age 30, I started hormones and I started dressing as a female full time. It was emotionally transforming. I started in the early 2000s which is around the time I moved to Norfolk for a job. I will say that it was challenging to balance my transition with my new job. I didn't know how to tell my employer. In fact, I ended up quitting because I felt so afraid to present at work. Now I feel like my boss and coworkers completely support my gender identity, which is a beautiful thing. I work in an office where most people have some type of vocational training or degree, but still, you never know how people will react. Part of this could be because I can afford to be more passable. Particularity with my new breasts.

The ability to transition provided a concrete structure that influenced various parts of her life. This undercurrent of positivity penetrated her career experiences as well as her public gender expression. She stated that her gender expression, when she felt more passable, improved her work relationships. This elevation in self-confidence provided Morgan with a stronger identity and increased self-esteem.

Transgender positivity, self-esteem, and pictures. Participants often experienced resilience in the context of self-esteem, which echoed into various categories in their life. This means that participants' self-confidence served as a signaling point that they have transitioned further and overcome various life obstacles. Take for instance this quote from Morgan's interview when she said:

> This identity is definitely reflected in the second picture when I was 31 and I was able to start HRT. I know for myself and a lot of other people, doing HRT is a game changer. It communicates the idea that this is the direction I'm going in. I am a trans female. In a way in made me feel legit. I mean, I was already presenting as a female for five years, but there were times when I was more closeted and I dressed in neutral clothing because it was easier than having conversations with some people. Once I was on HRT, this sense of being neutral, while still an option, felt more disingenuous. Like it's one thing, to withhold a truth it's another thing to tell a lie. If I'm covering up or hiding my breast or other features, then that would be a lie to me.

In this, Morgan highlighted the impact of transitioning on her self-esteem. This increase in feeling "legit" was a motivator for her to be emotionally healthy, authentic, and happy despite social constructs, which is the hallmark of resilience for Morgan's story. This was also further portrayed in her pictures when she said:

They reflect upon my experience because they showed how happy I was when I initially

starting presenting as trans. It was so, so freeing. It's hard to explain. It's kind of like the

song by the Beatles, you know … blackbird. In the song, they talk about taking broken

wings and learning to fly. That's how I felt at age 25. I felt that even though I was

broken, I could learn to fly with my new wings, my new sense of self. The other photo

was me when I was 31 and I was 6 months in using hormones. They just worked so well.

I remember how excited I was to have real breast. No, they weren't huge. But that didn't

really matter. I was happy just to have them.

Visibility has been a long-standing source of encouragement and pride for LGBT

individuals. Morgan's picture was a personal and meaningful source of pride and optimism for

her. During the interview, she smiled as she looked through her pictures because they

represented her resilience and feelings of acceptance.

Race Privilege

When race is not centered within discussions of transgender identity, it seems easy for

some of the participants to overlook the privilege that racial-cultural identity may provide. One

example of this occurred in Morgan's interview. Morgan's racial-cultural identity was not a

significant aspect of her transitioning experience or her identity as a human being overall. In

addition to privilege, the combination of multiple marginalized identities may be a contributor to

Morgan, initially overlooking the impact of race on other people's lives. This is illuminated in

her interview when she said:

I mean, I'm white, if that's what you're asking. I'm pretty sure I'm Irish and English. I

know that some black people have extended families and they seem to connect with other

black people in a natural way. I wish I had more of that. I mean, I wish I had more

friends. It's rough sometimes making friends at age 41. Not to mention the fact that not everyone is cool with the trans thing.

Throughout this first section of this interview blurb, she exposed her lack of understanding regarding white privilege. For Morgan, her story was characterized with varying identities and varying levels of privilege, and it was not until the end of her story that she became more reflective and understanding of how others experience race identity. In contrast, Morgan's journal reflected her understanding of her social position of privilege. This is particularly seen when she wrote:

Being white hasn't really negatively impacted my transitioning experience. I think if anything, being white may have been a little better than being a nonwhite person. I think that some African Americans are tougher on other African Americans who are trans. I heard of one African American trans female who was starting to come out and present as a female. She also lived in a poor part of town. One day, as she was waking to 7-11 to get cigarettes and she was confronted by two African American guys. They asked her why she was in a dress and she just ignored them and kept walking. Then they jumped her and took her purse. She told us this one time in a support group. I think it's absolutely horrible that it happened to her. Honestly, I think that trans ladies are vulnerable in general, but I do wonder if they were harder on her because she was black. She seemed to think so. It's possible that if it was me, they would have just takein my purse. I really have no way of knowing, but seems like it could be more challenging for African Americans that are trans.

This section suggested her evolution in understanding and reflectivity on her transitioning journey. While there was a natural sense of reflection throughout her interview and journal, this

final portion revealed a significant paradigm shift that occurred through community interactions and contemplative self-reflection. It communicated her maturity and feelings of transgender positivity that likely resulted from her transition.

Summary

The data in this chapter provide thick descriptions and contexts of the narratives of the eight participants in the study. As previously mentioned, each participant was asked eleven questions. Each participant was also asked to complete a journal based on their experience with age, racial-cultural, and SES identity. As previously mentioned, this study identified six themes of trans intersectional experiences when transitioning: a) SES salience , b) race oppression, c) age centered repression, d) privilege, e) and transgender positivity. The first three themes relate to transgender female experiences related to perceived discrimination and intersectionality, while the final two themes relate to the participant's experiences within various identities. All of the data collected analyzed in Chapter 4 will be discussed and interpreted in Chapter 5 along with study limitations and future research possibilities. The discussion will correlate with the research question regarding transitioning experiences of trans females who occupy varying identities with respect to cultural-racial identity, age, and SES.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion and Conclusions

As a result of the integration with LGB populations, literature on transgender individuals often categorizes them as having indistinguishable experiences when compared to sexual minorities (Bess & Staab, 2009; Lev,2009; Moradi, Mohr, Worthington, & Fassinger, 2009; Riley, Wong, & Sitharthan, 2011). Despite similarities between the LGB and transgender groups, gender identity often creates distinct experiences that are critical to acknowledge and distinguish from the mainstream LGB community. Many articles include only a small sample of the transgender community, which cannot be generalized to the overall community. These presumptions are important to acknowledge when addressing transgender intersectionality because it illuminates the gap in literature by identifying the need to separate transgender experiences from the larger acronym.

As previously mentioned in this paper, there is more to the identity of an transgender person individual than their gender. People who identify as gender minorities are simultaneously members of a variety of other social and biological-based groups that add to the person's individuality. Existing research identifies multiple experiences of oppression as significant barriers to mental health wellness and physical well-being (Bradford, Reisner, Honnold, & Xavier, 2013; Grant et al., 2011; Saffin, 2011). This acknowledgement has contributed to the rapid increase of in the last few decades of general research on the transgender community (Parent,, DeBlaere, & Moradi, 2013). Zabus and Coad (2013) suggested that individuals in the trans community do not experience or express gender separately from other social positions they occupy. This current study is of particular importance because much of the intersectional studies on transgender individuals have been grouped with the LGBT community, thereby

overshadowing the trans-experience. Also, literature on trans individuals has historically ignored the intersection of identities (Budge, Thai, Tebbe, & Howard, 2016; Moradi et al., 2016; Parent, DeBlaere, & Moradi, 2013). Despite the variance of identity within the population, scholarship on diverse populations has traditionally categorized trans individuals as a homogeneous group (Moradi et al., 2016). Consequentially, this categorization leads to assumptions regarding what it means to be a transgender individual. Literature in the counseling field has underrepresented marginalized race (Bowleg, 2008); age (Elder, 2016), and SES (Gehi, & Arkles, 2007; McCullough et al., 2017) identities as it pertains to transgender females. Notwithstanding, these identifies have been individually identified as important identities when considering the transitioning experience of transgender females (Moradi Et al.,2016; Nagoshi, & Nagoshi, 2014; Witten,2009). Examining how various identities contribute to an individual's experiences of harassment and discrimination involves the use of an intersectional lens through which researchers view lived experiences as crucial in conceptualizing the nuances of these occurrences (Crenshaw, 1991). Scholars run the risk of perpetuating assumptions and over-generalizations when they limit their studies to gender identity or other singular identies when discussing trans issues (Sánchez & Vilain, 2009). Intersectionality constitutes a vital step forward in research and social progress across multiple spheres of inquiry and influence.

There is a scarcity of research exploring how the intersectional experiences of transgender females who hold multiple minority statuses and influences their transition experiences. The need for intersectionality focused research on transgender individuals was emphasized in chapters one and two by discussing transgender oppression, the developmental models that highlight varying transgender experiences, and the existing research on intersectionality and transgender-focused intersectionality. These considerations led to the

development of the defining research question for this study: How does one's transgender female identity, cultural-racial identity, SES, and age contribute to their ability to transition? The purpose of this study was to learn more about the intersection of transgender female identity with cultural-racial identity, age, and SES. Specifically, this study aimed to understand the experiences of transgender females, their circumstances, and how these intersections of identity affected their ability to transition.

To effectively answer this question, chapter three described how this study utilized intersectionality to inform a narratological paradigm, while chapter four described the results of this study. The data provided thick descriptions and context of the narratives of the eight participants in the study. Each participant was asked eleven questions in an interview and responded to three questions through journaling. These three questions focused on their experiences with cultural-racial, age, and SES identity. As illustrated in chapter four, this study identified five themes of trans-intersectional experiences related to transitioning: a) SES salience , b) race oppression, c) age centered repression, d) privilege, e) and transgender positivity. The first three themes relate to transgender female experiences related to perceived discrimination and intersectionality, while the final two themes relate to the participants' experiences within various identities. Participants experienced these themes in unique chronological order, which varied between narratives. Within these primary themes, each participant experienced subthemes that provided deep insight into their perspective.

Purpose of the Study

Moradi et al. (2016) concluded that research on transgender populations had a limited focus on the social identities of transgender females. With transgender populations treated as a monolithic community, it was not clear how the combination of identities impacted the

transitioning experience for transgender individuals. This gap in literature is addressed through the findings of this study. Specifically, this study examined diminished voices and suppressed narratives of transgender females during their transition. I explored the role of intersectional identities in the lives of transgender females through the lens of narratological research. Through narratological inquiry, I examined the richness of this particular communities' experience, which is often overlooked in traditional, quantitative research designs (Budge, Thai, Tebbe, & Howard, 2016; Moradi et al., 2016). Narrative analysis allowed me to examine how intersectional narratives construct the experience of transitioning for transgender females. As discussed in chapter three, this type of research paradigm describes a structural theory that can include de-narrated texts, events, interviews, or artifacts that serve to tell a story (Bal, 2009). In this particular study, I utilized interviews, journals, and pictures to tell participants' stories. Through analysis of transgender intersectional narratives regarding their experience of transition, I was able to expose the ideological underpinnings of a narrative's construction and articulate how these narratives were influenced. As patterns of influence emerged throughout participant's interviews and journals, themes and subthemes emerged. Through this process, it was important to keep in mind that such discourse occurs subjectively and is connected to and formed through the collaboration with my cis-normative experiences. Narrative analysis typically incorporates multiple forms of data, thereby resulting in an accurate picture of stories created from the data (Savin-Baden & Van Niekerk, 2007). Encapsulating narrative analysis in a broad sense is to understand its suitability for multiple forms of data, thereby allowing me to utilize transcribed interviews along with archival data.

This section will discuss the findings of this study within the context of current research and the participant's unique experiences. The findings attempt to answer the aforementioned

research question regarding the intersectional experiences of transgender females while transitioning. Therefore, a discussion of the research participants' narratives is centered on intersectionality and transgender identity to better understand the meaning of their stories. In particular, the conclusions identify any contradictions or commonalities to current research along with the practical implications for counselors and counselor educators. To answer the question of how various aspects of individual identities impact participants' transitioning, I asked how they experienced each identity, and five themes were revealed, which included several subthemes. In the next session, I will discuss each theme including the related research and the subthemes that emerged from each theme.

Interconnectedness of Identities

There is an inextricable link between each element, trait, or social identity that a person occupies and all are critical in fully understanding one's identity (Crenshaw, 1991). McCall (2008) suggested that the goals of intersectionality motivated research allow for complexity in its methodology. With this in mind, this current study was executed in such a way to uncover nuanced aspects of participants' experiences and to resist reductionist approaches. To honor this endeavor, I incorporated participants' words as the foundational element of the research, gathering their testimony through interviews and journal entries. The study revealed how important it is to acknowledge the influence of various identities in the context of counseling. This acknowledgment was evident in general research on the transgender community (Parent, DeBlaere, & Moradi, 2013). Zabus and Coad (2013) found that individuals in the trans community do not experience or express gender separately from other social positions they occupy. This is consistently reflected in this study through the individual interviews, journaling, pictures, and contrasts between marginalized and privileged identities. For instance, Ashley

experienced vast privilege with respect to her SES age and race. Consequently, she experienced

greater passability, ability to transition, self-acceptance, and feelings of visibility in the media.

This was not the experience of participants like Christina and Jamie who encountered

marginalized identities in multiple categories. Not only were these identities impactful in their

own way, they were also interconnected. This is only one isolated example of how

interconnected each facet of identity is to the participants. The interconnection of identities has

been well documented in literature (Dhamoon, 2011; Levine-Rasky, 2011; Lutz, Vivar, & Supik,

2011). The following subsections will discuss the interconnection of identities as revealed in the

findings of this study.

      Multiple minority identities. Intersectional theory challenges us to consider what it

means to have a marginalized social position within a marginalized group. Studies on sexism,

classism, ageism, racism, and transphobia have advanced, leading critics to argue that isolating

any single part of these identities overlooks the experience of individuals with multiple minority

identities (De Vries, 2012; Johnson, 2013; Moradi et al., 2016). As previously highlighted is this

study, multi-minority identities create an alternative experience when compared to individuals

who experience singular minority status. The study illuminated the middle class-centric,

ethnocentric, and cis-normative ideologies that cause people who have multiple minority group

identities to be defined as uncharacteristic members of their respective identity groups.

Participants with multiple minority-group identities that do not fit the archetypes of their

respective identity groups experience what Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach (2008) designated as

intersectional invisibility. This was prevalent for several participants throughout this study. For

instance, during Jamie's interview she stated:

And in the [transgender support group] meetings I feel out of place. They're all like, I

told my dad and he's accepting. And I'm over here thinking, wow, I told my dad and he

didn't talk to me for four months. He still calls me boy and son blatantly. I mean he talks

to me regularly now because I'm his tech support, but it's always son, boy, Mr. James.

This particular experience contributed to Jamie's feeling of ostracization with-in a community

she expects to feel welcomed by. Transgender females who experience multiple minority

identities are likely to be misunderstood by the culturally dominant paradigms for what it means

to transition, thereby having difficulty with intersectional identity navigation and experiencing

interconnected gender role pressure. More examples on intersectional invisibility will be

discussed in latter sections with focus given to participant's exclusion in cultural-racial spaces

and how their SES connects to passability.

    Intersectional identity navigation. The challenges associated with marginalization,

misrepresentation, and disempowerment tend to be prominent features of the experience of

individuals with multiple minority identities. This sentiment was reflected in literature that

centered intersectional transgender experiences (De Vries, 2012; Moradi et al., 2016; Shelton,

2018). Erich, Tittsworth, Colton-Meier, and Lerman (2010) examined the perceptions of

transgender persons of color. Their study revealed the difficulties of navigating multiple

identities in various settings and how participants were able to establish *bicultural competence*.

Individuals like Jaime, who acquire a *bicultural competence*, can learn to communicate with

community members in the dominant culture while still able to navigate the institutional social-

cultural structures of minority spaces (Erich, Tittsworth, Colton-Meier, & Lerman, 2010). By

utilizing an intersectional paradigm that includes more than two identities, this study illuminates

participants' experiences involving multilevel cultural competency. When participants

experience multiple marginalized social identities, they have to be prepared to navigate multiple marginalized and privileged social structures. Jamie and other participants discussed their ability to function in mainstream society as female or male. This means they had to operate in cisgender spaces where they may be viewed as males but also as a transgender female within transgender communities. Within these spaces, Jamie mentioned that she has to further navigate racial norms such as being around transgender females who are white versus transgender females of color. This type of navigation can be particularly helpful when participants' identities constitute strict gender roles and expectations. For instance, Jamie's father viewed her as a man, and she had to learn how to navigate despite being mis-gendered. She attested that this was because of their older age, African American ethnicity, and lower middle-class identity, which depicts a firm characterization of what a man and women should act and look like. In transgender positive settings, such as primarily middle-class spaces or transgender centered spaces, Jamie was able to verbalize and externally express her femininity in a way that was meaningful and congruent. This is further complicated because she needs to navigate her relationship with her more tolerant mother in a different manner and with a different cultural competency (Indian). In a similar fashion, Samantha's work peer group, who can be identified as middle-aged, white, working class males, struggle with identifying her as a female, and continue to utilize her nonpreferred name. This is possibly because middle-aged, white, working class individuals are less likely to be familiar with gender concepts that are not based on the traditional gender binary (Galupo, Henise, & Davis, 2014; Moradi et al., 2016; Nadal, Skolnik, & Wong, 2012). The result of being misgendered leads Samantha to navigate her construction job in a way that feels unnatural and incongruent. In other words, she feels like she has to act like a man at times in order to effectively navigate her job. In settings where she felt her gender identity was accepted, such as

middle-class spaces or transgender centered spaces, Samantha was able to externally express her gender identity without feeling censored or judged. Another example is when Christina said:

> When I came out, I lost friends in the black community because of this belief. Also, I for real did not feel comfortable presenting as female at a black church. So, my first year coming out, I stayed closeted at church.

This further illuminates participants use of multilevel cultural competence. In Christina's narrative, she had to hide her true self, in order to continue to interact with her support system. This incongruence was challenging for Christina and resulted in her changing her church support system.

Erich, Tittsworth, Colton-Meier, and Lerman's (2010) study contested that *bicultural competence* is further compounded with issues of oppression experienced by transgender and cultural minorities. Their participants had to be able to manage a level of cultural competency in a variety of settings. Similarly, participants in this current study who identified as cultural minorities also had to navigate multiple marginalized and privileged settings along with coping with oppressive experiences such as racial profiling and transphobia. This created increased difficulties in their ability to find support in their transition, become passable, and experience acceptance in various social groups. This extra layer of difficulty led to Christina's experience with not being accepted in a black church, Tori having to act less effeminate around her parents, and Jamie's experience being ridiculed in front of a nail salon. These are just a few of the experiences that created unique challenges for participants who occupied multiple subjugated identities. One of the most challenging aspects of this experience of exclusion, including multilevel cultural competence, is the emotional turmoil associated with being marginalized by a privileged person or system of power. For many of the participants in this study, the experience

of exclusion often produced feelings of anger and confusion that were then followed by feelings of inferiority.

   Interconnected gender role pressure. Multiple participants in this study experienced several levels of marginalized identities that contributed to feelings of pressure in their gender role expression, including cultural-racial, age, and SES. Non-intersectional paradigms have failed to address the intensity of gender role pressure because they have failed to identify the various identities that contribute to this pressure. Gender role pressure creates a cycle where all variables are important for the participant to feel passable. Participants' cultural-racial, age, and SES identities combined to contribute pressure towards being passable. When participants experience marginalization in these identities, the pressure is magnified. For the five transgender females of color in this study, wearing women's clothing and makeup shaped their bodies into feminine conformity, which over time, helped their gestures, facial features, and clothing to feel authentic. Participants in this study said their physical bodies often shaped how they could access or need gender reaffirming clothing and other external means of expression, thereby, signaling the interconnectedness of multiple identities. Their ethnic identity contributed to their need to be passable while their body construction determined how much effort (hormones, clothing, makeup, etc.) would be needed in order to be passable. Identities such as age and SES connected directly with the participant's ability to obtain an external expression of themselves that would be congruent with their gender identity, thus contributing to the existing gender role pressure. For instance, several participants mentioned that age had impacted their body formation. This connects with their cultural-racial identity in that marginalized racial identity contributes to the desire to pass while age helps determine the impact of hormones and the ability for transgender

females to acquiesce to societal constructs of female identity, which typically include youthful appearance (Arendt, Peter, & Beck, 2016).

In addition to age, participants factored in SES. Since racial identity was a motivator for being passable, and SES contributed to their ability to be passable, SES was an important factor. For them, clothing, makeup and other external means of change were more than just desired items, they were items of necessity because these changes helped to transform their physical body into a gendered vessel. For instance, Christina and Brittney both reflected on their photos by talking about how their external changes made them accept their body and feel congruent with their external expressions. For them, being able to afford to make these changes was a significant part of their transition. In a similar study, Sevelius (2013) explored the intersectional experiences of 22 transgender females of color and found that they also experienced a sincere desire to become passable, which was influenced by several aspects of their identity such as race, sexual orientation, and HIV status. These identities contributed to the participants' experiences by creating their own unique pressure such as racial constructs, transgender identities in LGB spaces, and the impact chronic illness has on life choices.

All of these themes are consistent with gender role pressure. Similar to Sevelius's study, the current study explores and reveals the interconnected features of transgender identity, but aspects of identity nested in the current study include SES and age identity as well as identifying the impact of gender role pressure on these specific identities. Inclusion of these two identities is especially important due to their overall impact on transgender experiences (Oldenburg, & Bockting, 2015; De Vries, 2012; Mizock, & Mueser, 2014), the influence of age and SES on gender role pressure, and the inclusion of these identities throughout participants' narratives. Gender role pressure was relevant throughout many themes and subthemes in this study because

it was a significant factor in the experience of transgender female transition. Intersectional paradigms are important in a discussion about gender role pressure because they address the various identities that contribute to this pressure.

Intersection of privileged identities. In addition to exploring the experiences of multiple minority identities, this study explores the varying experiences of privilege in association with participants' transitioning. As previously mentioned, bell hooks (2014) theorized that studies can gain equally valuable information from individuals in privileged positions along with individuals who are marginalized, thus the inclusion of privileged experiences in this study. Privilege provides unearned opportunity and access to status, rewards, and resources unavailable to other intersections. For instance, a financially affluent white participant in this study will have varying degrees of opportunity that look quite different from participants like Jamie and Christina who experienced multiple marginalized identities like being African American and being in their thirties when they were able to transition. The combination of these identities made it more challenging for them to begin transitioning, achieve passability, and acquire appropriate support. For several participants in this study, privileged identities often included an experience of privilege reduction while transitioning.

Privilege reduction. Participants' privileged identities must be viewed in an intersectional context in order to understand how these identities impact one another. Furthermore, privilege is not monolithic, meaning it is unevenly distributed in varying forms and contexts. The results of this study show that the combination of identities is just as important as the amount of privileged and marginalized identities the participants occupied. At times, aspects of marginalization in one identity may mute or reduce privilege based in other identities. For instance, Samantha's ethnicity provided her some areas of privilege. This privilege was reduced

as a result of her transgender identity and her SES in that she did not experience the same social privilege they may be experienced by white cisgender females or males. This was highlighted through her experience of being ostracized in white spaces. Another scenario was shared by Ashley, the participant who experienced the most privilege. Ashley was young, white, and affluent, which provided her with ample opportunity to transition and become passable. She did, however, experience bullying and transphobia when she was in school. This was a result of her transitioning at a young age. She experienced privilege due to her age, but it also magnified her marginalized transgender identity, thereby reducing her privilege. While privilege reduction is not well documented in the literature, a similar concept of privilege loss has been discussed in the context of transgender female experiences (Mizock, & Hopwood, 2016; Staples, Bird, Masters, & George, 2018; Westbrook, & Schilt, 2014). Studies on privilege loss discussed the loss of male privilege that transgender females experience after transitioning. This typically included an increase in sexualization, increased challenges in a male-dominated workforce, and an overall expectation of gender biased standards of beauty. This loss of privilege also resonated with participant experiences and echoed through all identity positions including cultural-racial identity, SES, and age. In terms of racial stereotypes for females, these differences take shape in various forms, such as gender pay gaps and expectations for female ageing. These intersectional losses of privilege can be seen in Jamie's narrative when she talks about what her parents expect from her as a woman, Angela's story when she discusses SES and reveals implications of being underpaid, and in Samantha's interview when she explained that she was too old to be passable. The loss of privilege combined with privilege reduction created challenges while transitioning, even for privileged participants.

While some scholarship tends to assume that trans individuals are monolithic (Moradi et al., 2016), other studies have noted intersectionality within trans populations (Budge et al., 2016). These studies examined the intersection between transgender identity and other single identities, such as racial identities (Dozier, 2005; Schilt, 2006; Singh, 2013, 2012), sexual identity (Bockting, Benner, & Coleman, 2009; Hill, 2007), or SES (Gehi & Arkles, 2007). Inversely, literature that examined multiple identities of transgender people (Dozier, 2005; Schilt, 2006) focused only on trans men. While this current section contextualized the interconnectedness of identities, the following sections will address the singular intersections of identity, including the themes that emerged from this study. These singular intersections are equally important because they combine to contribute to participants' overall experience while transitioning.

SES Salience

Despite the current literature on the intersection of transgender identity and SES, there continues to be a need for research on intersections of identities. Findings from this study exposed feelings of misrepresentation in the community, the experience of oppression for participants with low SES, and subjugation due to their marginalized SES status. Several relevant sub themes emerged from this current study, including SES privilege in the media, SES privilege during transition, putting transitioning on hold due to SES, and SES connected to passability. Chronologically, SES privilege and media visualization foreshadow participants' ideas of passability and halting transitioning. The latter often appears in between feeling non-passable and feeling passable.

One of the more illuminating subthemes regarding SES salience involved the representation of financially privileged transgender females in the media. Several of the

participants mentioned mainstream media figures such as Jazz, Katlin Jenner, and Laverne Cox. Participants stated that these representations were influential to participants in terms of their transition process, passability, and societal expectations of what it means to be a transgender female. Nicolazzo (2016) studied the experiences of black, trans, non-binary students and how their experiences greatly differed from norms presented on television, which correlates with the theme of SES that is consistent throughout the current study. Whether they experienced privilege or felt marginalized, a majority of the participants viewed SES as the most important factor with regard to their transition experience. In a similar context, Nicolazzo (2016) communicated that while particular transgender individuals are gaining social visibility and people are beginning to understand their experience, this does not relate equitably to all trans people. Specifically, the extensive public visibility of transgender people such as Janet Mock, Laverne Cox, and Caitlyn Jenner suggests that to be transgender is to medically transition from one's birth-assigned sex to one's gender identity (Nicolazzo, 2016). This is significant because individuals who are transitioning may internalize these paradigms of what it means to be transgender. Despite the obstacles that may make it difficult to achieve these benchmarks, individuals may view themselves as less of a female or a transgender female, thereby potentially excluding them from the LGBT community and limiting potential support that could have a significant impact. In a similar manner, this form of visibility produced an internalized standard of transgender beauty for participants in this current study. That is, by viewing mainstream transgender females in the media, participants developed specific ideas of what transitioning and passability meant to them.

When asked during the interview, SES was considered the overall most important identity by most of the participants. In this context, privileged SES implies that the participants were in a financial position in which they could begin and carry out their transition in a way that

feels congruent with their gender identity without having to hesitate or adjust their transition

activities based on financial concerns. Looking at the subtheme of privileged SES, Nicolazzo

(2016) and similar studies (Brewster, Velez, Mennicke, & Tebbe, 2014; Brewster et al., 2012;

Budge et al., 2010; Dispenza et al., 2012; Hendricks & Testa, 2012; Mocarski, Butler, Emmons,

& Smallwood, 2013;) suggested that social class does have a significant impact on passability

and transgender self-esteem. These studies identified the connection between SES and social

constructs regarding how a transgender female should look. This further illuminates the

financial challenges that some transgender individuals experience in their efforts to become

passable and how these challenges connect to their gender self-esteem. Not being able to afford

to transition is correlated with individuals' sense of self. In this current study, it meant that

participants could afford affirming clothing, hormones, surgeries if they wanted them, affirming

makeup, and other practical activities that are associated with female gender expression.

Linked to SES identity are results from the current study that identified experiences of

self-criticism and social distress related to body image dissatisfaction, self-acceptance, and social

acceptance. These concerns are directly related to participants' gender identity, gender

expression, and their financial ability to be what they considered as passable. In a study of

transgender experiences in work settings, Alexandra-Beauregard, Arevshatian, Booth, and

Whittle (2018) identified the struggles experienced by transgender females regarding fair pay,

passibility, and overall equity in the workplace. The study also identified the impact of

hormones, cosmetics, electrolysis, and surgery to help transgender individuals pass. In some

cases, these are tools that allow transgender individuals to be stealth, or indistinguishable from

the cisgender population. While these are meaningful actions that help some transgender

individuals appear more passable, not everyone has financial access to these treatments, nor do

they necessarily guarantee that transgender individuals will be stealth (Alexandra-Beauregard, Arevshatian, Booth, & Whittle, 2018). This correlates well with the current study in that participants expressed a sincere desire to appear passable and a sense of disappointment regarding the loss of ability or opportunity to appear passable. This is most evident in Brittney's narrative when she talks about how she paused her transition because she couldn't afford to look passable according to society's standards. This concept was reinforced by the fact that Brittney did present as female when she felt she had enough money to do so. This experience was not isolated in this study nor is it unique in transgender studies (Barr, Budge, & Adelson, 2016; Budge, Katz-Wise, Tebbe, Howard, Schneider, & Rodriguez, 2013; Burnes, & Singh, 2016; Dozier, 2005; Levitt, & Ippolito, 2014; Moolchaem, Liamputtong, O'Halloran, & Muhamad, 2015). Based on these studies and the current study, transgender hesitation due to SES is a result of transgender individual's desire to be passable.

For many individuals in this study, there was a feeling that they had to put transitioning on hold due to their lack of financial resources. Participants like Samantha and Angela highlighted SES as an intertwined yet prominent aspect of their identity. In particular, Angela experienced feelings of hesitancy due to money concerns. For her, social class not only created feelings of hesitancy but also contributed to thoughts of de-transitioning because it would be easier. As a working-class transgender female, it was important for her to appear as passable as she could. Literature has described the concept of not being passable as being clocked (Bettcher, 2014; Jenness & Fenstermaker, 2014; Sevelius, 2013;). Angela and other participants did not want to be clocked. She felt it was particularly important that she present as a cisgender female, which meant being able to afford certain medical procedures, makeup, and clothing. Passablity was particularly important to working class females in this study because of the need for their

social connections to appropriately conceptualize gender identity. Studies suggest that low SES

has been correlated with lower education (Davis-Kean, 2005; Sharma, 2014; Sirin, 2005),

making it challenging for non-transgender individuals to understand transgender identity.

Therefore, not being clocked seemed to serve as a way of avoiding difficult conversations

regarding gender identity.

This subtheme of putting transitioning on hold due to SES was experienced by more than

half of the participants and is represented in the literature. As mentioned previously, one

particular issue that emerged from the literature was the numerous financial barriers that

occurred for transgender individuals from either a lack of job protection or lack of employment

(Brewster, Velez, Mennicke, & Tebbe, 2014; Brewster et al., 2012; Budge et al., 2010; Dispenza

et al., 2012; Schilt, 2006). Brewster, Velez, Mennicke, & Tebbe, 2014). Several participants

identified a hesitation in transition as a result of low income, underemployment, and general fear

of transphobia in the workplace. Several participants said they wanted to transition and look as

close to a cis gender female as possible, which typically cost money. The similar all or nothing

thoughts permeated their decision process in a way that they waited long after they actually

identified as a transgender female. These thoughts were connected to the participant's perception

of passability and societal expectations. Participants talked about temporarily and sometimes

permanently delaying important transition steps such as hormones, surgeries, or even external

gender expression altogether. When counselors understand how imperative the transition

experience can be for transgender females, combined with understanding the impact of financial

barriers, they understand the devastation felt by transgender females who cannot afford to

transition.

While studies on the intersectional experience of social class and gender identity are emerging, the occurrence of this type of scholarship is nascent in counseling literature (McCullough et al., 2017; Moradi et al., 2016; Taylor, 2010, 2012). This dearth of literature is consequential because the developing focus on the intersection of class and transgender identity has specific implications for the counseling profession. With existing literature, scholars have suggested that the social perception of transgender identities are constructed through middle-class identities (Bockting, Benner, & Coleman, 2009; Boehmer, 2002; Budge, Thai, Tebbe, & Howard, 2016). As a result, diverse class-based representations of transgender identities are often absent from counseling research. As previously mentioned in the literature review, the concept of socially constructed identities has centered various singular identities such as SES, and there have been several studies that connect mental health concerns with social class (Budge, Thai, Tebbe, & Howard, 2016; Wadsworth, Evans, Grant, Carter, & Duffy, 2016). A study by Hendricks and Testa (2012) revealed that transgender individuals often experience unemployment or underemployment. Navigating career concerns can be especially challenging for trans individuals, particularly when multiple forms of oppression are at work. Furthermore, Brown et al. (2012) revealed the incidence of comparatively low wages for transgender individuals in their chosen fields. As can be seen in this study, low wages can be another barrier for trans individuals acquiring necessary health resources. Overall, studies suggest that low wages are often a primary economic concern for members of the Transgender community (Ahmed, Andersson, & Hammarstedt, 2013; Anteby & Anderson, 2014; Barron & Hebl, 2013; Gates, & Viggiani, 2014; McNulty, 2017). While these worries are mostly economic in context, issues of social class and access to social capital are direct outcomes of these economic concerns. An overall lack of legal protections for LGBT individuals magnify these unfair labor practices

(Spade, 2011). This lack of protection can be particularly devastating for transgender individuals who cannot afford to appear passable due to the prices of hormones, clothing, and other external gender identifiers. Due to their class and gender position, they are more vulnerable to direct discrimination, which in turn contributes to their feelings of dysphoria and ostracization (Bradford, Reisner, Honnold, & Xavier, 2013; Moradi et al, 2012; Nadal, Skolnik, & Wong, 2012). Conversely, studies have suggested that transgender individuals who have greater resources may have improved outcomes such as avoiding sex trafficking, less addiction stemming from gender dysphoria, and less violence (De Vries, 2012; Dispenza et al., 2012; Levitt, & Ippolito, 2014b; Mizock, & Mueser, 2014; Moradi, et al., 2016). While this current study echoes these sentiments and expressions from individuals of varying SES, the methodology provided a platform for a more in-depth investigation into understanding this aspect of participants' identity. The study advances the literature that focuses on SES and transgender identity by examining in-depth the unique experiences of transgender females with various SES identities.

Race Oppression

This current study further illuminated the deteriorating relationship between transgender persons of color and the white centered LGBT movement and authority figures. The unique aspect of these data is the depth of the participants' stories that resulted in the themes and subthemes. These experiences amounted to several subthemes, including transgender exclusion in cultural-racial spaces, the positive influence of race, race oppression and familial exclusion, race privilege, and passability and race. Apparent in various parts of their narratives were experiences of gender dysphoria, trauma, and underlying mental health concerns such as ongoing depression or anxiety. Sequentially, race privilege and inclusion in cultural-racial space typically

occurs during the earliest transition experiences. It is often followed by or included with themes of familial exclusion and passability connected to race. The construct of passabiltiy and race typically appeared towards the end of participants' experience.

Many participants expressed specific examples that identified transgender exclusion in cultural-racial places. Essentially, this meant that they felt explicitly excluded in places frequented by individuals who share their cultural-racial identity but are cis-gender. This was a theme seen both by individuals with culturally-racial privilege and individuals with a marginalized racial identity. A factor that makes this sub-theme unique, and therefore necessary, includes the overtones of race that occur during the participant's experiences. For instance, several participants felt ostracized in spaces that are traditionally traditional cultural spaces for members of their community. In this study, participants mentioned barber shops, churches, and even family gatherings. While this sub-theme overlaps with constructs from general race oppression, it provides an extra layer of internalized bigotry because of the rejection from people who participants felt they should be safe around. This was particularly demoralizing for participants who experienced marginalized social positions regarding their cultural-racial identity. That is, they felt additional rejection in a world where they already felt rejected for being a racial minority. As one participant put it, "I'm already at a disadvantage being colored, but now I'm trans and female. I just made a glass ceiling three panes. I don't just have one glass ceiling to go through, but three. Three-ply glass ceiling".

While some participants felt unaccepted in traditional cultural-racial spaces, the data also illustrated the positivity and feeling of strength that other participants experienced as a result of their cultural-racial identity. This led to the subtheme of the positive influence of race. That is to say, many of the interviewees expressed that culture was a positive factor that contributed to

their ability to be resilient in tumultuous times. Jamie reflected on the positive influence of cultural-racial identity on her identity as a trans person. Jamie refers to her identity as "half Black half Indian" throughout the interview and indicates that this was particularly meaningful to her. This is conceptually similar to a study by Chang and Singh (2016) on transgender persons of color in which the authors discuss the importance of cultural humility. Their study put forth the idea that a client's racial identity may play an unpredictable role for the client. They suggested that it is necessary to conduct a thorough assessment of clients who identify as transgender persons of color. Specifically, counselors should acknowledge and address the client's experiences with trauma and discrimination in addition to the experiences that provide support and strength (Chang & Singh, 2016). In this current study, participants helped expose the importance of recognizing how one's culture can have a positive influence on their transitioning experience.

Familial exclusion is a common experience among transgender females and transcends various identities (Graham, 2014). In particular, this study found several instances where this sense of exclusion was connected with cultural-racial identity. This is reflected in several race centered transgender studies (Gonzalez, D'Augelli, & Grossman, 2017; Hwahng, & Nuttbrock, 2014; Kattari, Walls, Whitfield, & Langenderfer-Magruder, 2015; Shelton, 2018). Koken, Bimbi, and Parsons (2009) explored the experiences of transgender women of color with a specific focus on their biological family relationships. The reactions of parents and family members of transgender females of color were diverse and resulted in a range of emotions expressed by the transgender females, from feeling connected to feeling rejected by their family of origin (Koken, Bimbi, & Parsons, 2009). The authors paid close attention to the family's reaction to the participant's gender identity, and the majority of participants reported a mix of familial reactions

ranging from acceptance to destructive rejection (Koken, Bimbi, & Parsons, 2009). In a similar fashion, the current study revealed incidents of familial rejection. Throughout the interviews and journals, many participants contributed to the rejection they experienced from family members from the same cultural-racial identity. That is, occupying a marginalized racial identity contributed to social constructs regarding gender that may have influenced familial rejection. This was particularly relevant in Jamie's interview when she discussed her rejection from her father and how this rejection stemmed from what her father deemed as masculine imperatives.

Consistent with the research in the Koken, Bimbi, and Parsons (2009) study, participants in this study discussed their experiences in the context of cultural-racial privilege. As previously mentioned, racial privilege implies that participants experienced unearned, often invisible, social benefits that impacted their lives despite their awareness of such privilege. Similar to existing literature that examined racial privilege in the transgender community (Budge, Thai, Tebbe, & Howard, 2016; Erich, Tittsworth, Colton-Meier, & Lerman, 2010; Hwahng, & Nuttbrock, 2007; Sevelius, 2013), several participants, such as Ashley, experienced privilege that was evidenced in their narrative. Typically, these experiences were indirectly expressed and couched in an inability to relate to racial oppression. This is moderately reflected in Burnes and Chen's (2012) study when they examined privilege in transgender female experiences. In particular, their study aimed at analyzing multiple axes of oppression for transgender individuals. The authors found that individuals who engaged in various transition activities at various points throughout their life span often experienced intersecting traumatic experiences that served as stressors. For their participants, experiences of race privilege could create unique experiences for transgender females during transition and, in some cases, provided opportunities that may have not otherwise been available. In a similar way, the white participants in this study encountered privilege during

their transitioning experience. In particular, white participants did not have the obstacles that some of their racially marginalized counterparts experienced.

In some cases, participants were aware of this privilege and experienced some challenges within their experience of privilege. They describe situations and experiences that are a result of their identity despite having privilege in that identity. Samantha, for example, seemed to have some sense of how she is privileged with her racial social position. This may be a result of dealing with other marginalized qualities, such as low SES and transitioning, when she was older than 50. Samantha also experienced a sort of double-edged sword of privilege with regard to her perspective on support. More to the point, she identified a common feeling of racial isolation that is reflected in research (Bonilla-Silva, Goar, & Embrick, 2006). Many marginalized racial minorities experience a common sense of community based on shared culture and experiences of racial oppression. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Samantha spent time in the interview and in her journal discussing how she felt disconnected with white people, particularly since she identified as a transgender female. She also felt more supported by African American females when compared to people in white communities. For Samantha, and other participants, support was a big part of her feeling comfortable enough to transition. Despite occupying certain positions of social privilege, they experienced difficulties that could only happen within privilege.

Many of the individuals in this study expressed in so many ways that passability is important to them. Passability intersects with race because of the social constructs held by individuals in various racial groups. For instance, Jamie felt that her cultural-racial identity contributed to her need to be passable. She stated that the African American community is harsher on transgender females, making it more important for her to be passable. This was

echoed through other participant's narratives and is also echoed in literature that focuses on the experiences of transgender persons of color. Bith-Melander et al. (2010) conducted a study that focused on psychological factors that impact transgender people of color and passability within the African American community. The author identified factors that impacted the mental health of their 43 participants and found that passability was a major aspect in their transitioning experience (Bith-Melander et al., 2010). The participants in the study identified race as a contributing obstacle in being passable. That is, they felt that their communities (African American, Latinx, and Pacific Islander) possessed a stronger sense of cis-normativity compared to white populations. This made it more challenging for them to access the resources and support needed to be passable. Similarly, the current study identified participants, such as Jamie, who were impacted by cis-normative constructs in the community. Mantras and platitudes such as "a man should be a man" and "the way I should look" were utilized in several of the interviews and revealed the underlying cis-normative constructs. Comparatively, Bith-Melander et al. (2010) reflected on racially centered constructs that focused on the ability of transgender persons-of-color to be passable. Specifically, their participants discussed times when they felt other African American transgender individuals were influencing their perception of their transition as an all or nothing situation in which they accurately present as a female or remain presenting as a male. This presented as a form of peer pressure and, in some ways, encouragement; however, participants in the current study experienced more discouragement and lack of support. In a way, the current study illuminates the internalized transphobia that participants acquired from their experience within the African American and Latinx communities. The internalization of transphobia translates to a static sense of gender expression because of gender constructs that influenced participants at a young age. As suggested in literature (Collins, 2000; Hayes & Swim,

2013; Robnett, & Anderson, 2017; Villalba, Ramirez□Ortiz, Dévieux, Attonito, & Rojas, 2018), marginalized racial populations are more likely to have an inflexible view of gender expression , thus giving life to such mantras as *a man should be a man and act like a man*. Consequently, transitioning with the hope of being passable became more challenging to cultural-racial minority participants.

Literature in the counseling field has underrepresented transgender people of color (Bowleg, 2008; Moradi et al., 2016; Parent, DeBlaere, & Moradi, 2013); however, existing research identified multiple experiences of oppression as significant barriers to mental health wellness and physical well-being (Bradford, Reisner, Honnold, & Xavier, 2013; Grant et al., 2011; Saffin, 2011). Several of the participants in this study experienced racial oppression, and, in many ways, this was the most challenging identity for many of the participants largely due to the historical nature of racial oppression in society. This is similar to the experiences of the As participants in this study struggled with financial resources, support networks, visibility in social media, and an overall sense of self-acceptance regarding their gender and cultural-racial identity, they also experienced oppression as a significant barrier to mental and physical well-being. Several participants connected their cultural-racial identity with their social networking ability. Specifically, they felt that being a transgender person of color created barriers to their ability to socially connect and, in many cases, impacted them emotionally, financially, and psychologically. Research on transgender females, while scarce, has identified some of the barriers for mental health wellness that were also revealed in this study. For instance, Grant et al. (2011) surveyed transgender people throughout a region in Virginia to explore the barriers experienced by the community. The study suggested that transgender people of color experienced the highest level of barriers that existed in housing, employment, addiction,

incarceration, health care access, mental health care access, and other areas that may greatly impact this population. Additionally, the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs (2012) reported that trans people of color were more than twice as likely to experience anti-transgender discrimination and were more than twice as likely to experience police violence. This underlines the influence of racial oppression on participants' transitioning experience.

Age Centered Repression

The identity of age has been featured throughout participants' narratives, both in terms of the numerical age in which one begins transition and the impact of what generation a person is able to begin the transition progress. Aging was a merging theme that often occurred in the midsection of participants' stories. As previously mentioned, age centered repression refers to participants' experience with oppression based on their age and how that relates to their gender identity. This often included historical social oppression, intersections with other identities, and sexist implications. While the subject of transgender aging is increasing in popularity, most research studies merged transgender aging into publications focusing on the more general topics of LGBT aging (Aldridge & Conlon, 2012; Arthur, 2015; Stinchcombe, Smallbone, Wilson, & Kortes-Miller, 2017).

The subthemes that emerged from the data in this study highlight how age can fundamentally change one's experience in this context. These themes include age and transgender hesitation, passability and age, and privilege and age. Chronologically, passability and privilege came before transgender hesitation because they were both predictors of halting one's transition. Transgender hesitation was often coupled with the social expectations of what it means to be a transgender female. These expectations were a result of how society viewed transitioning at various points in the lives of the participants. One study by Witten (2009)

suggested that trans persons developed their elderly transgender identity through one of three ways: (1) coming out later and transitioning later in life, (2) coming to terms with their gender variance early in life, or (3) growing up in a culture that openly accepted non-traditional gender identity and expression. This relates to several of the participants' narratives because they felt that they could not transition when they were first aware of their gender identity.

The second theme involved passability and age. Several studies identified passability as a major concern among transgender females (Arayasirikul, & Wilson, 2018; Chamberland, 2016; Moolchaem, Liamputtong, O'Halloran, & Muhamad, 2015; Munson, & Cook-Daniels, 2017; Shelton, 2018). Arayasirikul and Wilson (2018) talked about the social construct of passability as a product of transgender misogyny. They wrote, "Measuring whether or not a trans woman is passable is a complex social interaction, a joint action, enveloping members of society and the trans individual through the lens of trans-misogyny" (Arayasirikul, & Wilson, 2018, p. 19). This was evident for many of the participants in the current study. Take, for example, Samantha's experience in transitioning. Samantha felt isolated and, at times, hopeless with regard to being perceived as passable. When she discussed one of the pictures she brought, it was clear that she felt like she would never live up to the female standards of beauty imposed by American culture. This was connected with her age and a shared idea of what a transgender female should look like. This exposes the deep-rooted impact that one's age has on one's transition experience that is often discussed in studies that focus on transgender elders (Bailey, 2012; Ettner, & Wylie, 2013; Foglia, & Fredriksen-Goldsen, 2014;Van Wagenen, Driskell, & Bradford, 2013; Witten, 2009).

The third theme includes privilege and age. In this context, privilege typically involved the ability to look more passable. There is not currently significant research that focuses on privileged identities as it pertains to the intersection of age and transgender female identity.

While this current study is not centered on privilege identities in this context, two participants in this study emphasized the benefits and meaningfulness of their age privilege. In particular, age privilege relates to participants' ability to transition at a young age and during a generation in which transgender identities are increasingly more accepted. For both participants who experienced age privilege, the support they received was not limited to emotional support and acceptance. Rather, it particularly included financial support such as Ashley's 16th birthday shopping spree and Angela's ability to buy affirming clothing and take hormones at a young age. Being young also allowed them to take hormones at an age when they would have the maximum impact. This means that testosterone will have less impact on their muscle and hair growth while estrogen will be prominent in their facial structure, breast growth, and overall body shape.

The intersection of age and gender identity are complex and result in internalized oppression and varying levels of self-esteem. As trans individuals develop, they are able to use their oppression management skills as a means of building resiliency. Working through internal and external oppression can contribute to resources such as one's ability to culminate support and reframe cognitions. While many participants viewed their age as an important identity in which they did not experience privilege, they were able to perceive aspects of their older age that provided resources which helped them to transition.

Applications for Clinical Practice

The goal of this study was to better understand the transition experience of culturally diverse transgender females through an intersectional narratological lens. This next section will outline a number of ways in which findings from this study can be utilized to inform clinical practice when working with transgender individuals. The current study provides practitioners with numerous clinical implications that could inform and positively impact their work with

transgender clients. These implications build on current transgender studies such as Budge, Thai, Tebbe, and Howard (2016) and Moradi et al. (2016), which center on trans multicultural competencies. These implications include an understanding of intersectionality, infusing intersectional concept into counseling interventions, and understanding a client's need for support that is congruent with the intersections of their identity.

Understanding identity. The study illuminates the need for mental health therapists to develop a strong understanding of intersectional identities and how the various identities that their clients hold may contribute to a transitioning experience that is or was different from privileged transgender females. As mentioned throughout the results section, marginalized identities can impact one's ability to transition and one's overall transition experience. More to the point, it's important to understand the context of the interconnected nature of multiple identities. It's particularly important for counselors to understand client difficulties in intersectional identity navigation, interconnected gender role pressure, and privilege reduction. Varying identities within Transgender identities illuminates the complex and entangled components of gender. Similar to Warner and Shields (2013), this study has examined how the combination identities can cultivate to create a unique experience for the client. Take for instance, Kaitlin Jenner, who was mentioned in four out of the eight participant's interviews. Kaitlin's identity includes white ethnicity, transgender female, middle-aged, and wealthy, which is different than Samantha's experience because of her social class identity. While Samantha experiences privilege in cultural-racial identity, her transitioning experience is vastly different compared to Kaitlin Jenner. If a counselor were to hyper-focus on Samantha's white transgender identity, they would miss one of the biggest influencers of her transitioning experience, which is social class.

One mistake that is often made by counselors, both beginning and expert, is to over-focus on one aspect of the client's identity or overgeneralize about aspects of the client's identity. As a counselor educator, I have observed counselors making assumptions regarding transgender experiences. This was documented in the literature review (Grzanka, & Miles, 2016; Shin et al., 2017; Singh, 2012) and was, in some ways, reflected in the participants' narratives (Angela, Brittney, & Tori). To center the intersectional identities, counselors should make an intentional effort to understand and engage in the client's multiple identities. This should happen early in the counseling relationship, particularly during the information gathering stage. In particular, counselors can ask questions like, *how would you describe yourself in terms of cultural-racial identity (age, and SES)*? They should also ask which of the identities is most important to the client and, *how do these identities create a unique experience for you?* As presented in the study, the combination of identities can create a unique experience; therefore, understanding these identities could significantly impact the client's experience with anxiety, depression, and other mental health concerns.

Intersectionality infused theoretical orientations. The second recommendation generated from this study is the practical application of intersectional understanding during counseling. Counselors should strive to infused intersectional concepts directly into their theoretically based interventions. As mentioned earlier in this study, the transgender community represents a diverse group of people from different ethnicities, faiths, ages, socioeconomic groups, and cultural backgrounds with varying family structures, abilities, languages of origin, and mental health needs. McCullough et al. (2017) studied the experiences of thirteen trans individuals who went through therapy with a mental health professional. Consistent with qualitative inquiries about desirable characteristics of counselors providing services to LGB

persons (Benson, 2013; Bess & Stabb, 2009; Elder, 2016), McCullough et al. (2017) found that transgender participants value a warm and empathic atmosphere where the counselors valued their identity without overemphasizing the role of their gender identity. In other words, trans individuals in the study wanted counselors to understand and respect their identity without assuming it was the primary focus of the session (McCullough et al., 2017). Reflecting on transgender positivity and the participant's overall perception of what support means, this current study illuminates the need for a similar approach to working with transgender clients. Empathy and respect are garnered from listening and understanding the client's subjective experience. Therefore, utilizing a compassionate intersectional lens that includes recognizing the influence of gender identity, cultural-racial identity, SES, and age is imperative for working with this community. Moreover, Austin and Craig (2015) suggested that an LGBT affirming approach should be directly intertwined with a theoretical perspective.

In a similar manner, I believe that intersectionality can and should be directly infused into theoretical orientations. The aim of an intersectional approach in transgender affirming therapy is to gain an understanding of how client's myriad identities impact their ability process events, cope with stressful situations, and obtain support. Using this framework to inform affirming therapy, counselors strive to challenge their beliefs about client identities throughout therapy and treat them as the experts regarding their own experience (Shin et al., 2017). Counselors should challenge themselves to create an open environment where their own assumptions can be addressed and intersectionality can be naturally intertwined into their therapeutic style. Understanding a client's unique experience of minority stress or majority privilege allows for a more nuanced exploration of their experiences surrounding gender identity along with cultural racial, age and SES identity. Interviews from the current study showed how these diverse

identities can be meaningful aspects of the participant's experience while transitioning.

Prioritizing this type of approach would provide a space where counselors are able to utilize

general information about diverse cultures without committing cultural empathic failures.

Counselors should have a general understanding of how various identities may influence client

experiences without making sweeping generalizations about transitioning. One example of how

to put this approach into action is through an intersectional cognitive behavioral therapeutic

(CBT) approach. This would include gathering information about the client's intersection of

identities and utilizing this context to assist the client with developing coping skills, identifying

unhelpful thinking styles, and reframing unhelpful cognitions. The counselor could also

understand, acknowledge, and potentially address the historical nature of oppression that stems

from multiple marginalized identities. Further sessions could identify how oppressive attitudes

impact the client's stress level (Austin & Craig, 2015). The counselor then could assess the

client's internalized oppression as well as their experience with institutionalized and cultural

transphobia. Broaching issues of oppression is a key component in Intersectionaly Infused-CBT

for the purpose of identifying how the client's experience with oppression contribute to their

negative thought processes. All of which would be contextualized with a foundation of empathy

and respect that strive to understand how the intersection of identities creates a new and unique

experience for the client. This style of therapy is an example of how intersectionality and a

transgender affirming lens can effectively guide a specific therapeutic style. While this type of

theoretical infusion would require more research, it could be a significant addition to transgender

counseling literature that is practical and useful for practitioners.

Need for intersectional support. The third consideration from this study is for

counselors to be aware of the impact of intersectional support. The study illuminated the

meaningfulness of support from individuals whose clients share similar identities. Research has consistently reflected the importance of support for transgender people (Fuller, & Riggs, 2018; Hocken, Good, Elliott, Webb, O'Connor, & Cox, 2018; Pflum, Testa, Balsam, Goldblum, & Bongar, 2015; McCann, & Sharek, 2016). However, results from this current study suggest that some individuals benefit from identity relevant support. For instance, Jamie directly stated that she does not feel that she fits in with a support group she leads. This is primarily because the group was exclusively white transgender females and she felt that their transitioning experience was different from hers. As previously discussed, Jamie experienced within-racial-group exclusion based on her gender identity along with within-transgender-group exclusion in primarily white transgender female spaces. These feelings of exclusion not only relate to one another, they also compound her experience of exclusion. Similar feelings were seen in other participants. Christiana talked about feeling rejected by the black church and feeling like she didn't fit into the mainstream transgender community because of her cultural-racial identity. While this study did not focus on the participant's experiences in support groups and other spaces, the information did stem from conversations about the transitioning experience. Counselors should understand and implement intersectional support for their transgender clients in order to contribute to their level of self-acceptance and ability to navigate oppression based on multiple marginalized identities, so they can experience a sense of universality regarding their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. This may include referring clients to groups that match multiple aspects of their identity such as a queer persons of color group. Counselors may also consider exploring how the client might feel about engaging with individuals who share multiple similar identities. This could involve encouraging the client to pursue and nourish friendships who experience similar identity intersections.

Limitations

This study presents several limitations that occurred during the interviewing and analysis process. One limitation is sampling size. Congruent with the intent of purposeful sampling, the researchers carefully selected females who identified as transgender. This limited the study greatly in terms of the number of participants we were able to recruit. This study could have benefited from an increase in the number of participants along with a diversity in the identity of participants. For instance, this study may have benefited from participants who identified as Asian transwomen. While Hays and Singh (2012) suggested that a smaller sample size is a characteristic of qualitative research, the limited sample size reduces the generalizability of this study. However, this is a typical limitation when using a narrative paradigm (bell, 1996). While the individual interviews, corresponding pictures, and journal entries were enough to reach saturation, this quality limits the generalizability of this study beyond the eight participants. Consistent with this limitation is the concept of substantive validation, which constitutes that the content is not significant because of the small-sized target population. Despite this limitation, the representation of individual voices and opportunities for potential systemic improvement assist this study in maintaining consequentiality and parallels the purpose of the intersectionality paradigm along with narratological inquiry. While generalizability and significance are imperative features of research, it's important to understand the inherent subjectivity that occurs with these limitations.

The study may also be limited by the identity of the researcher. As the primary researcher, I identify as a pansexual, cis-gender, white male who is middle class. As previously discussed, I have endeavored to bracket my bias while conducting the interviews and reading the journals. Regardless, bracketing cannot account for the participant's perceptions of and reactions

to the various identities I occupy or my role as the clinical director of the LGBT Life Center. As a result, the participants may have experienced pressure to exaggerate or suggest a false sense of oppression to add to the study or to appease me. It is also plausible that the research questions and interview style may include language with a subtle bias stemming from my vested interest in the study. In narratological inquires such as this one, bias may be multifaceted in that researcher influence has the potential to reduce the credibility of the study. Notwithstanding, such connection to the research has the potential to increase the authenticity in the study as a result of increased insight and compassion towards this community. Van Manen (1997) suggested that personal investment in qualitative research contributes to accurate investigation and appropriate reflection of the experience that is being studied. As previously discussed, the identity of the primary researcher may limit trustworthiness to some degree, while paradoxically providing distinct insight into the meaningfulness and purpose of this study.

Recommendations for Future Research

Implications for future scholarship include a greater emphasis on intersectionality theory in studies in the field of counseling and counselor education. Scholars may apply this theory to many areas in the field, including practical counseling implications (i.e., intersectional CBT), intersectional focus in counselor education, and the study of counseling dynamics. Intersectionality creates the potential of examining these areas in a way that accommodates more of their complex, nuanced reality. Intersectionality could also create more possibilities for collaboration among fragmented research groups such as counselor education researchers, counseling practitioner researchers, LGBT education researchers, critical race education researchers, and researchers who look at various aspects of identity within the context of education. Additionally, future research on transgender experience could benefit from the use of narrative inquiry, particularly

because this methodology requires that the researcher make their motives and potential bias obvious to readers. Also, this style of research provides a more authentic view of the participants' experience. This occurs from the style in which interviews are connected, the multiple data points from individual participants, and the thick reflections that are featured in the results section of narratological inquiries.

The study addresses a significant gap in the counseling research through a narratological and intersectional lens. By virtue, this study takes multiple intersectional identities into account, including the chronology of influence, to allow for a more authentic view of a participant's experience. It examined the ways in which identities such as, cultural-racial identity, SES, and age contribute to the transition experience of transgender females. Finally, it allowed these stories to be told from the perspective of the participants, placing them at the center of their own experiences. By virtue of the selected identities, this study may have implicitly shaped a conceptualization of these variables as intrapersonal, categorically self-defined, and comprehensive. Therefore, it would be useful for future studies to focus on other intersections of culture such as race, religion, sexual orientation, age, and education level. Religion was mentioned as a particularly important aspect for three of the participants while two others alluded to the potential influence of religious beliefs. Understanding how the entirety of multiple identities converge could help conceptualize how they create a unique transitioning experience for transgender females.

Chapter 6

The excess of cisnormativity throughout interconnecting discourses permeates culture and history (Feinberg, 1996). The counseling community, however, has made efforts to align their training with multiculturally progressive beliefs with regard to underrepresented and marginalized populations. Specifically related to the present research, advocates and scholars have created standard competencies for working with individuals who identify as transgender (Burnes, Singh, Harper, Harper, Maxon-Kann, Pickering, & Hosea, 2010). In fact, research on trans identity has greatly increased over the past several years (Budge, S. L., Thai, J. L., Tebbe, E. A., & Howard, K. A., 2016;McCullough et al., 2017; Moradi et al., 2016),including both empirical and conceptually focused articles that address an array of trans-focused issues. Furthermore, society has made strides concerning visibility (McInroy, & Craig, 2015) and civil rights (Bieschke, Perez, & DeBord, 2007) of trans people. Despite these achievements and efforts by the counseling community, there continues to be a lack of research and visibility for individuals who identify as nonwhite and who do not identify with the gender binary (McCullough et al., 2017; Moradi et al., 2016). While transgender research has flourished in the past several decades, numerous trans-focused studies have rapidly become obsolete considering the changing social landscape. More specifically, trans literature focuses on privileged trans experiences at the exclusion of intersectional experiences (Budge, Thai, Tebbe, & Howard, 2016). Also, the research limits the scope of scholarship to focus solely on gender identity, thereby perpetuating assumptions, misunderstanding, and stigmatization of trans individuals (Sánchez & Vilain, 2009). In this study, I attempted to lay the ground work for transgender intersectionality to gain allocated space in the field of trans studies by examining how transgender identities are affected by intersectional paradigms. What follows is a discussion of the problem as it exists currently, the purpose of and influence of this study, the related literature

on gender identity development, minority stress and intersectionality, and the research methods

that were used in this study. In the following chapter, I discuss the purpose of this study, the need

for this study, terminology related to this study, and the potential contribution of this study.

Statement of the Problem

Since most counseling settings may serve transgender individuals at some point (Grant et

al., 2011), the literature suggests that trans-affirmative self-efficacy is imperative for all

counselors (Barden & Greene, 2015; Benson, 2013; Bess & Stabb, 2009). However, attention to

privileged minorities, such as white lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) individuals,

renders those who experience multiple minority identities as unacknowledged. Such

marginalization has been systematically reinforced (Atewologun, & Sealy, 2014); therefore, a

consistent struggle exists for those who do not fit within the mainstream transgender population.

As part of a research agenda, Moradi et al. (2016) conducted a content analysis that revealed the

transgender participants were not significantly included in almost half of the studies that

purported to include them in "LGBT" (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) studies.

Unfortunately, this is a common theme in LGBT literature. Moreover, in the same series of

research, Budge, Thai, Tebbe, and Howard (2016) suggested that trans-focused intersectionality

research has been overlooked, particularly in reference to individuals identifying as transgender

females. While many studies have targeted transgender concerns, a large percentage have

focused on trans individuals who experience many other privileges in categories such as cultural-

racial identity, age, and socio-economic status (SES). A lack of focus on intersectionality

impacts the wellness of trans individuals because counselors may overemphasize or

underemphasize the importance or relevance of one part of the individual's identity (Budge, Thai,

Tebbe, & Howard 2016). For instance, statistics suggest that people of color experience worse

counseling outcomes than white people (Paniagua, 2013). Counselors who make the assumption that a white trans individual will experience similar results as an African American trans individual are excluding their race. An intersectional approach within therapy entails discussing with clients how they recognize their combined multiple identities, as well as examining times when some identities may be more relevant (Budge, Thai, Tebbe, & Howard, 2016). As will be discussed later in the study, the intersection of identity is a significant consideration for those who provide mental health services to the transgender community.

Purpose of the Study

Given the previously mentioned disparities in trans female intersectional research, this study aimed to add methodological diversity to the current body of literature. That is to say, much of the literature related to trans individuals and mental health outcomes only examine a single dimension of their identity (McCullough et al., 2017; Moradi, 2016). There are few known studies that thoroughly assessed multiple identities among trans females through a qualitative lens, particularly with implications for counselors. For that reason this study assessed the intersectional experience of trans individuals through a narratological lens by exploring the subjective experience of those who occupy these identities on a daily basis. From this exploration, this study provides recommendations for counselors who work with transgender individuals.

With the growing visibility of trans communities, it is important to highlight the experience of those who reside at the intersection of historically marginalized identities. The intent of this study was to learn more about the intersection of transgender female identity and their cultural-racial identity, age, and SES. Specifically, the goal of this study was to understand their experiences, their circumstances, and how these intersections of identity affect their mental

health outcomes. Acknowledging that the intersection of trans female identity may have inherently different meanings and impacts on a person's worldview, I used the following question to guide this study while analyzing and revealing the subjective experience and perceptions of trans identity, SES, cultural-racial identity, and age as they navigate the complexities of identity.

> Question: How does one's trans female identity, cultural-racial identity, SES, and age contribute to their ability to transition?

Ultimately, the purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of inclusion of trans persons in a culture dominated by cisgender males. The research question was critical to my understanding of life at the intersection of these identities and underscored the ways in which this marginalized group has experienced oppression. At individual and institutional levels, commonly constructed social positions of gender, cultural-racial identity, SES, and age are a central part of the contexts of social interaction. It is my hope that my findings will serve as grounds for further research as more questions are raised through examination of individual and group discourses.

Methodology

This study examined diminished voices, suppressed narratives, and the expansion of counter-hegemonic queer discourse. I explored the role of intersectional identities in the lives of trans individuals through the lens of narratological inquiry. The primary objective of narratological research is to examine the richness of a particular communities' experience, which is often overlooked in traditional, quantitative research designs. Narrative analysis allowed me to examine how intersectional narratives construct the experience of transitioning for trans females. Essentially, narrative analysis describes a structural theory that can include de-narrated texts,

events, interviews, or artifacts that serve to tell a story (Bal, 2009). Through analysis of trans

intersectional narratives regarding their experience of transition, narratology has the ability to

expose ideological underpinnings of a narrative's construction and articulate its influential

function. As the interviewer and primary researcher, it is important to keep in mind that such

discourse occurs subjectively and is connected to and formed through the collaboration with my

cisnormative experiences. Encapsulating narrative analysis in a broad sense is to understand its

suitability for multiple forms of data, thereby allowing me to utilize transcribed interviews along

with archival data. Specifically, narrative analysis typically incorporates multiple forms of data,

thereby creating an accurate picture of stories created from the data (Savin-Baden & Van

Niekerk, 2007).

This method is predicated on illuminating experiences in regard to how individuals

interpret those experiences (Andrews, Squire, & Tamboukou, 2013). Consequently, this method

increased the rigor of this study and provided an opportunity for a more in-depth examination of

participants' experiences. The narratological method also promotes the use of post coding or

coding throughout the data analysis process in order to promote multiple perspectives, thereby

reducing individual bias (Saldaña, 2015). According to St. Pierre & Jackson (2014), post-coding

analysis functions as an open means of analysis that occurs anywhere and anytime throughout

the analysis process. Post coding leads to coders coming to a consensus regarding the meaning

of the data. In addition, the narratological method employs the use of an external auditor in order

to check the coder's work. The final step in the narratological method is the creation of domains

and core concepts that stem from the analysis process. Bal (2009) described these concepts and

domains as a "fabula," which is a series of logical events that are chronological in nature.

Therefore, the purpose of creating these domains and core concepts is to illustrate the meaning

and intention of the trans community narrative. Andrews, Squire, and Tamboukou (2013) described the coding process as directly connected to the participants experience in a way that is accurate and truthful to their experience. To accomplish this, I utilized trustworthy measures and an intersectional lens to clarify the experience of participants. Epistemologically, knowledge about the intersection of transgender identities was deconstructed and reorganized through the narratological theoretical lens and characterized through my research paradigm, intersectional theory. Intersectionality can be used to effectively explore the nature of multiple forms of oppression, and is, therefore, a complementary framework to our narratological lens, which allowed me to illuminate participant's subjective stories.

As previously mentioned, the theory of intersectionality describes ways in which oppressive institutions are interconnected and cannot be separate from one another (Crenshaw, 1991). Thus, in order to fully understand the extent of oppression for marginalized groups, one must investigate the ways in which the structure of one group's oppression becomes shaped by experiencing dual membership in another oppressed group or social representation (Meyer, 2012). With this in mind, it was my intention to bring a voice to a marginalized group within a marginalized group. It is imperative to understand multiple cultural impacts in order to understand trans individuals with respect to cultural-racial identity, age, SES, and gender identity. In pursuit of such understanding, the salience of this study is based on consistent questioning and close examination of bias and perception.

Participants and Sampling

The contextual framework of intersectionality can be used to understand how systemic injustice and social inequality occur on a multidimensional basis with respect to individual experiences (Crenshaw, 1991). I used this framework to establish and adjust participant selection

and data collecting procedures. I specifically acquired a diverse sample with respect to cultural-racial identity, age, and SES to support the use of an intersectionality framework. I also used some aspects of purposeful sampling , including directly asking participants from varying social positions within the trans-female community, which helped me obtain a more diverse participant pool. In particular, I was intentional with my selection process in order to get a diverse sample. The participant selection process helped integrate the intersectional and narratological paradigms into the study by engaging the community, thereby creating space for a diverse voice within this community.

The study took place in the southeastern region of the United States; participants were recruited from a local LGBT community center and asked to participate in individual interviews. I obtained permission from the community center program director to recruit participants. I also made announcements to trans feminine support groups in the area and asked members of the community to help with recruitment.

Demographics. As previously mentioned, all participants in this study were recruited because they self-identified as transgender females according to the previously given definition. With a total of 8 participants, there were a variety of ages, cultural-racial identities, and SES identities. The ages of the participants ranged from 26 to 51 (26, 28, 29, 35, 38, 41, 49, and 51). Though these numbers represented their current age, the participants' narratives were a reflection of various age points as it pertained to their transitioning process. The racial-cultural identities of the participants included 3 white, 2 African American, 1 Latina, 1 African American-Latina, and 1 African American-Indian. These racial-cultural identities were self-identified and reflected in the participants' narratives. The participants were also asked about their SES, which included 1 upper middle class, 4 middle class, 2 working poor, and 1 lower middle class. This status was

reflected what they currently considered their SES to be, though it is relevant to know what their status was when they transitioned, which many shared in their narrative. A graph of the demographics can be seen in appendix E.

Procedure

Observational data combined with individual interviews are effective in obtaining data because of the richness of the individual experience and the opportunity to explore the interaction between participants, which would otherwise be unavailable to the researcher (Hays & Singh, 2011). The contextual challenge of this endeavor was most evident in the process of obtaining participants who identified as transgender. Once participants were selected, data collection began using interviews and archival data.

Interview. The interviews included eight to ten semi structured questions of which will guide the participants to discuss their experience with respect to the various aspects of their identity. This study engaged in these interviews with the intention of digging deeper into the participant's subjective experiences as they applied to cultural-racial identity, gender identity, age, and social class. Demographics such as sexual orientation and ability status were not included in participant criteria; however, the researcher will obtain this information for the purpose of future research endeavors. Each participant who agreed to participate read and signed an informed consent prior to participating and promised complete anonymity.

Archival data. The collection of unobtrusive data focused on the subjective perception of those who identify as transgender female. Bal (2009) encouraged the use of archival data as a means of triangulating the experiential data. Using Bal's (2009) basic theory of narratology, data of all sorts, including archival data, was considered of equal status as it was coded and examined. Through coding, I analyzed the structure of the narratives created from the data. That is, the

context in which these narratives arrived provided insight into the meanings of common themes

that occurred. Similar to this study, several narrative inquires explored archival data, such as

journaling and pictures, to add richness and further complexity to the narratives that emerged

during interviews (Foster, & Hagedorn, 2014; Gockel, 2011; Haines, Poland, & Johnson, 2009;

Hays, Wood, Dahl, & Kirk☐Jenkins, 2016; Mizock, Russinova, & Shani, 2014; Mörtl & Gelo,

2015). Archival data was a particularly valuable aspect of this study because it allowed this

research to include multiple intersections of identity that may not otherwise be realistically

obtainable.

Participants were asked to bring three pictures that represented their experience in

transitioning. The use of these pictures was included in the interview as well as archival data.

The requirements of these pictures were explained to each participant (appendix B). Participants

were provided with an explanation as to how the pictures would be used (Appendix B), and told

they would be kept confidential and only the interviewer and the trans female auditor would have

access. All pictures were destroyed after data was analyzed. Journaling was also included in the

study to help incorporate the participant's identity intersections regarding cultural-racial identity,

SES, and age. The purpose of journaling was to allow an articulation of the participant's identity

in a reflective and meaningful way. The requirements of the journaling activity were explained

to each participant. Archival data, as discussed by Hays and Singh (2011), needs to take into

consideration the author's experience and expertise of the topic, the credibility of the article, and

the context of the documents. Accordingly, I utilized the sources above to obtain credible

information to the point of saturation in regard to perceptions of transgender females who occupy

multiple identities.

Interpretive Criteria for Data Analysis.

It is imperative that narrative inquirers view themselves as narrators. This process included recursive immersion of the transcripts with the intention of accurately displaying the perspective of the participants. Ongoing data analysis, field notes, and open coding took place throughout the study through a narrative lens, thereby highlighting the intersections of power such as voice, representation, and interpretive expertise. Analyzing and conducting narrative inquiry requires active listening during interviews and intentionality in coding. It involves a process of connecting with the participants in a way in which you will authentically and accurately hear, collect, and interpret their narrative (Chase, 2005). Specifically, the coding process included a scheme of numbers and letters which were used to designate major categories and subcategories. This provided a foundation for communication between the research team. As the process of constant comparison continued, the researchers used selective coding to identify core categories and multiple interacting categories. Hard copies of all computer-processed data will also be coded using colored pens to mark the margins with the appropriate numbers. Moreover, in order to create data sets of a size that can be analyzed in depth, I created condensed narratives from the interviews. With Bal's (2009) concept of an event and Moustakas (1994) concept of data reduction in mind, I utilized the participant's words while altering only for brevity and clarity. For instance, a participant may go into detail about how their experience of coming out influenced their transition. For data purposes, I may include only the parts that contributed or connected to the event of transitioning or to the participant's identity. Therefore, details such as the color of the participant's first high heels may be excluded upon participant's approval. Essentially, this is where efficiency and strategies for trustworthiness meet. Accordingly, Bal (2009) suggested that an event is characterized by a shift or alteration of one state of being or state of mind to another. If events communicated change or predicted the

future, they were included in the assessment process. This analysis process was fundamentally dependent on effective trustworthiness strategies.

Strategies for Trustworthiness

Multiple strategies were utilized to ensure trustworthiness in the study. Trustworthiness is defined by two categories, dependability and credibility. The credibility of this study was established through the use of memos, member checking, a thorough audit trail, and triangulation. Member checking is particularly important when utilizing the principles of event selection and reduction due to the cis-identity of the primary researcher. Dependability was established through member checking and by using external audits. In line with qualitative inquiry, this study strived to eliminate assumptions based on the researcher's preconceived notions regarding transgender intersectional identities. For this purpose, the researcher's assumptions and preconceptions were bracketed, and an enlisted auditor who identifies as a trans female reviewed the data to ensure that the participants had an accurate voice in the research.

Community Auditor

Revisions to the coding structure are a natural occurrence in open coding and add to the authenticity and meaningfulness of the study. This is especially true considering the influence of the auditor. As previously mentioned, an outside auditor was utilized to provide an authentic perspective regarding the process and the actual code creation. Though this was not consensus coding because she edited my existing codes, she did make significant changes along with additions to the codes. The auditor, asking to be anonymous, will be referred to by her pseudo name, Amanda. Amanda identifies as a 46 year old white transgender female with a master's degree in education. She currently works in a corporate setting and is pursuing her PhD in an online program. Amanda was incredibly important to the integrity and impact of this study

because her identity illuminated the voice of transgender females. She provided a counterbalance to the identity of the primary researcher who identifies as a cisgender male.

Very careful consideration was given to what Amanda reviewed and her suggested changes. Amanda was aware of and had access to documents regarding the context of the study, the overall methodology of the study, the interview process and questions, the transcripts pre and post coding, the journals pre and post coding, and the interview notes. Along with the coding process and themes, Amanda evaluated the trustworthiness of the study. To this end, she made several recommendations. First, she stated that future studies should consider utilizing a different setting where the researcher does not occupy dual roles. She was concerned that my dual roles could influence some of the interviews. She found, however, that there was no evidence in the interviews that my role as clinical director of the center influenced the interviews. She also suggested that I provide deep detail about how my dual role impacted the study. As per her recommendation, this will be discussed in chapter five. She also recommended including pictures with the research; however, this was not possible due to the need for confidentiality and protecting the identity of participants. Instead, thick descriptions of pictures and participants' reactions to pictures have been included.

Results

This study identified five themes of trans-intersectional experiences related to transitioning: a) SES salience , b) race oppression, c) age centered repression, d) privilege, e) and transgender positivity. The first three themes relate to transgender female experiences related to perceived discrimination and intersectionality, while the final two themes relate to the participants' experiences within various identities. Participants experienced these themes in

unique chronological order, which varied between narratives. Within these primary themes, each participant experienced subthemes that provided deep insight into their perspective.

SES Salience

Despite the current literature on the intersection of transgender identity and SES, there continues to be a need for research on intersections of identities. Findings from this study exposed feelings of misrepresentation in the community, the experience of oppression for participants with low SES, and subjugation due to their marginalized SES status. This can be seen in Angela's narrative when she said:

It was hard being lower middle class. Stuff like makeup, hormones, and fem clothing cost money. I've heard that you can't put a price on happiness. Well, try being in the wrong body and not being able to afford to transition.

Several relevant sub themes emerged from this current study, including SES privilege in the media, SES privilege during transition, putting transitioning on hold due to SES, and SES connected to passability. Chronologically, SES privilege and media visualization foreshadow participants' ideas of passability and halting transitioning. The latter often appears in between feeling non-passable and feeling passable.

Race Oppression

This current study further illuminated the deteriorating relationship between transgender persons of color and the white centered LGBT movement and authority figures. The unique aspect of these data is the depth of the participants' stories that resulted in the themes and subthemes. These experiences amounted to several subthemes, including transgender exclusion in cultural-racial spaces, the positive influence of race, race oppression and familial exclusion, race privilege, and passability and race. Apparent in various parts of their narratives were

experiences of gender dysphoria, trauma, and underlying mental health concerns such as ongoing depression or anxiety. For instance, race oppression can be seen in Jamie's narrative when she said:

> I went into a nail salon to get my nails done and I overheard these two African American men says to each other (in a judgmental tone) , what the fuck is going on around here these days.

Sequentially, race privilege and inclusion in cultural-racial space typically occurs during the earliest transition experiences. It is often followed by or included with themes of familial exclusion and passability connected to race. The construct of passabiltiy and race typically appeared towards the end of participants' experience.

Age Centered Repression

The identity of age has been featured throughout participants' narratives, both in terms of the numerical age in which one begins transition and the impact of what generation a person is able to begin the transition progress. Aging was a merging theme that often occurred in the midsection of participants' stories. As previously mentioned, age centered repression refers to participants' experience with oppression based on their age and how that relates to their gender identity. For instance, Age Centered Repression can be seen in Samantha's narrative when she said:

> Early on I just thought I never could transition.. It was hard for me to even start… your younger self is in the past. Your life is over half the way over. It's been a disguise and there's nothing you can do about it.

This often included historical social oppression, intersections with other identities, and sexist implications. While the subject of transgender aging is increasing in popularity, most research

studies merged transgender aging into publications focusing on the more general topics of LGBT

aging (Aldridge & Conlon, 2012; Arthur, 2015; Stinchcombe, Smallbone, Wilson, & Kortes-

Miller, 2017).

The subthemes that emerged from the data in this study highlight how age can

fundamentally change one's experience in this context. These themes include age and

transgender hesitation, passability and age, and privilege and age. Chronologically, passability

and privilege came before transgender hesitation because they were both predictors of halting

one's transition. Transgender hesitation was often coupled with the social expectations of what it

means to be a transgender female. These expectations were a result of how society viewed

transitioning at various points in the lives of the participants. One study by Witten (2009)

suggested that trans persons developed their elderly transgender identity through one of three

ways: (1) coming out later and transitioning later in life, (2) coming to terms with their gender

variance early in life, or (3) growing up in a culture that openly accepted non-traditional gender

identity and expression. This relates to several of the participants' narratives because they felt

that they could not transition when they were first aware of their gender identity.

Interconnectedness of Identities

There is an inextricable link between each element, trait, or social identity that a person

occupies and all are critical in fully understanding one's identity (Crenshaw, 1991). McCall

(2008) suggested that the goals of intersectionality motivated research allow for complexity in its

methodology. With this in mind, this current study was executed in such a way to uncover

nuanced aspects of participants' experiences and to resist reductionist approaches. To honor this

endeavor, I incorporated participants' words as the foundational element of the research,

gathering their testimony through interviews and journal entries. The study revealed how

important it is to acknowledge the influence of various identities in the context of counseling. This acknowledgment was evident in general research on the transgender community (Parent, DeBlaere, & Moradi, 2013). Zabus and Coad (2013) found that individuals in the trans community do not experience or express gender separately from other social positions they occupy. This is consistently reflected in this study through the individual interviews, journaling, pictures, and contrasts between marginalized and privileged identities. For instance, Ashley experienced vast privilege with respect to her SES age and race. Consequently, she experienced greater passability, ability to transition, self-acceptance, and feelings of visibility in the media. This was not the experience of participants like Christina and Jamie who encountered marginalized identities in multiple categories. Not only were these identities impactful in their own way, they were also interconnected. This is only one isolated example of how interconnected each facet of identity is to the participants. The interconnection of identities has been well documented in literature (Dhamoon, 2011; Levine-Rasky, 2011; Lutz, Vivar, & Supik, 2011). The following subsections will discuss the interconnection of identities as revealed in the findings of this study.

Multiple minority identities. Intersectional theory challenges us to consider what it means to have a marginalized social position within a marginalized group. Studies on sexism, classism, ageism, racism, and transphobia have advanced, leading critics to argue that isolating any single part of these identities overlooks the experience of individuals with multiple minority identities (De Vries, 2012; Johnson, 2013; Moradi et al., 2016). As previously highlighted is this study, multi-minority identities create an alternative experience when compared to individuals who experience singular minority status. The study illuminated the middle class-centric, ethnocentric, and cis-normative ideologies that cause people who have multiple minority group

identities to be defined as uncharacteristic members of their respective identity groups. Participants with multiple minority-group identities that do not fit the archetypes of their respective identity groups experience what Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach (2008) designated as *intersectional invisibility.* This was prevalent for several participants throughout this study. For instance, during Jamie's interview she stated:

> And in the [transgender support group] meetings I feel out of place. They're all like, I told my dad and he's accepting. And I'm over here thinking, wow, I told my dad and he didn't talk to me for four months. He still calls me boy and son blatantly. I mean he talks to me regularly now because I'm his tech support, but it's always son, boy, Mr. James.

This particular experience contributed to Jamie's feeling of ostracization with-in a community she expects to feel welcomed by. Transgender females who experience multiple minority identities are likely to be misunderstood by the culturally dominant paradigms for what it means to transition, thereby having difficulty with intersectional identity navigation and experiencing interconnected gender role pressure. More examples on intersectional invisibility will be discussed in latter sections with focus given to participant's exclusion in cultural-racial spaces and how their SES connects to passability.

　　Intersectional identity navigation. The challenges associated with marginalization, misrepresentation, and disempowerment tend to be prominent features of the experience of individuals with multiple minority identities. This sentiment was reflected in literature that centered intersectional transgender experiences (De Vries, 2012; Moradi et al., 2016; Shelton, 2018). Erich, Tittsworth, Colton-Meier, and Lerman (2010) examined the perceptions of transgender persons of color. Their study revealed the difficulties of navigating multiple identities in various settings and how participants were able to establish *bicultural competence*.

Individuals like Jaime, who acquire a *bicultural competence*, can learn to communicate with community members in the dominant culture while still able to navigate the institutional social-cultural structures of minority spaces (Erich, Tittsworth, Colton-Meier, & Lerman, 2010). By utilizing an intersectional paradigm that includes more than two identities, this study illuminate's participants' experiences involving multilevel cultural competency. When participants experience multiple marginalized social identities, they have to be prepared to navigate multiple marginalized and privileged social structures. Jamie and other participants discussed their ability to function in mainstream society as female or male. This means they had to operate in cisgender spaces where they may be viewed as males but also as a transgender female within transgender communities. Within these spaces, Jamie mentioned that she has to further navigate racial norms such as being around transgender females who are white versus transgender females of color. This type of navigation can be particularly helpful when participants' identities constitute strict gender roles and expectations. For instance, Jamie's father viewed her as a man, and she had to learn how to navigate despite being mis-gendered. She attested that this was because of their older age, African American ethnicity, and lower middle-class identity, which depicts a firm characterization of what a man and women should act and look like. In transgender positive settings, such as primarily middle-class spaces or transgender centered spaces, Jamie was able to verbalize and externally express her femininity in a way that was meaningful and congruent. This is further complicated because she needs to navigate her relationship with her more tolerant mother in a different manner and with a different cultural competency (Indian). In a similar fashion, Samantha's work peer group, who can be identified as middle-aged, white, working class males, struggle with identifying her as a female, and continue to utilize her nonpreferred name. This is possibly because middle-aged, white, working class individuals are less likely to

be familiar with gender concepts that are not based on the traditional gender binary (Galupo, Henise, & Davis, 2014; Moradi et al., 2016; Nadal, Skolnik, & Wong, 2012). The result of being misgendered leads Samantha to navigate her construction job in a way that feels unnatural and incongruent. In other words, she feels like she has to act like a man at times in order to effectively navigate her job. In settings where she felt her gender identity was accepted, such as middle-class spaces or transgender centered spaces, Samantha was able to externally express her gender identity without feeling censored or judged. Another example is when Christina said:

> When I came out, I lost friends in the black community because of this belief. Also, I for real did not feel comfortable presenting as female at a black church. So, my first year coming out, I stayed closeted at church.

This further illuminates participants use of multilevel cultural competence. In Christina's narrative, she had to hide her true self, in order to continue to interact with her support system. This incongruence was challenging for Christina and resulted in her changing her church support system.

Interconnected gender role pressure. Multiple participants in this study experienced several levels of marginalized identities that contributed to feelings of pressure in their gender role expression, including cultural-racial, age, and SES. Non-intersectional paradigms have failed to address the intensity of gender role pressure because they have failed to identify the various identities that contribute to this pressure. Gender role pressure creates a cycle where all variables are important for the participant to feel passable. Participants' cultural-racial, age, and SES identities combined to contribute pressure towards being passable. When participants experience marginalization in these identities, the pressure is magnified. For the five transgender females of color in this study, wearing women's clothing and makeup shaped their bodies into

feminine conformity, which over time, helped their gestures, facial features, and clothing to feel authentic. Participants in this study said their physical bodies often shaped how they could access or need gender reaffirming clothing and other external means of expression, thereby, signaling the interconnectedness of multiple identities. Their ethnic identity contributed to their need to be passable while their body construction determined how much effort (hormones, clothing, makeup, etc.) would be needed in order to be passable. Identities such as age and SES connected directly with the participant's ability to obtain an external expression of themselves that would be congruent with their gender identity, thus contributing to the existing gender role pressure. For instance, several participants mentioned that age had impacted their body formation. This connects with their cultural-racial identity in that marginalized racial identity contributes to the desire to pass while age helps determine the impact of hormones and the ability for transgender females to acquiesce to societal constructs of female identity, which typically include youthful appearance (Arendt, Peter, & Beck, 2016).

Intersection of privileged identities. In addition to exploring the experiences of multiple minority identities, this study explores the varying experiences of privilege in association with participants' transitioning. As previously mentioned, bell hooks (2014) theorized that studies can gain equally valuable information from individuals in privileged positions along with individuals who are marginalized, thus the inclusion of privileged experiences in this study. Privilege provides unearned opportunity and access to status, rewards, and resources unavailable to other intersections. For several participants in this study, privileged identities often included an experience of privilege reduction while transitioning.

Privilege reduction. Participants' privileged identities must be viewed in an intersectional context in order to understand how these identities impact one another.

Furthermore, privilege is not monolithic, meaning it is unevenly distributed in varying forms and contexts. The results of this study show that the combination of identities is just as important as the amount of privileged and marginalized identities the participants occupied. At times, aspects of marginalization in one identity may mute or reduce privilege based in other identities. For instance, Samantha's ethnicity provided her some areas of privilege. This privilege was reduced as a result of her transgender identity and her SES in that she did not experience the same social privilege they may be experienced by white cisgender females or males. This was highlighted through her experience of being ostracized in white spaces. Another scenario was shared by Ashley, the participant who experienced the most privilege. Ashley was young, white, and affluent, which provided her with ample opportunity to transition and become passable. She did, however, experience bullying and transphobia when she was in school. This was a result of her transitioning at a young age. She experienced privilege due to her age, but it also magnified her marginalized transgender identity, thereby reducing her privilege. While privilege reduction is not well documented in the literature, a similar concept of privilege loss has been discussed in the context of transgender female experiences (Mizock, & Hopwood, 2016; Staples, Bird, Masters, & George, 2018; Westbrook, & Schilt, 2014). Studies on privilege loss discussed the loss of male privilege that transgender females experience after transitioning. This typically included an increase in sexualization, increased challenges in a male-dominated workforce, and an overall expectation of gender biased standards of beauty. This loss of privilege also resonated with participant experiences and echoed through all identity positions including cultural-racial identity, SES, and age. In terms of racial stereotypes for females, these differences take shape in various forms, such as gender pay gaps and expectations for female ageing. These intersectional losses of privilege can be seen in Jamie's narrative when she talks about what her parents expect

from her as a woman, Angela's story when she discusses SES and reveals implications of being underpaid, and in Samantha's interview when she explained that she was too old to be passable. The loss of privilege combined with privilege reduction created challenges while transitioning, even for privileged participants.

While some scholarship tends to assume that trans individuals are monolithic (Moradi et al., 2016), other studies have noted intersectionality within trans populations (Budge et al., 2016). These studies examined the intersection between transgender identity and other single identities, such as racial identities (Dozier, 2005; Schilt, 2006; Singh, 2013, 2012), sexual identity (Bockting, Benner, & Coleman, 2009; Hill, 2007), or SES (Gehi & Arkles, 2007). Inversely, literature that examined multiple identities of transgender people (Dozier, 2005; Schilt, 2006) focused only on trans men. While this current section contextualized the interconnectedness of identities, the following sections will address the singular intersections of identity, including the themes that emerged from this study. These singular intersections are equally important because they combine to contribute to participants' overall experience while transitioning.

Discussion

The goal of this study was to better understand the transition experience of culturally diverse transgender females through an intersectional narratological lens. This next section will outline a number of ways in which findings from this study can be utilized to inform clinical practice when working with transgender individuals. The current study provides practitioners with numerous clinical implications that could inform and positively impact their work with transgender clients. These implications build on current transgender studies such as Budge, Thai, Tebbe, and Howard (2016) and Moradi et al. (2016), which center on trans multicultural

competencies. These implications include an understanding of intersectionality, infusing intersectional concept into counseling interventions, and understanding a client's need for support that is congruent with the intersections of their identity.

  Understanding identity. The study illuminates the need for mental health therapists to develop a strong understanding of intersectional identities and how the various identities that their clients hold may contribute to a transitioning experience that is or was different from privileged transgender females. As mentioned throughout the results section, marginalized identities can impact one's ability to transition and one's overall transition experience. More to the point, it's important to understand the context of the interconnected nature of multiple identities. It's particularly important for counselors to understand client difficulties in intersectional identity navigation, interconnected gender role pressure, and privilege reduction. Varying identities within Transgender identities illuminates the complex and entangled components of gender. Similar to Warner and Shields (2013), this study has examined how the combination identities can cultivate to create a unique experience for the client. Take for instance, Kaitlin Jenner, who was mentioned in four out of the eight participant's interviews. Kaitlin's identity includes white ethnicity, transgender female, middle-aged, and wealthy, which is different than Samantha's experience because of her social class identity. While Samantha experiences privilege in cultural-racial identity, her transitioning experience is vastly different compared to Kaitlin Jenner. If a counselor were to hyper-focus on Samantha's white transgender identity, they would miss one of the biggest influencers of her transitioning experience, which is social class.

  One mistake that is often made by counselors, both beginning and expert, is to over-focus on one aspect of the client's identity or overgeneralize about aspects of the client's identity. As a

counselor educator, I have observed counselors making assumptions regarding transgender experiences. This was documented in the literature review (Grzanka, & Miles, 2016; Shin et al., 2017; Singh, 2012) and was, in some ways, reflected in the participants' narratives (Angela, Brittney, & Tori). To center the intersectional identities, counselors should make an intentional effort to understand and engage in the client's multiple identities. This should happen early in the counseling relationship, particularly during the information gathering stage. In particular, counselors can ask questions like, *how would you describe yourself in terms of cultural-racial identity (age, and SES)*? They should also ask which of the identities is most important to the client and, *how do these identities create a unique experience for you?* As presented in the study, the combination of identities can create a unique experience; therefore, understanding these identities could significantly impact the client's experience with anxiety, depression, and other mental health concerns.

Intersectionality infused theoretical orientations. The second recommendation generated from this study is the practical application of intersectional understanding during counseling. Counselors should strive to infuse intersectional concepts directly into their theoretically based interventions. McCullough et al. (2017) studied the experiences of thirteen trans individuals who went through therapy with a mental health professional. Thier study found that participants wanted counselors to understand and respect their identity without assuming it was the primary focus of the session (McCullough et al., 2017). Reflecting on transgender positivity and the participant's overall perception of what support means, this current study illuminates the need for a similar approach to working with transgender clients. Empathy and respect are garnered from listening and understanding the client's subjective experience. Therefore, utilizing a compassionate intersectional lens that includes recognizing the influence of

gender identity, cultural-racial identity, SES, and age is imperative for working with this community. Interviews from the current study showed how these diverse identities can be meaningful aspects of the participant's experience while transitioning. This further emphasizes the need for counselors to understand and utilize a diverse and transgender affirming therapeutic approach that is an addition and adaptation of existing theoretical perspectives to best meet the needs of their transgender clients. Prioritizing this type of approach would provide a space where counselors are able to utilize general information about diverse cultures without committing cultural empathic failures. They could have a general understanding of how various identities may influence client experiences without making sweeping generalizations about transitioning. One example of how to put this approach into action is through an intersectional cognitive behavioral therapeutic approach. This would include gathering information about the client's intersection of identities and utilizing this context to assist the client with developing coping skills, identifying unhelpful thinking styles, and reframing unhelpful cognitions. The counselor could also understand, acknowledge, and potentially address the historical nature of oppression that stems from multiple marginalized identities. All of which would be contextualized with a foundation of empathy and respect that strive to understand how the intersection of identities creates a new and unique experience for the client.

Need for intersectional support. The third consideration from this study is for counselors to be aware of the impact of intersectional support. The study illuminated the meaningfulness of support from individuals whose clients share similar identities. Research has consistently reflected the importance of support for transgender people (Fuller, & Riggs, 2018; Hocken, Good, Elliott, Webb, O'Connor, & Cox, 2018; Pflum, Testa, Balsam, Goldblum, & Bongar, 2015; McCann, & Sharek, 2016). However, results from this current study suggest that

some individuals benefit from identity relevant support. For instance, Jamie directly stated that she doesn't feel that she fits in with a support group she leads. This is primarily because the group was exclusively white transgender females and she felt that their transitioning experience was different from hers. As previously discussed, Jamie experienced within-racial-group exclusion based on her gender identity along with within-transgender-group exclusion in primarily white transgender female spaces. These feelings of exclusion not only relate to one another, they also compound her experience of exclusion. Similar feelings were seen in other participants. Christiana talked about feeling rejected by the black church and feeling like she didn't fit into the mainstream transgender community because of her cultural-racial identity. While this study did not focus on the participant's experiences in support groups and other spaces, the information did stem from conversations about the transitioning experience. Counselors should understand and implement intersectional support for their transgender clients in order to contribute to their level of self-acceptance and ability to navigate oppression based on multiple marginalized identities, so they can experience a sense of universality regarding their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. This may include referring clients to groups that match multiple aspects of their identity such as a queer persons of color group. Counselors may also consider exploring how the client might feel about engaging with individuals who share multiple similar identities. This could involve encouraging the client to pursue and nourish friendships who experience similar identity intersections.

Limitations

This study presents several limitations that occurred during the interviewing and analysis process. One limitation is sampling size. Congruent with the intent of purposeful sampling, the researchers carefully selected females who identified as transgender. This limited the study

greatly in terms of the number of participants we were able to recruit. This study could have benefited from an increase in the number of participants along with a diversity in the identity of participants. For instance, this study may have benefited from participants who identified as Asian transwomen. While Hays and Singh (2012) suggested that a smaller sample size is a characteristic of qualitative research, the limited sample size reduces the generalizability of this study.

The study may also be limited by the identity of the researcher. As the primary researcher, I identify as a pansexual, cis-gender, white male who is middle class. As previously discussed, I have endeavored to bracket my bias while conducting the interviews and reading the journals. Regardless, bracketing cannot account for the participant's perceptions of and reactions to the various identities I occupy or my role as the clinical director of the LGBT Life Center. As a result, the participants may have experienced pressure to exaggerate or suggest a false sense of oppression to add to the study or to appease me. It is also plausible that the research questions and interview style may include language with a subtle bias stemming from my vested interest in the study. In narratological inquires such as this one, bias may be multifaceted in that researcher influence has the potential to reduce the credibility of the study. Notwithstanding, such connection to the research has the potential to increase the authenticity in the study as a result of increased insight and compassion towards this community. Van Manen (1997) suggested that personal investment in qualitative research contributes to accurate investigation and appropriate reflection of the experience that is being studied.

Recommendations for Future Research

The study addresses a significant gap in the counseling research through a narratological and intersectional lens. By virtue, this study takes multiple intersectional identities into account,

including the chronology of influence, to allow for a more authentic view of a participant's experience. It examined the ways in which identities such as, cultural-racial identity, SES, and age contribute to the transition experience of transgender females. Finally, it allowed these stories to be told from the perspective of the participants, placing them at the center of their own experiences. By virtue of the selected identities, this study may have implicitly shaped a conceptualization of these variables as intrapersonal, categorically self-defined, and comprehensive. Therefore, it would be useful for future studies to focus on other intersections of culture such as race, religion, sexual orientation, age, and education level. Religion was mentioned as a particularly important aspect for three of the participants while two others alluded to the potential influence of religious beliefs. Understanding how the entirety of multiple identities converge could help conceptualize how they create a unique transitioning experience for transgender females.

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Appendix A

Individual Interview Protocol

1. **Acquiring Participants**

- Goal of eight participants

- Advertise at the local LGBT Life Center (248 W 24th street, Norfolk, Virginia)

  o Trans-female support groups

  o Community bulletin board

  o Utilize intersectional perspective to access members

- Contact potential participant by telephone or email and explore interest level and

  appropriateness of candidate (i.e. identifying as a Trans female).

2. **Provide a Description of the Study**

- Provide description of the study and consent form via email or personal meeting.

- Request that the participants bring at least three photos to the interview that describe or

  represent some aspect of their experience in transitioning. The only requirements are that

  the photos must be of the participants and they must be able to be used in the study and

  in the write up of the study. These images can be printed or brought via cell phone. Cell

  phone copies will be sent by email. Researcher will request a copy of such photos to be

  used as data in the final project. These photos will be anonymous and will only be seen

  by the researcher and the auditor. All photos will be destroyed once data has been

  obtained.

- Receive back consent form signed by participant.

- Answer any questions participants may have about the study and their participation in it.

- Provide participant with specific instructions regarding the journaling after the interview

  See description in step 4.

3. **Individual Interviews** (questions presented at the bottom)

- Receive written consent prior to interview.

- Receive verbal consent for participant to review the transcription of the interview in order

  for the participant to check for accuracy and expand on contents, if indicated, and for

  other clarifying contact, if needed, during data processing.

    o Interviews will be 60-90 minutes at the LGBT center and will occur during

      January or February of 2017. Interviews will be conducted by the primary

      researcher in individual interview rooms using Dohm sound machines to disguise

      the conversation and ensure privacy.

    o Interview will be audio taped. Recordings will be password protected and

      destroyed after transcription.

- Ask participant to discuss experience transitioning and how their various identifies they

  occupy contribute to that experience. Ask participant to include photos during interview.

- Communicate researcher availability to answer any further questions and concerns that

  may arise as a result of participation in this study.

4. **After the Interview**

- After our interview, participants will be asked to engage in 3 days of personal journaling

  (expressive writing) about their thoughts and feelings related to the impact of racial-

  culture, age, SES on their transition experience. Participants will be asked to complete

this within one week of the interview. They will be asked to spend 15 to 30 minutes a day, free writing about how each identity impacted their transition experience (See Appendix B for details)

Script to Participants

Thank you for meeting with me today. I appreciate your time and input and I want you to know that your participation is a valuable part of this study. (Interviewer will review consent form with the participant). Now that you have reviewed the consent form, I would like to know if you have any questions or concerns before we continue.

Today, I will be asking you several questions about your experiences as a transgender female. Specifically, I am curious about your experiences with respect to racial-cultural identity, age, and SES and how these identities impacted your experience of transitioning. Also, please feel free to utilize any of the photos that you brought to help you answer any of the questions that I ask. As you speak, I may take notes for my records but these notes will be kept securely, and your name will not be used anywhere. Your answers will be looked at with those of other participants and you will not be identifiable in any published record of this research.

We will be recording the interview which will last approximately 60-90 minutes. Should you wish to end the interview sooner or decline to answer a question, please feel free to do so. After the audio recording is transcribed, I will remove any identifying information. At the time that interview transcription has been completed, I will destroy the audio recordings to ensure confidentiality.

I am going to turn the recorder on now. Please remember, you can ask me to turn this off at any time.

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. What does it mean to you to be a transgender female?

2. Walk me through your experience in transitioning from male to female.

3. How do these photos represent or reflect upon your experience in transitioning? Explain why you chose those photographs.

4. How do these blurbs represent or reflect upon your experience in transitioning? Explain why you chose those blurbs.

5. How do you identify yourself in terms of racial-cultural identity?

6. Describe how has this identity has impacted your experience in transitioning? In what way, if any, is this evident in your blurbs or pictures?

7. Tell me about your identity with respect to SES.

8. Can you think of a time when this identity has impacted your experience in transitioning? Describe the visual narrative you created. In what way, if any, is this evident in your blurbs or pictures?

9. How old are you? How has your age impacted your experience in transitioning? In what way, if any, is this evident in your blurbs or pictures?

10. Is there any particular aspect of your identity that was most salient in transitioning process? Can you tell me more about how this identity impacted your transitioning process?

11. Is there anything that you would like you would like to comment on that we did not cover?

Thank you again for your participation today. If you have any further questions or concerns, please let me know. I will transcribe this interview over the next few weeks. Again, I thank you for your time. May I contact you if further questions arise?   Turn off recording.

Appendix B

Participants pictures- Requirements

(Will be sent to participants)

- Pictures must be a reflection of the participants transition experience.

- Pictures must include the participant and no other persons. Clothing will also be accepted. Please make sure all photos include the participant or their clothing (please ask the researcher if you are unsure).

- Pictures must be g rated. If the picture includes anatomy development or diminishment, clothing must be worn.

- Drawings are not permitted.

- Three pictures are requested. Participants can bring more pictures if they wish. Participants will only be excluded if they are unable to provide at least one picture.

- These pictures need to be brought with the participant to the interview. They can be brought via prints, photos, photo copies, electronic copies, or cell phones. Participant will not be excluded if they can send picture(s) within one week of the interview.

Appendix C

Participant Journaling Requirements

(Sent to participants)

Thank you again for being a part of this study. I would like for you to complete a journal reflecting on your experience in gender transition. It is preferred that you complete this journal via Microsoft word document; however, if you do not have access to a computer, a hand-written journal will be acceptable (please ask researcher for materials as needed). At the end of the third day, I would like for you to email me the 3 journals in an attachment to cgerw001@odu.edu. If you hand write these journals, I will make arrangements to obtain the journals. Once again, I would like to reassure your identity will only be known by me, as I will use pseudonyms once I receive the journal.

Please complete this within one week of the interview. They will consist of 15 to 30 minutes a day, free writing about how each identity impacted their transition experience.

- o Day one, please write about how your racial-cultural identity influenced, contributed to, or related to your transition experience in any way. If you feel that your racial-cultural identity did not have any impact on transitioning, I would still like you for you to write a reflection. Please write about how you think your racial-cultural identity differed from other transgender females who identify with a different racial-culture. If you are unsure about what to write, please contact me.

- o Day two, please write about how your age influenced, contributed to, or related to your transition experience in any way. /If you feel that your age did not have any impact on transitioning, I would still like you for you to write a reflection. Please write about how you think your ag differed from other transgender females who

identify with a different age. If you are unsure about what to write, please contact me.

o Day three, participants will write about how SES influenced, contributed to, or related to their transition experience in any way. If you feel that your SES did not have any impact on transitioning, I would still like you for you to write a reflection. Please write about how you think your SES differed from other transgender females who identify with a SES. If you are unsure about what to write, please contact me.

Appendix D

Themes	Definitions	Subgroups	Examples
SES Salience	Experience with social class and how it impacts and intersects one's transition.	Putting Transitioning on hold due to SES SES Connected to Passability SES Privilege During Transition SES Privilege in the Media	"It made it harder. I don't have health insurance. So trying to get these (points to breast), it would come out of pocket. Forget about bottom surgery. I can't afford it and I can't afford insurance." "I just don't make enough money. Still, I'm choosing to stay strong and be myself. Love myself despite not being able to have my body exactly like I want it. I mean after all, not everyone can be like Laverne cox." "It was hard trying to balance paying my bills and transitioning at the same time." "When it comes to it, money just makes life easier. Like Walmart. I wish I didn't have to shop at Walmart for anything. But I do. I have to shop at Walmart for everything." "So, a lot of the things I would like to do for transitioning, I can't. The money is not there for that."
Race Oppression	Prejudice and discrimination based on internally and externally identified cultural-racial identity that particularly intersects one's transgender identity.	Race Oppression and Exclusion Positive Influence of Race Trans Exclusion in Cultural Racial Spaces Race Oppression and Familial Exclusion Race Privilege Passability and Race	"I went into a nail salon to get my nails done and I overheard these two African American men says to each other, ugh, what the fuck is going on around here these days. And the guys are like its 2015, and men be doing that these days. I just mind my own business. … but I don't think they would be so angry about it and say it out loud if I was white." "Growing up as a black transgender was very difficult for me. I was ridiculed and picked on saying that I was ugly and that I would never make it as a transgender. This negativity came from a group of peers who I thought were going to be good friends to me. " "Much of Mexican culture does not always recognize trans people. I mean there's a sense that men should be men you know, machismo. " "..being black is just one more obstacle I have to deal with while transitioning. Being trans is hard enough without having extra struggles to deal with. Besides that, I think black men are more hateful towards black trans. It's as if they think were betraying our race or something." "I'm already at disadvantage being colored, but now I'm trans and female. I just made a glass ceiling 3 panes. I don't just have one glass ceiling to go through, but 3. 3 ply glass ceiling." "I know that there are trans women of color out there, but, where are they? …I'm active in the LGBT community, but I feel like I'm active in a community that I don't fit into. I don't see a lot of people like me. I feel like I can't always relate. I mean they can't relate to me and I can't relate to them sometimes because it feels like were having two separate experiences about the same issue."
Age Centered Repression	The influence of age on one's ability to transition. This could include historical social oppression (what decade they discovered their gender identity) along with ageism.	Age and Transgender Hesitation Age and Privilege Passability and Age	"I know I'll never be that person, in that picture. I'm too old." "I wish I was younger when I started. I think that would have been a game changer. Also, I think the culture has changed since I started my transition and people are now more accepting than ever." "I will say, I think those that transition earlier, Like Jazz, have a big advantage. They can take hormone blockers before testosterone can kick in."

| | | | "But um yea, being passable would make it easier. And I attribute it to age. I f I did it at 18, I think I would have more time to blend in. The hormones would have impacted me better. "

"To be honest, I wish I could have afforded to do it much earlier in my life. I'm just saying, I knew that I was a girl at age 19. I could have started so much earlier. But I guess it wasn't it the cards." |
|---|---|---|---|
| Privilege | Access to power experienced by a dominant social group thereby giving them social, economic, political, and cultural advantages at the expense of members of a socially marginalized group. This power can exist even within a marginalized population. | Privilege in the Media

Privilege Amongst Multiple Identities

Challenges Within Privilege | "In one of the pictures I was wearing new clothes. That's something I didn't have to worry about affording. ….I'm fortunate enough to go out a buy new clothes to make me feel more comfortable. I was even nervous about trying on new clothes at stores so I would just go to the stores, buy the clothes and see if I liked them when I got home. I was still able just to throw out 400 or 500 dollars for clothes… Especially starting out, I was able to buy isolation..".

"I'm not saying that people don't experience bigotry because of their race, I'm just saying I don't think it influences one ability or experience in transitioning."

"I'm pretty lucky to have started transitioning in my twenties. I can also tell you that I'm much happier than I would be if I had to wait later in life"

"My parents were really supportive of me transitioning and they helped financially support my process through buying girl clothing and getting me therapist and doctors so that I could get on hormones." |
| Trans Positivity | A tendency to be positive or optimistic towards the transgender community, aspects of transition, or experiences of transgender individuals. | Internalized Transgender Positivity

Transgender Positivity and Support | "When you start to transition, it's such a wonderful moment. It's a wonderful experience."

"In that picture, when I took it of myself, it was reaffirming to me. It was like yes, this I who I am supposed to be. This is right for me. I'm doing the right thing. And it gave me the strength to come out at work latter."

"These pictures reflect the fact that I had the support and love to follow through with the transition process."

"The second picture is of me at age 40. This was a few years after I fully transitioned into the beautiful female that I am now. It was also a birthday celebration but I think my smile was much more familiar around that time." |

Appendix E

Name	Racial Cultural Identity	Age	SES
Samantha	White	49	Working Poor
Jamie	African American Indian	38	Middle Class
Tori	African American	35	Middle Class
Ashley	White	26	Upper Middle Class
Angela	Mexican American	28	Lower Middle Class
Morgan	White	41	Middle Class
Christina	African American Latina	51	Middle Class
Brittney	African American	29	Working Poor

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