COMMUNICATING ORGANIZATIONAL AND TRANSGENDER INTERSECTIONAL

IDENTITIES: AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF A TRANSGENDER OUTREACH CENTER

by

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Communicating Organizational and Transgender Intersectional Identities: An Ethnography of a

Transgender Outreach Center

Dissertation directed by Dr. Bryan C. Taylor

Abstract

This dissertation examined the communicative construction of identity by members of a

transgender outreach organization. It focused on how members' communication created and

modified *organizational identities* in relationship to participants' *individual identities*. Through

my three-year ethnography of and volunteering with the Transgender Resource Center of New

Mexico (TGRC), I conducted 415 hours of participant observation, 64 hours of semi-structured

interviews (n=36), document analysis, and over nine hours of creative focus groups (n=5) of one

of the only transgender-centered organizations in the United States. I investigated how TGRC

members negotiated the significance of relevant individual and organizational identities, their

relationships, and their implications for transgender organizational outreach. I argued that

TGRC's transgender-centered organizational outreach and their emic, ambiguous emphasis on

their members' intersectional identities revealed important complexities for organizational

communication inquiry.

My data analysis reviewed two salient identity intersections for many TGRC participants:

(1) *homeless and transgender* identities and (2) *indigenous and transgender* identities, which

both tied to other identity intersections. Next, I presented TGRC organizational identity ideals

responding to participants' transgender intersectional identities: (1) TGRC as *family* and (2)

TGRC as *support for all facets of transgender living*. I then examined four communication

constraints for sustaining those organizational identity ideals: (1) *family tensions*, (2) *non-binary*

critiques, (3) *Harm Reduction Program competition*, and (4) *Nonprofit Industrial Complex hegemony*.

My dissertation revealed theoretical and practical recommendations for studying the communicative construction of organizational identity for transgender intersectional outreach organizing. Specifically, we need increased understanding of how organizational members create organizational identities that account for complex, intersectional participant identities as they simultaneously organize around a strategic, focused identity category. This research offered a unique examination of the complexities of constructing organizational identities for an identity-based organization—collectives advancing outreach and justice for members "sharing" one or more social identities (e.g., race, disability, sexuality, etc.). I offer three future extensions for organizational identity research grounded in prior scholarship and in my ethnographic findings: (1) *contrasting communication*, (2) *detypification*, and (3) *crystallized organizational identity using ambiguous intersectionality*. I end by calling for future engaged transgender and intersectional organizational communication research.

Keywords: Organizational communication, organizational identity, transgender, intersectionality, ethnography, nonprofit organizations

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* * *

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CHAPTER ONE: ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTITY

This dissertation examines the communicative construction of identity by members of a transgender outreach organization. It focuses on how communication creates and modifies *organizational* identities—particularly in relationship to *participants' individual* identities. Through my three-year ethnography of the Transgender Resource Center of New Mexico (TGRC), one of the only transgender-centered organizations in the United States, I studied the unique experiences of organizational members (principally, its Directors and staff) attempting to serve transgender and gender non-conforming clients (referred to as "guests") in Albuquerque and across the state of New Mexico.

In this process, TGRC staff and guests negotiated the significance of relevant individual and organizational identities, the nature of their relationships, and their implications for the organization's outreach programs. In this dissertation, I situate TGRC as an example of an "identity-based organization." In 1999, Reid defined the term identity-based organization as, "People with common identities [that] often construct organizations and engage in politics for their mutual benefit" (p. 305). She used veteran organizations as a model example of an identity-based organization serving a collective with a shared identity. In using the term *identity-based organization* herein, I refer to an organization that dedicates its mission to supporting and advancing social justice for participants "sharing" one or more social identities (e.g., race, gender, sexuality, disability, etc.).

I present an ethnographic account of TGRC's organizational identity construction across seven chapters. Chapter One examines literature on organizational identity to contextualize how organizational members communicatively construct who they are as a collective. Chapter Two focuses on individuals' related communication of their individual identities through a review of

organizational identification, transgender identities, and intersectionality literatures. My

dissertation revealed that even as TGRC Directors and staff defined and responded to

"transgender" identities, they did so in relationship to guests' other salient identities and needs.

Chapter Three presents my general methodology, as well as specific ethnographic methods of

data collection, analysis, and writing. I then present three chapters reporting findings from data

analysis: (1) Chapter Four depicts two salient intersections of identity with participants' trans

identities, (2) Chapter Five discusses TGRC's organizational identity ideals, and (3) Chapter Six

examines constraints arising from the communicative enactment of those ideals. Chapter Seven

presents my conclusions, reviews the study's limitations, and projects future directions for

related research. I now turn to this chapter's examination of organizational identity.

* * *

"Although we neither desire nor expect to achieve consensus about organizational identity, we
believe that progress can be made by anchoring our theorizing and our empirical explorations in
explicit definitions, by stating our ontological and epistemological assumptions, and by being
specific about the subset of identity research toward which we aim our contributions"
(Corley, Harquail, Pratt, Glynn, Fiol, & Hatch, 2006, p. 96).

This chapter explores the enticing theoretical construct of organizational identity.

Theorizing organizational identity is no easy feat, given the wide-ranging starkly different

studies undertaken in its name. Following the epigraph from Corley et al. (2006) above, I do not

aspire to resolve all differences among these approaches in this dissertation. Rather, this chapter

will both explore scholarly conceptualizations of organizational identity—including those

developed in communication studies—and position this dissertation among these approaches.

The chapter begins by exploring the popularity of organizational identity and considers

some explanations of the attractiveness of this construct to diverse scholars. It then reviews a

foundational essay by Albert and Whetten (1985) that has generated significant theoretical

discussion of organizational identity. It ends by examining questions about and approaches to theorizing organizational identity in order to better understand (or "anchor" in Corley et al.'s words) how we might collectively enrich our theoretical and empirical approaches.

What's So Compelling About Organizational Identity?

Contemporary organizational scholars have deep, sustained interests in understanding the relationship between identity and organization. They offer differing accounts concerning the growth of organizational identity scholarship inflected with varied tones of enthusiasm and skepticism. Here, I briefly explore the fascination with organizational identity by considering it as a *pervasive* construct—that is, many organizational phenomena are entangled with issues of identity, and identity has become a compelling interdisciplinary topic for inquiry. Generally, I define organizational identity as *members' beliefs about who they are as an organization, and the communicative practices through which they construct, sustain, and transform those beliefs*.

We may begin by noting that Alvesson, Ashcraft, and Thomas (2008) attribute scholars' interests in identity to its connection with countless facets of organizing and diverse theoretical orientations. As they note, "Identity, it seems, can be linked to nearly everything: from mergers, motivation and meaning-making to ethnicity, entrepreneurship and emotions to politics, participation and project teams" (p. 5). This linkage to other organizational elements inspires scholars like Gioia, Patvardhan, Hamilton, and Corley (2013) to suggest that theorizing organizational identity is, "an intellectually exciting endeavor that could well define one of the most important organizational concepts of our time" (p. 184). Some scholars, following Luhmann, go further to situate identity as "a drive that characterizes all living systems" toward self-understanding and narration (Cheney, Christensen, & Dailey, 2014, p. 695).

Communication scholars have a particular vested interest in studying how organizational members reference and perform organizational identity. As Cheney et al. explain:

> For most large organizations today, identity is not only a key point of reference but also a practical building block for other objectives and projects; that is, organizations use their established identity programs and identity messages within networks of activities and projects, including mission statements, articulations of values and ethics, and marketing materials. Most organizational activities, in other words, are pervaded by identity concerns. (pp. 695-696)

Here, Cheney et al. position organizational identity in a few important ways. First, the authors note the ubiquity of identity issues, thus welcoming it as an important topic for communication inquiry. Second, in framing identity as a "key point of reference," they note how organizational members' ongoing communication utilizes the construct of identity to accomplish tasks, unify beliefs, create and sustain values, and even develop persuasive and strategic programs. Third, they present the possibility of multiple authors of and audiences for organizational identity research—something I will explore below in developing my review of past literature. Fourth, this conceptualization implicates the connections of discursive (e.g., values, messaging) and material (e.g., marketing materials, artifacts) manifestations of organizational identity.

It seems that scholars wholeheartedly agree about the prevalent and persistent interest characterizing organizational identity research. Yet organizational scholars offer divergent accounts for how it is that organizational identity *became* so compelling to theorize, study, and practice. Corley et al. (2006) present identity as an area of inquiry that begins in ancient and classical philosophy. Figures such as Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas focused on "notions of the self and its place within the surrounding social milieu as a foundation for theorizing about the

human condition" (p. 86). Cheney et al. (2014), by contrast, describe our current fascination with identity as a historical accomplishment that can be attributed to the rise of modernity. For example, in traditional societies, individual identity was primarily ascribed by collective needs, hopes, and dreams (i.e., concerning membership in family, church, regional, and occupational groups) (see Deetz, 1992). Whereas in pre-industrial society, "one could see much of one's future self in one's parents and grandparents," today "one's identity moorings are plant[ed] in shifting sand" (Albert, Ashforth, & Dutton, 2000, p. 14). Following Foucault (1978/1990), Cheney et al. examine how our current identity fascinations became explicit, "defining preoccupations of the contemporary industrialized world" (2014, p. 695). For these authors, theorizing organizational identity should be understood in relationship to both historical and contemporary cultural contexts. They detail that in a postindustrial milieu:

> identity has become a focused and professionalized enterprise, adopted by organizations in all sectors through the successive development of advertising, public relations, and marketing. And, with applications from personal branding to international social movement identification, these disciplines have exerted a growing influence on individual identities and self perceptions. (p. 696)

This version of identity's popularity introduces themes of professionalization, strategic communication, organizational identification, and organizational communication.

While Cheney et al. (2014) caution us about organizational identity's growing influence, other scholars are even more cynical. For example, in multiple texts, Alvesson expresses a robust skepticism in questioning what organizational identity offers that is unique or better than other prior constructs developed in organizational studies. In 2008, Alvesson et al., claim that, "the rise of identity scholarship may be more a case of old wine in new bottles" (p. 7). This image

presents identity scholarship as a new packaging of other organizational research. Specifically, the authors suggest that identity "can be (and perhaps has been) applied to almost any phenomenon, much as the [prior] organizational culture craze co-opted and replaced similar yet worn out constructs" (p. 7). Elsewhere, Alvesson (2011) continues this critique, specifying that identity (and also discourse) scholarship may be simply a redux of 1980s/1990s organizational culture scholarship. There he analyzes distinctions and overlaps among the concepts of organizational identity, discourse, and culture. Alvesson questions whether identity and discourse are simply newer, more marketable terms that create space for scholars to claim novelty and innovation without actually delivering on those claims. This argument is reminiscent of questions developed among communication scholars: How is the *institutional memory* of related theory and research being persevered? In this way, organizational identity scholarship may fail to acknowledge past intellectual labor.

Alvesson also notes how identity researchers seem to "come very close to themes well covered in organizational culture without referring to the wealth of work within the latter umbrella" (2011, p. 21). He shows how rarely the two constructs are cited together since identity became the terminology in vogue and how identity made organizational culture "seem superfluous" (p. 22). Rather than consider identity scholarship as a form of organizational culture studies—even though much organizational identity scholarship emphasizes "shared meanings and understandings of organizational reality" (p. 12)—Alvesson explains that scholars almost entirely avoid conceptualizing identity and culture together (see my discussion of Hatch & Schultz, 2002, below as an exception). He writes that in "most recent publications, authors seem to solve the problem through simply omitting or disregarding the less fashionable terminology, that is by favoring identity" (p. 23).

Thus, while Cheney et al. (2014) see an organizational focus on identity as part of a progression since modernity, Alvesson reminds that our academic, institutional choices could be otherwise. Research on organizational identity is itself a discourse: "there is nothing natural or self-evident about concern with who we are; preoccupation with identity is a cultural, historical formation" (Alvesson et al., 2008, p. 11). Nonetheless, despite Alvesson's own reservations about identity scholarship, he writes that there are opportunities for organizational theorists to "develop novel and nuanced theoretical accounts, to produce rich empirical analyses that capture the inter-subjectivity of organizational life in a thoughtful and empathetic fashion, and to demonstrate how individual and collective self-constructions become powerful players in organizing processes and outcome" (Alvesson et al., 2008, p. 7).

Regardless of the enthusiasm with which scholars have responded to theorizing organizational identity (i.e., as fad, discursive formation, worthy topic of inquiry, etc.), scholars seem to agree on one point: When we claim studies are about organizational identity, we utilize multiple, differing definitions. Corley et al. write:

> Organizational identity is a construct around which there are profound disagreements and differences that may not be reconciled, and yet there is great promise in the construct. We look at the multiplicity of perspectives optimistically, as opportunities for scholars to keep conversations about organizational identity richly contextualized in their ontological assumptions about organizations themselves. (2006, p. 96)

It is to these disagreements that I now turn. To begin this process, I discuss a formative essay that has shaped our current conversations of organizational identity.

Albert and Whetten's Organizational Identity Manifesto

Across disciplines, scholars of organizational identity frequently cite, follow, and critique Stuart Albert and David A. Whetten's (1985) article, "Organizational Identity." As Corley et al. (2006) characterize this foundational piece: "Although one might argue that Weber, Marx, Durkheim, Selznik, and others gave identity its early moorings in the study of organizations…This influential work launched a wave of research and theory that continues to the present" (p. 86). Albert and Whetten's (1985) landmark essay has shaped how we conceptualize organizational identity as a construct, how we pose related research questions, and how we conduct related empirical studies. I now explore these important contributions in detail.

Albert and Whetten position their article as seeking to addresses academic and practical concerns surrounding "how organizational members use the concept of self-identity" (1985, p. 264). They claim that questions of organizational identity often surface in a "prototypical sequence" of questioning via organizational members' communication. For example, organizational members may have goals of providing specific services (e.g., programming to combat alcoholism), and they may experience disagreements and misunderstandings concerning what those services or products should be, and how they should be delivered. The authors suggest that in these moments of decision-making, deliberation, and future planning, "questions of information will be abandoned and replaced by questions of goals and values. When discussion of goals and values becomes heated, when there is deep and enduring disagreement or confusion, someone may well ask an identity question: 'Who are we?' 'What kind of business are we in?' or 'What do we want to be?'" (p. 265). Importantly, this sequence of questioning shifts members' communication from a relatively administrative focus (e.g., on organizational tasks and needs) to one emphasizing value-based concerns. In this shift, organizational members

move through divergence or confusion from a presumed stable version of organizational identity, toward communication about identity. Similarly, Cheney et al. describe this as an example of auto-communication, in which organizations "maintain, construct and develop themselves" (2014, p. 702) through communication about who and what they are and might become.

Albert and Whetten propose that when members begin to question organizational identity, they will "form a statement that is minimally sufficient for the purpose at hand. It does so, we speculate, because the issue of identity is a profound and consequential one, and at the same time, so difficult, that it is best avoided" (1985, p. 265). This classification of identity illustrates the complexity of related communication, and they even suggest that such it may be cumbersome or unpleasant. I will later argue, however, that this depiction of organizations as crafting a minimally sufficient—and perhaps ambiguous—identity enables them to attract and influence as many audiences as possible.

Despite these challenges, once organizational identity questioning begins, Albert and Whetten offer three criteria for evaluating members' value-based "answers." They view these criteria as both necessary and sufficient for defining organizational identity:

1. The answer points to features that are somehow seen as the essence of the organization: *the criterion of claimed central character*. 2. The answer points to features that distinguish the organization from others with which it may be compared: *the criterion of claimed distinctiveness*. 3. The answer points to features that exhibit some degree of sameness or continuity over time: *the criterion of claimed temporal continuity*. (p. 265, emphasis in original)

These criteria have subsequently been expressed through the acronym "CED"—or central,

enduring, and distinctive (see Gioia et al., 2013; Whetten, 2006). I will now unpack each of these

criteria.

Criterion of Central Character

Albert and Whetten (1985) introduce their criterion of *central character* as crucial for

conceptualizing organizational identity. Yet despite this vital status, they do not offer norms for

determining how this centrality is communicated and experienced. Instead, they suggest that both

scholars and organizational participants must make decisions for themselves about how

centrality is developed, recognized, and maintained. However, they do argue that central

character is connected to both (1) "how do organizations answer the identity question," and (2)

"how are their answers affected by the context of the question" (1985, p. 266). These answers,

they continue, may present "different essential characteristics depending on the perceived nature

and purpose of the inquiry" (p. 266). For example, when only staff or managers question the

central character of organizational identity, the response may differ from such questioning

performed among stakeholders. This is because, they argue, such internal questioning occurs

among relatively homogenous groups sharing existing consensus, and is thus relatively safe and

predictable (p. 266). While this position does not seem to account for ways that employees or

managers may experience threats to their identities during this questioning, it emphasizes the

importance of differences among audiences and contexts for negotiating organizational identity.

According to the central character criterion, organizational identity is constructed in

communication around decision-making that defines an organization's core characteristics.

Albert and Whetten depict this decision-making as typically occurring in a top-down approach,

in which "leaders…attempt…to define the organization's central characteristics as a guide for

what [members] should do and how other institutions should relate to them" (1985, p. 267). They thus view this decision-making as leader-driven, action-driven, and comparison-driven (e.g., in referencing how other, similar organizations would choose *their* identity). They also depict decision-making as coordinating "the impact that future activities will have on the core organizational identity" (p. 267). This framing connects daily administrative activities to identity and vice-versa.

In considering the multiple, varied audiences of identity discourse among contemporary organizations, we might thus argue that the "central character" criterion may be better defined as *characters*, due to the likelihood of having different versions of identity promoted by and for different stakeholders. Even in 1985, the authors suggested that, "alternative statements of identity may be compatible, complementary, unrelated, or even contradictory" (p. 267). Albert and Whetten subsequently encouraged empirical study of how "organizations elaborate, disambiguate, or defend a given statement of identity in the face of challenge" (p. 267).

Criterion of Classification

The second criterion of *classification* holds that organizational identity is a process in which members construct similarities to and differences from other types of organizations. Specifically, Albert and Whetten argue that "[o]rganizations define who they are by creating or invoking classification schemes and locating themselves within them" (1985, p. 267). There are at least two types of schemes here. One responds to the, "What kind of organization is this?" question by invoking categories such as: "age, business/nonbusiness, approximate number of members, scope of activities, and location." In contrast, they argue, "the more piercing question, 'Who are we?' tends to focus on more specific, sensitive, and central characteristics (e.g., ethical, entrepreneurial, employee-oriented, stagnating, and predatory)" (p. 269).

However practical they may be, Albert and Whetten argue that these schemes are rarely clear, deep, or are independent from other candidates. They argue that the "organization may only be ambiguously or vaguely located within each scheme, and different schemes may be employed on different occasions with self-interest the only principle of selection" (1985, pp. 267-268). Classification thus appears to be a loose criterion used by organizations that are motivated to self-order. As such, the authors explain, "The dimensions selected to define an organization's distinctive identity may be quite eclectic, embracing statements of ideology, management philosophy, culture, ritual, etc." (p. 268). As with the criterion of central character, these dimensions may also vary based on the audience. Rather than having one clear identity statement, this creates space for "multiple equally valid statements relative to different audiences for different purposes" (p. 268). Participants may therefore harness dissimilar facets of organizing schemes to classify their organization in different communication interactions.

Albert and Whetten go further to argue that classification "is more a political-strategic act than an intentional construction of a scientific taxonomy" (1985, p. 268). They anticipate that organizations will have "imprecise, possibly redundant, and even inconsistent multiple classifications [of identity] at different levels of analysis" (p. 268). In fact, according to the authors, crafting definitive classification is potentially both impossible and undesirable. They offer the following four reasons for this: (1) Organizations are complex, so classification may be unreasonable; (2) Too precise a classification does not leave space for organizational change and risks becoming quickly obsolete; (3) Ambiguity in classification permits the organization to avoid unproductive typecasting (i.e., they are strategically ambiguous, see Eisenberg, 1984); and (4) Precision is not expected when organizational identity is "usually assumed [by organizational members] and only critically examined under certain conditions and then resolved with a

minimal answer" (p. 268). These four reasons explain the often confusing and conflicted character of attempts at classification.

Criterion of Time

The third and final criterion in Albert and Whetten's scheme involves the stability of organizational identity over time. Here Albert and Whetten (1985) connect their argument to organizational change, and to members' experience of identity "loss," such as in Albert's own research on plant closures. They focus on how identity rituals are shaped through change and can create experiences of grief for participants. The authors compare how organizational members communicate their experience of gains and losses associated with change in both their individual roles (e.g., from entrepreneur to leader) and in the organization's identities. As such, Albert and Whetten recommend research that, "underscores the need to examine how new roles come into existence, how organizations choose (or back into) one role rather than another, and how that action affects the organization's internal and external identity" (p. 273). This call invites empirical study of organizational identity's temporality. Additionally, Albert and Whetten invoke theorists such as Cooley, Mead, and Goffman who see identity as "formed and maintained through interaction with others." They subsequently question whether and how organizations (i.e., as corporate actors) are socialized via self-comparison and reflection over time (p. 273).

A second issue of time involves whether scholars can predict when identity will emerge as a salient organizational issue. Albert and Whetten hypothesize this will likely occur at specific times, including: an organization's initial formation; loss of "an identity sustaining element;" achieving its "*raison d'etre*"; rapid growth, and/or a shift in its "collective status" such as merger or retrenchment (1985, pp. 274-275). Here as well, they examine organizational lifecycles,

attributing identity formation to environmental complexity and constraints (p. 276). This illustrates what they term "duality by default" where there "is a tendency for some organizations, particularly those in the public sector, to acquire multiple identities simply because they become the repository of all things that other organizations will not undertake" (pp. 276-277).

Beyond Criteria

Following introduction of their criteria, Albert and Whetten elaborate the importance—and complexity—of actually researching organizational identity. They review additional considerations for building theory about organizational identity, including methodology. Overall, they present organizational identity as a "multidimensional construct where the problem is to identify, define, and then measure" (1985, p. 280). Yet, despite their propensity for quantitative measurement, they also remind readers that there is "no mechanical discovery procedure for what dimensions should be considered in a given case, just as, at the level of individuals, there is no agreed upon list of identities or roles than an individual might assume in the world" (p. 280).

The authors detail potential empirical means for studying organizational identity. First, they present deductive approaches—which appear to be favored, given their emphasis placed throughout on related elements such as hypotheses. They also note, however, the potential for "purely inductive" approaches, where a "given organization is examined in detail without an explicit preconceived theoretical viewpoint, and those dimensions that define what is core, distinctive, and enduring are arrived at by inductive generalization from the organization's peculiar characteristics" (p. 280). They then implement a "middle ground" methodological orientation through their new method of extended metaphor analysis (EMA)—which they connect to Weickian (1979) sensemaking—as "a way of retrospectively sharpening the definition

of each identity and the dimensions that underlie or compose it" (p. 281). In this process, they liken EMA to a triangulation approach.

In sum, Albert and Whetten (1985) provide an extensive discussion of organizational identity as a theoretical and practical construct. They laud the richness of multiple theories of identity that lead to diversity of thought with different hypotheses, research questions, and directions of organizational identity theorizing (p. 293). They summarize their project by reminding of us of the importance of members' identity questioning and interaction as keys to understanding organizational identity creation and transformation. As they remind us, "the question, 'What kind of organization is this?' refers to features that are arguably core, distinctive, and enduring. These features reveal the identity of the organization" (p. 292). Albert and Whetten subsequently call for research on these criteria and remind questing scholars that, "organizations are capable of supplying multiple answers for multiple purposes, and that to recognize that fact and study the conditions that provoke different answers and the relationship of those answers to each other is an identity distinctive inquiry" (p. 292). Having laid this foundation, I turn now to explore current approaches to organizational identity scholarship.

Key Questions for Organizational Identity

As I previewed above, scholarship on organizational identity varies immensely—so much so that scholars question if all the scholarship performed under the label of "organizational identity" should fit under this heading. Following their manifesto, Albert and Whetten offered updates on their respective positions. For example, Albert et al. (2000) noted differences and potential tensions among organizational identity approaches. For Albert and colleagues, diverse perspectives on organizational identity are valuable, and scholars should attempt to "build bridges" across them. As they suggest, "different views at different points in history may simply

serve different purposes, without the lack of universal agreement being in any way an impediment to progress. In fact, it may turn out that some of the most profound issues raised by questions of identity are not resolvable; that identity—because of its depth and profundity—will always be, in part, an enigma" (p. 15). Albert, then, embraces the breadth of organizational identity scholarship from diverse disciplines, methods, and audiences. Such diverse approaches seem to merit our scholarly attention, and there is not only one, single way to "get" identity right.

Contra Albert, Whetten dismisses the lack of clarity, multiple meanings, and different approaches to studying organizational identity. Whetten (2006) instead advances what he terms a "strong version" of organizational identity theory to serve the goal of its validation. Whetten sustains his and Albert's earlier claims that organizational identity must have the tripartite "CED" relationship. He argues that CED attributes are "most likely to be invoked in organizational discourse when member agents are grappling with profound, fork-in-the-road, choices—those that have the potential to alter the collective understanding of 'who we are as an organization'" (pp. 220-221). Thus, for Whetten, upheaval, change, and choices are ideal conditions for theorists to consider organizational identity. Thus, whereas Albert et al. (2000) invite openness in theorizing organizational identity, Whetten (2006) aims to flatten, clarify, and reduce the construct. In this study, I will follow Albert et al.'s open approach and contend with the key questions arising from that choice, including evaluation of the CED criteria.

The very breadth of organizational identity perspectives Albert et al. (2000) pointed to continues to expand. Recently, Gioia et al. (2013) charted periods of organizational identity from 1985 (an infancy period) to developmental period ("the mid-to-late 1990s") (p. 128). Gioia et al. suggest we are currently transitioning from an "aged adolescence" period (a term they borrow from Corley et al.'s 2006 article title) to a "mature stage (as a core and more-or-less permanent

domain within organization study)" (p. 128). Gioia et al. thus invite scholars to consider what it means for organizational identity to be growing up. They write, "we see organizational identity study as standing on the verge of adulthood, ready for its senior prom. Is the field now 'all dressed up with no place to go?' or is it instead 'all dressed up with some intellectually exciting places to go', now that almost all the germane concepts are in place and all the basic issues identified?" (p. 129). Gioia et al. believe exciting intellectual developments await, including treating organizational identity as "a useful theoretical lens for understanding other phenomena (organizational strategy, culture, learning, knowledge, etc.)" (p. 167).

Gioia et al. suggest that important questions remain for scholars of organizational identity. Thus, my following sections consider those questions in order to investigate the evolving contributions and limitations of this construct. As a device, I will review three articles that closely examine organizational identity scholarship and augment my discussion of their key themes with claims from additional scholarship. Each essay offers a comprehensive review of related literature and introduces unique, provocative questions. They each pool diverse approaches and disciplinary perspectives, and go beyond a single empirical study in order to advance theorizing of organizational identity today.

First, I will consider Corley et al. (2006)'s depiction of organizational identity in its "aged adolescence." Second, I detail six pertinent questions from Alvesson et al. (2008) concerning how we theorize organizational identity. Third, Gioia et al. (2013) offer the most expansive and recent literature review to date about organizational identity. In addition to my discussion of this work above, I will focus on their categorization of related research according to four perspectives. Fourth, I introduce two of my own questions for organizational identity.

Questions from Corley et al. (2006)

Corley et al. (2006) provide a useful rejoinder to many of Albert and Whetten (1985)'s questions in their extension of this foundational article. As aforementioned, Corley et al. note the importance of enriching theory and methods of organizational identity research with an eye to promoting *both* pluralism *and* clarity and transparency in theorizing (p. 86). Their article focuses on three sequential questions: (1) The "nomological net" of organizational identity, or "What organizational identity is…[and] is not?," (2) "What is the 'reality' of organizational identity?," and (3) "How do we define and conceptualize organizational identity?" (p. 87).

The nomological net of organizational identity. First, Corley et al. (2006) invoke the phrase the "nomological net" of organizational identity, or the principles of organizational identity as a construct. They argue that the questions, "'Who am I?' and 'Who are we?' capture the essence of organizational identity at different levels of analysis, highlighting that identity is about an entity's attempts to define itself" (Corley et al., 2006, p. 87). They also position organizational identity as a comparative phenomenon, i.e., involving how one organization is considered like and unlike others. While noting that "organizational identity involves a shared understanding by a collective" (p. 87), they also trouble conceptions of who is included in creating this collective understanding (e.g., should "outside" stakeholders be included?).

Similarly, Alvesson (2011) maintains that organizational members emphasize a certain self-referential form that defines them as a social group and in connection to external audiences and competing organizations (p. 13). For Alvesson, organizational identity is a recurring process: "It is assumed that an organizations' members shape and are shaped by this organizational identity. Organizational members develop and express their self-concepts within the organization, and the organization in turn is developed and expressed through its members' self-

concepts" (2011, p. 13). As such, members both create and are influenced by organizational

identity, and the expression of organizational identity is tied up in members' self-concepts.

Cheney et al. (2014) also detail organizational identity as a circular communication process. For

example, in organizing, employees use the logic: "This action is right because of who we are [fill

in the characteristics and values]" (p. 696).[1] While all of these theorists advance organizational

identity as a self-referential, collective-level construct, Corley et al. (2006) go further in their

review of theorists, questioning whether organizational identity is a collective-level construct

"either in part or in whole" (p. 87). That is, they consider the "shared" or "collective" nature of

organizational identity as potentially being (1) "an aggregate property (that is, a summary of

members' understandings and beliefs about the organization's identity)," *or* (2) a gestalt property

that originates in group actions (p. 87).

In this discussion, Corley et al. (2006) specifically question levels of analysis developed

for studying organizational identity. They conceive organizational identity specifically as

"capturing that which provides meaning to a level above and beyond its individual members—a

self-referential meaning where the self is the collective" (Corley et al., 2006, p. 87). They present

two common perspectives developed in organizational studies. First, certain scholars position

organizational identity with the *organization* "as an entity or 'social actor' that can be discerned

only by the patterns of the organizations' entity-level commitments, obligations, and actions" (p.

87; see Whetten and Mackey, 2002). Second, alternately, organizational identity is "the

individual-level cognition about 'who the organization is'…This view conceptualizes

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[1] Framing organizational identity as a circular process mirrors the relationship of structure and agency for Giddens' (1984) structuration theory. He argued that we create organizational structures as agents, but the structures also, in turn, act on us. Yet we forget that we created structures, and we can reclaim and change them recognizing our agency in the process. I include this note as a reminder of the way communication about "who we are" can become structured in ways that preclude alternate possibilities.

organizational identity as a product of the dialectic relationship between collective, shared

cognition on one hand and socially structured individual cognitions on the other" (p. 88; see

Haslam & Ellemers, 2005).

Discussions of levels are also prominent in other accounts of organizational identity. For

example, Albert et al. (2000) suggest identity research "travel[s] easily across levels of analysis"

(p. 13). Cheney et al. (2014) claim that organizational identity "establishment and maintenance

involves a variety of forms and levels of communication" (p. 695). They advocate for analysis

that explores multiple levels of rigorous identity inquiry. As an exemplar of multilevel identity

research, Cheney et al. cite Karen Ashcraft's (2007) work on airline pilots that explores national,

ethnic, linguistic, professional, organizational, and group levels of identity. The authors laud

Ashcraft's work as "cross-cultural" (p. 696) identity inquiry. Significantly, I read Cheney et al.'s

use of the term of cross-cultural here as a synonym for difference. That is, in their discussion we

see a distinction made between organizational and group levels and difference-based

conceptualizations of identity. I thus mark these distinctions by delineating two possible

approaches in theorizing organizational communication and identity: (1) research on

organizational identity (e.g., who we are as an organization), which is the focus of this chapter,

and (2) research on identity and/or difference *in* organizations/organizing (e.g., who am I as an

individual, how do I understand my salient identities, and/or how do I see myself in relationship

to the organization), which is a focus of my second chapter. Alvesson (2011) similarly

categorizes the variety of identity research in organizational studies across three primary levels.

These are: "organizational identity, social identity, and self-identity, pointing at (respectively)

organizational, group, and individual issues around a sense of whom and how we are or I am" (p.

21). My second chapter will address these levels further by describing organizational members'

construction of transgender identities via organizational communication.

Corley et al.'s (2006) own focus on levels of identity reminds us that organizational

researchers struggle with these varied levels of analysis. They thus propose organizational

identity "to describe something about an organization as a collective and the term

organizationally based identity [is] reserved for describing that part of the self-concept that

defines one's connection with an organization" (p. 88, emphasis in original). This terminology of

"organizational based identity" is tied to communication process of *organizational identification*

(which I also review in Chapter Two). Important for our purpose here is Corley et al.'s

distinctions of organizational identity, organizational based identity, as well as social or

difference-based identities.

Lastly, in describing what organizational identity is *not*, Corley et al. focus on how

organizational identity differs from related concepts such as organizational image, reputation, or

corporate identity (2006, p. 88). They note the distinction between the self-referential

communication creating organizational identity contra "external" corporate, image, and

reputation research. As I will explore below in my own questions section, many published

studies situate organizational identity as managerial control exerted over an organizational image

and directed to external audiences—a view I find distinctly limiting.

Organizational identity and questions of reality. After considering questions of

terminology, Corley et al. (2006) pose a new point of ontological inquiry: "What is the 'reality'

of organizational identity?" (p. 87). They first consider whether the phrase "organizational

identity" is meant to refer to an objective phenomenon, or whether it better serves as a metaphor.

To view organizational identity as a phenomenon, they argue, is to establish it as "experienced

by organizational members, perceived by outsiders, and central to social processes with real outcomes in organizational contexts" (p. 89). They note that the majority of organizational identity research conducted since Albert and Whetten's (1985) essay follows this phenomenon perspective. The other approach sees organizational identity as metaphor, used to "suggest a resemblance between the characteristics of individuals and the characteristics of collectives" (p. 89). This is to treat organizations as though they have identities, and to consider how applying the metaphor allows for unique analyses.

However, considering organizational identity as a phenomenon opens a new set of questions according to Corley et al. (2006). As they write:

A fundamental issue that quickly partitions research on organizational identity is one's position on whether or not organizational identity exists as a social reality (or essence) apart from how individuals, collectives, top managers, or others represent (and perhaps create) the organization's identity through symbols and language. Put another way, if identity is 'real' and not metaphorical, then how is it real? (p. 90)

Cheney et al. (2014) also note the variety of ontological claims made about organizational identity, depicting it as (1) an essence, (2) a social construction, or (3) both. For scholars taking the essence stance, identity is viewed as real in the sense that it exists, "somehow resides in, and is attached to, the focal organization" (Corley et al., 2006, p. 90). Corley et al. give the example of research that treats organizations as social actors whose decision-making or legal status will reflect the organizational identity. In the essence approach, organizational identity is a "set of organizational characteristics that exist, that members may or may not all believe, and that can be experienced, assessed, appreciated, and possibly managed" (p. 90). Cheney et al. (2014)

characterize Albert and Whetten (1985) as "largely essentialist" because they treat identity "as the inviolable core of an organization that shapes its choices and defines its integrity" (p. 697).

In this study, I take issue with an essence-only perspective, as I do not position organizational identity as existing on its own, without human communication. As Cheney et al. (2014) describe:

> organizational identities are *real* to the extent that people extend such cherished concepts to organizations; thus organizational identities becomes objects of study just as they are points of reference in everyday life. This is different, however, from asserting that we can discover the *true* identity of an organization. (p. 698)

Instead, I follow the second approach to organizational identity as a phenomenon that treats any "essence" of the organization as a social construction via communication. As Corley et al. explain, approaches like my own "treat organizational identity as an ongoing social construction that takes place among organizational members; can be influenced and accessed by individuals, groups, top management teams, or other collectives; and is usually understood to be focused on the organization" (2006, p. 90). Empirically this may mean researchers following a social construction approach may focus on interpretive research or narrative analysis and/or critique and textual analysis to understand how an organizational identity is created, maintained, and sustained. I return to the social construction perspective below in the Gioia et al. (2013) review.

Defining organizational identity. The third and final question from Corley et al. (2006) interrogates conventional definitions of organizational identity. To do so, the authors return to Albert and Whetten's (1985) criteria of "CED." Corley et al. explore how we might retain, update, and go beyond these criteria for organizational identity. First, in exploring *central character (or centrality)*, Corley et al. note the difficulties for both organizational members and

scholars in defining and choosing a core central character. This concern echoes Albert and Whetten's concern that organizational members must be able to choose and develop centrality on their own, rather than conforming to its pre-scripted, top-down, unilateral imposition.

Corley et al. go still further questioning the nature of an organization's core by asking, "Can organizational identities be seen as core and peripheral? Can organizations have more than one 'center?'" (2006, p. 90). In considering these vexing questions, they offer three suggestions for understanding organizational identity through centrality. Centrality, they argue, could first be understood as *depth* of organizational identity, including aspects that are "deeply rooted" and perhaps not easily described to researchers. This view of centrality depicts the organization as an actor and identity as a critical essence. In contrast, a second way to understand centrality is as *structural*. Corley et al. note that network theorists who follow positivist approaches to hypothesizing organizational identity would see centrality as structural. As an example, if one "node" of the identity structure were lost, others would fall away too. A third way to understand centrality is as *shared* via beliefs that multiple organizational members follow and share—a view consistent with a social constructionist approach. An example from Gioia et al. (2013) is that shared beliefs about the "central" aspect(s) of organizational become "deliberatively preserved" (p. 134)—therefore also tied enduring and continuity criterion (see also Whetten, 2006). They argue:

> What is central are those features that are deemed to be so core to the organization's sense of "who we are in social space" that they are deliberately preserved and almost never questioned unless seriously challenged. Members will inevitably resist any attempts to change the sense of these features and their pivotal place the spectrum of possible descriptors. (p. 167)

Thus deliberative preservation simultaneously keeps features of organizational identity central and enduring.

Additionally, Corley et al.'s (2006) discussion of core and/or periphery of central identity presents the possibilities of multiple cores or centers. The possibility of multiple identities varies based on scholars' epistemological assumptions. For example, scholars who focus on essentialism, shared cognitions, and group mind (with beliefs held in common) would have a hard time making sense of multiple identities (pp. 91-92). However, for other scholars who refute such approaches, multiple identities seem possible and even likely.

Corley et al. subsequently ask us to consider, "If organizations have more than one identity, how are these identities related to each other?" (p. 92). In response, they present two possibilities: (1) hybrid identities and (2) multiple identities. The hybrid identities originate with Albert and Whetten's (1985) concept of "duality of identity," which presumes conflict between two potential mismatched cores, and which they describe as common among normative (e.g., humanitarian) and utilitarian (e.g., corporate) organizations. Multiple identities theorists, on the other hand, do not support claims concerning the necessity of a duality, or that identities have to be in conflict. Instead, they might question how organizational members navigate their multiple identities in considering the centrality of identities.

Other contemporary scholars offer additional alternatives for theorizing multiple organizational identities. For instance, Alvesson et al. (2008) note a recent trend involving research on identity fragmentation, rather than on a clear, scripted core. This trend "assumes the presence of multiple, shifting and competing identities, even as we also question how identities may appear orderly and integrated in particular situations" (p. 6). This approach facilitates study of how identities shift and even questions the apparent order of identity (see Mumby, 1987).

Gilpin and Miller (2013) go a step further by encouraging emergent identity theorizing *over* singular identity theorizing. As they explain, many theorists and practitioners "tend to conceive of organizations as having a singular identity, against which they can gauge stakeholder impressions and strategically project a cohesive desirable image. When approaching organizations from an emergent perspective, identity is an ongoing, collective, multilevel sensemaking process" (p. 160).

After exploring centrality, Corley et al. (2006) turn to consider the criterion of *distinctiveness* (aka the classification criterion). Conventionally, distinctiveness encourages researchers to investigate how organizational members engage in implicit and explicit comparison to other organizations. The authors suggest, "Individuals compare their focal organization to referent organizations and consider the degree to which its central or core attributes differentiate it from comparable others" (p. 92). As Albert and Whetten (1985) theorized, not all attributes of identity need match those of similar organizations Indeed, "ultimately, it is a distinctive set of characteristics that sets an organization apart from others" (Corley et al., 2006, p. 93). Organizational members understanding and communicating this criterion engage in a delicate dance between developing sufficient distinctiveness and similarity to secure their meaningful connection with other peer organizations—a status that Brewer (1991) termed "optimal distinctiveness." Gioia et al. even suggest that similar organizations may not be very distinctive from one another, but "what really matters is that organization members themselves *believe* that they have distinctive identities, regardless of whether such beliefs are 'objectively' verifiable" (2013, p. 126).

Alvesson (2011) pushes even further in his analysis of current conditions of fragmentation among both individuals and organizations, and he argues that communication

about distinctiveness is crucial for "organizational identity to make sense" (p. 22). He explains such communication seeks to display the "distinctive features [that] characterize the organization in different situations and across various themes, such as decisions, actions, and policies" (p. 22). Alvesson's themes present possibilities for empirical research to examine how organizational participants communicate identity distinctiveness. In sum, distinctiveness offers potential for future research in that it is currently understudied or only superficially addressed (p. 93; see also Gioia et al., 2013).

Lastly, Corley et al. (2006) consider the concept of organizational identity over time via the criterion of *continuity and endurance*. As I discussed above, Albert and Whetten (1985) understood "an organization's identity to be central to its self-definition (regardless of how *central* is defined), they believe[d] that organizational identity changes only with major disruptions in organizational life" (Corley et al., 2006, p. 93, emphasis in the original). With organizational identity as *continuous*, change to identity occurs "very slowly, over long periods of time" (p. 93) according to Albert and Whetten (1985). As I discussed above concerning the centrality criterion, there is a clear interconnectedness between the criteria of centrality and durability. For example, Whetten writes, "organizations intentionally perpetuate their central and distinguishing features, preserving for tomorrow what has made them what and/or who they are today" (2006, p. 224). He also discusses how even new central organizational features may be seen as enduring retrospectively by organizational members (p. 225).

Organizational scholars continue to be fascinated by the relationship of identity to continuity and change (Corley et al., 2006) and how/if organizational identity is enduring dominates much of the focus of scholarship leaving central and distinctive criteria less studied (Gioia et al., 2013). In fact, Gioia et al. note the historical progression of organizational identity

scholarship has largely focused on the enduring and continuity criterion, and that researchers were captivated over identity change before ever even addressing identity formation. Corley et al. suggest that, "organizational identity change is intriguing because it deals with questions of organizational persistence at the most fundamental level (i.e., self-definition)" (2006, p. 93). Some scholars continue to follow Albert and Whetten's positioning identities as enduring whereas others assume "that organizational identity can change and, in some cases, might even need to change" (p. 93). Gioia et al. (2013) advance that organizational identity is changing "albeit in perhaps subtle ways" (p. 126) but that:

> insiders tend to perceive identity as stable, even when it is changing, because they continue to use the same labels to describe their identity even as the meanings of those labels change without conscious awareness. In other words, *the labels are stable, but their meanings are malleable*. (p. 126, emphasis in original)

This perspective adds more complexity to the issue of organizational identity continuity, as it shows how communication about meanings of organizational identity may change over time even if participants consider their identity to have simply endured.

Overall, Corley et al. (2006) suggest that using Albert and Whetten's criteria may create different impacts for different scholars. Some may see these criteria as a means for generalizing findings from studies of all organizations having similar standards (p. 95) and thus take an etic approach; others may take emic approaches to focus on uniqueness of organization's identities and use "dimensions suggestions by the organizational members themselves" to understand identity (p. 95). For emic approaches, Albert and Whetten's criteria may be useful to define and understand organizational identity, or other criteria may emerge as more productive for the site.

In sum, Corley et al.'s (2006) detailed article allows us to question the terminology, reality, and definition and conceptualization of organizational identity. They present "multiple paths to studying organizational identity, each with its own base assumptions and intended destination" (p. 96). Corley et al. call for potential dialogue among approaches. For example, they suggest that social constructionist approaches allow scholars to understand that organizational identity "does not 'appear out of thin air'" (p. 96); yet these approaches can be complimented by more essentialist perspectives that allow scholars to theorize change and shifting organizational identities as "in fact, a single, coherent organization" (p. 96). I welcome a collegial approach to enliven our research across disciplines. I now shift to another series of important questions for how we utilize organizational identity in our research.

Questions from Alvesson et al. (2008)

Alvesson et al. (2008) present six journalistic style questions for the future of organizational identity research, or what is colloquially known as 5W1H (Who, What, Where, When, Why, and How?). Although their article primarily focuses on *individual* identity *in* organizations and organizing (which I have discussed above as conceptually distinct from *organizational* identity), their questions are still beneficial to consider herein as they are focused on enriching research inquiry about "identity in the context of organizational life" (p. 17). Let us briefly review their questions.

First, Alvesson et al. question, "*why* bother about identity?" (p. 17). To answer, they follow Habermas' (1972) distinctions among three principal approaches to human inquiry: (1) technical, (2) practical-hermeneutic, and (3) emancipatory. The authors suggest that an organizational researcher should "bother" about identity because of the theoretical framework(s) where one is situated. First, technical/functionalist scholars would focus on finding solutions to

organizational challenges and treat identity as "a positive force that needs to be optimized" (p. 17). Second, Alvesson et al. see practical-hermeneutic scholars as invested in understanding. These scholars are drawn to "the concept of identity [because it] presents opportunities to enrich the study of organizations with in-depth, often empathetic insights and descriptions that can stimulate and facilitate people's reflections on who they are and what they do" (p. 17). Third, emancipatory approaches focus on interrogating the impact of identity in organizations and implications of power.

The second question from Alvesson et al. (2008) is "*who* is the key agent in the process of identity construction?" (p. 17). The authors note how:

almost all research on identity in organizations takes individual subjects or groups thereof into account. Even studies of identity at the organizational level tend to examine individual perceptions in relation to organizational identification. Nonetheless, we see considerable variation in the extent to which the individual is a central player in identity construction. (p. 18)

Possibilities they review include a focus on an individual agent and also what they term "extra-individual forces." These extra-individual forces are: organizational agents (e.g., elites and managers and structures they create), organizational discourses (such as entrepreneurship, that "provide seductive and normalizing subject positions for individual appropriation"), and societal/cultural discourses (e.g., "good parents or good workers" discourses) (p. 18).

Third, Alvesson et al. (2008) question, "*what* are the main ingredients out of which identities are constructed?" (p. 17). They propose a great list of the "stuff" of identity, including: embodied practices, material and institutional arrangements, discursive formations, story-telling performances, groups and social relations, and anti-identities (e.g., visions of the other) (p. 19).

The authors also address how "who" and "what" questions could overlap in certain research perspectives. For example, when viewing organizational identity as co-created in communication among participants, the "what" of group/social relations or storytelling may be mapped onto the "who." Alvesson et al. recommend at least analytically thinking about the who and what as separate questions and combining them thoughtfully.

The fourth point of inquiry is "*when* is the key agent engaged in this process?" (2008, p. 17). Scholars diverge on their answers to this question, and Alvesson et al. present a sort of spectrum from identity construction as "always" occurring to identity questioning happening only in moments of change to a disinterest in this question all together. The always camp sees that identity "requires constant (re)production and maintenance. Everything we do, say or think reflects and shapes how we define ourselves" (p. 19). Others are focused on identity construction in organizations as "critical incident" results, such as large organizational changes or recurring micro-level incidents. As we recall from Albert and Whetten (1985), they saw the "prototypical sequence" of questions around identity occurring in moments of questioning. Lastly, Alvesson et al. account for some scholars who answer the "when" question with a sort of "Who cares?" response, as they view timing as largely irrelevant because they see identity as largely stable.

Finally, the fifth (and sixth) combined questions are: "*where* and *how* should we go about studying it?" (p. 17). Alvesson et al. (2008) note the differing views of *where* we can study organizational identity and *how* to do so methodologically (p. 20). They review three examples: (1) interviewing, (2) (participant) observation, and (3) reading texts. Alvesson et al. note the popularity of interviews as the most common "how" of "where" to access identity. Some use interviews as an assumption that "the individual 'houses' identity (i.e. a first answer to the question of 'where' or site) and that researchers can access the sense-making of individuals

through interview accounts" (p. 20). Some situate interviews as places of participants' identity work, and others still "cast serious doubt on the value of interviews as 'realistic' expressions of how people define themselves and experience subjective worlds" (pp. 20-21; see Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003). Second, (participant) observation methods invite a focus on researching "situated organizational practice" and conversations as important to theorize identity. Third, reading texts is another methodological choice examining identity via representations and varied subjectivities, such as popular cultural artifacts (see also Carlone & Taylor, 1998). Alvesson et al. allow authors to consider these key questions in choosing theoretical and methodological frames. In closing my discussion of Alvesson et al.'s (2008) impactful 5W1H questions, I now review Gioia et al.'s four perspectives of organizational identity research.

Gioia et al. (2013) Questioning Scholars' Perspectives on Organizational Identity

Among their many contributions, Gioia et al. (2013) propose four perspectives conceptualizing organizational identity: (1) social actor, (2) institutionalist, (3) population ecologist, and (4) social construction. Their synthesis of interdisciplinary literature importantly allows us to take a pulse of the varied orientations of organizational identity research and examine their intricacies. First, the *social actor view* "emphasizes the notion that organizations as entities are actors in society, gives prominence to the overt 'claims' made by organizations about who they are in society, and assigns great weight to the role of categories in determining organizational identity" (p. 170). By categories, they mean types of organizations, such as banks, universities, etc. I position Whetten (2006) as an exemplar of the social actor view (see also Whetten & Mackey, 2002). Whetten's oeuvre demonstrates his perspective that "organizations are constituted as social artifacts but function as commissioned social actors in modern society" (2006, p. 229). Given his rigid version of organizational identity including the validity of the

CED, Whetten explains, "In practice, CED attributes function as organizational identity referents for members when they are acting or speaking on behalf of their organization" (2006, p. 220).

This social actor view has certain consequences for theorizing organizational identity. For example, under the distinctiveness criterion—which Whetten renames as "distinguishing…to capitalize on its dual meaning: different from; better than" (2006, p. 229)—Whetten reviews how organizational actors distinguish their identities by using categorical imperatives where they are expected to perform as a certain category (e.g., a retail store). They seek to "encompass the attributes required of all organizations of a particular type as well as the ideal attributes associated with that type," which become expectations (pp. 223). Gioia et al. note how such expectations may lead to social actor organizational identity research to be too focused on "assertions (e.g. in annual reports) that are not necessarily expressions of identity, per se, but project images the organization hopes others will accept as legitimate" (2013, p. 170). In other words, Whetten's categorical imperatives advanced by the organization as social actor may be incongruous with members' experiences. Gioia et al. also critique the emphasis in social actor studies on categories and how such studies seek to distinguish one organization from other organizations in the same category. They argue it is not necessarily important for theorizing identity, "i.e., to know that an organization is a bank does not tell us enough about its identity" (2013, p. 170).

The second organizational perspective is the *institutionalist view*. This "treats identity as an internally defined notion, but has traditionally regarded organizations as highly socialized entities, subject to the strong influence of institutional forces" (Gioia et al., 2013, p. 127). An exemplar from this approach is the work of Glynn (see Glynn, 2008; Glynn & Abzug, 2002). For example, Glynn and Abzug (2002) focus on how organizations follow institutional norms in

their "naming practices and patterns," which they connect to identity (Gioia et al., 2013, p. 135). Their research suggests, "that organizations and their identities cannot be fully differentiated from the institutions within which they are embedded" (p. 162). Gioia et al. note institutionalist research uniquely focuses on these "isomorphic" qualities of organizational identity, sometimes in lieu of the CED criterion of a distinctive focus (p. 127). They also point to a recent trend for the institutionalist theorists to move away "from studying the enduring aspects of institutions to studying their dynamic aspects" (p. 171). Gioia et al. attribute this shift to a new interests both in micro-processes that "undergrid" institutions as macro-phenomena (p. 171; see Powell & Colyvas, 2008) and in "accounting for human agency in institutional change (Glynn, 2008)" (p. 171). Gioia et al. attribute Glynn's (2008) work in particular for advancing institutionalist approaches to position organizational identity as enabling instead of as simply constraining (p. 171). In sum, Gioia et al. credit new institutionalist perspectives as enriching the macro focus of organizational identity, by focusing on legitimacy of organizational identity elements (i.e., CED), and by considering institutional contexts of organizational identity (pp. 172-173).

Gioia et al.'s (2013) third perspective, the *population ecologist view*, positions "identity as a concept held by outsiders about organizations" (p. 127) with identity as "socially determined" (p. 173) from external views. They cite Hannan as the central population ecologist theorist (Hannan & Freeman, 1977; Polos, Hannan, & Carroll, 2002). His approach to theorizing organizational identity change is "deterministic, which asserted the supremacy of environmental and inertial influences" (p. 130). Population ecologists largely center external influences and perspectives. However, according to Gioia et al., there are some exceptions to the external-focused theorizing to also include foci on external and internal audiences, including in Hannan's more recent work (see Hsu & Hannan, 2005). Hannan, Baron, Hsu, & Koçak (2006), for

example, theorize how organizational founders have immense influence on organizational identity with their perspectives becoming "blueprints" for the organizational identity. Additionally, like the social actor scholars, population ecologists also focus on organizational categories; however, here "any given organization's identity is rather simply and starkly described by the attributes associated with that category by outside parties" (Gioia et al., 2013, p. 128). Hannan's research "asserts that external audiences hold 'identity codes' or perceptions about what it means to be a prototypical member of a category and, consequently, hold expectations about how the organization will and should act" (p. 135). Gioia et al. initially reject the population ecologist view as "an inappropriate use of the term 'identity'" and actually closer to the construct of image (p. 127). Later, however, they are much softer, even linking the population ecologist view to the social construction view "because both emphasize the role of external audiences in identity construction" (p. 174). They even go as far as suggesting scholars could collaborate and utilize all four views for a rich analysis (p. 175).

The fourth organizational identity perspective Gioia et al. (2013) review is the *social construction view*. Both Gioia et al. and my dissertation advance this final approach. According to a social construction view, "organizational identity is a self-referential concept defined by the members of an organization to articulate who they are as an organization to themselves as well as outsiders. This view focuses primarily on the labels and meanings that members use to describe themselves and their core attributes" (pp. 126-127). This perspective mirrors communication scholarship that advances how members' communication constructs organizational identities. We can thus define the social construction view of organizational "identity as emerging from the shared interpretive schemes that [organizational] members collectively construct" (p. 141; see Corley et al., 2006). Organizational members are "meaning creators—as the ultimate generators

of the labels, meanings, and other cognitive features that produce the 'understandings' (Ravasi & Schultz, 2006) that constitute the essence of organizational identity" (p. 170). A focus on organizational members as the creators and sustainers of organizational identity then points to the empirical need for researchers to ask participants to reflect on their understandings of organizational identity. Gioia et al. also advance the importance of theorizing organizational identity is as both self-referential *and* self-reflective:

> that is, it is a reflexive consideration of the existential question 'who-am-I-as-an-individual?'/'who-are-we-as-an-organization?' Identity, at all levels, taps into the apparently fundamental need for all social actors to see themselves as having a sense of 'self', to articulate core values, and to act according to deeply rooted assumptions about 'who we are and can be as individuals, organizations, societies' etc. (p. 127)

Both self-referential and self-reflexive communication are important areas for organizational communication scholars to attend to in studies of organizational identity.

Gioia et al. also address scaling identity studies from the individual to organizational level. Critics of social construction researchers point to scaling as a limitation where organizations are anthropomorphized as too meaning-centered, too much like individuals, and too "difficult to measure" (p. 170; see Whetten, 2006). Instead, rich understanding of organizational identity as self-reflexive is imperative to develop theorizing that is useful to the organizations we study. As Gioia et al. argue, "Unless we understand identity and identity-related processes, the way organizational actors understand and experience them— and not just project them—our understanding of identity is likely to be impoverished and lacking in relevance to practitioners" (p. 173).

A heavily cited and relevant essay using a social construction perspective exemplar comes from Hatch and Schultz (2002). They define organizational identity as "a dynamic set of processes by which an organization's self is continuously socially constructed from the interchange between internal and external definitions of the organization offered by all organizational stakeholders who join in the dance" (p. 1004). Their theory links organizational identity, organizational image, organizational culture, and internal and external audiences—constructs that are often in contention with one another. Hatch and Schultz instead call for "organizational identity theorists to account for the effects of both organizational culture as the context of internal definitions of organizational identity, and organizational images as the site of external definitions of organizational identity, but most especially to describe the processes by which these two sets of definitions influence one another" (p. 991).

Hatch and Schultz (2002) consequently propose a model to show the linkages among organizational culture, identity, and image. They introduce four intertwined processes: "mirroring (the process by which identity is mirrored in the images of others), reflecting (the process by which identity is embedded in cultural understandings), expressing (the process by which culture makes itself known through identity claims), and impressing (the process by which expressions of identity leave impressions on others)" (p. 991). They argue other organizational researchers have focused on both mirroring and impressing whereas their model not only adds reflecting and expressing but also showcases the importance of this interconnectedness to theorize identity.

Hatch and Schultz's approach specifically addresses the social construction of organizational identity as an ongoing process of internal and external audiences:

at any moment identity is the immediate result of conversation between organizational (cultural) self-expressions and mirrored stakeholder images, recognizing, however, that whatever is claimed by members or other stakeholders about an organizational identity will soon be taken up by processes of impressing and reflecting which feed back into further mirroring and expressing processes. This is how organizational identity is continually created, sustained and changed. (p. 1004).

In sum, Hatch and Schultz offer a provocative, process-based social construction theory of organizational identity. A potential limitation to their approach is how a researcher could trace and isolate these constructs that they see as so interconnected. Also, what is the value of identifying each part of the process and labeling these sub-processes? It also seems to demand methods that intricately trace moments of movement among culture, identity, and image. Researchers may be motivated to admire their model but to also ask: To what end is this useful? How does this model allow organizational researchers and practitioners to better understand organizational identity? Hatch and Schultz (2002) suggest organizational members' familiarity with their model could prevent organizational dysfunction (e.g., their review of the problems of narcissism and of hyper-adaptability) and improve effectiveness (see p. 1014), which they view as having a practical impact for organizations. Having considered these multiple treatments of organizational identity theory and research, I now turn to develop my own questions for use in this study.

Relevant Questions from the Literature

Corley et al. (2006), Alvesson et al. (2008), Gioia et al. (2013), and the other scholars whose work I have considered above have all developed provocative questions for consideration in studying organizational identity. I now offer two other potential questions developed from my

critical literature review. First, I consider the significance of multiple potential audiences for, and authors of, organizational identity. Second, I explore existing gaps and future paths of development for this research program.

Who are the varied audiences for (and potential authors of) organizational identity?
Scholars diverge in how they conceptualize organizational identity audiences as potential authors and influencers of identity. Since Albert and Whetten (1985), researchers of organizational identity have considered the potential influence exerted in this process by multiple and potentially conflicting audiences. Here, I briefly consider organizational members (e.g., staff and managers) as both the audience and authors of organizational identity. Specifically, I question which potential audiences or authors we might include when we theorize organizational identity "outside" of the organization (Corley et al., 2006).

To begin, Cheney et al. (2014) discuss organizational identity's audiences and authors in their analysis of organizational boundaries and membership. First, Cheney et al. (2014) note the contested role of boundaries in organizational communication research. Their discussion considers how both scholars and practitioners bound organizations. They review the common view of organization as containers where communication occurs within them. Here, organizations "*produce* communication not as their general way of being or existence but as something distinct and separate from other organizing practices" (2014, p. 701). Second, following critiques of organizations as more than fixed sites, Cheney et al. (2014) examine current research inspired by Weick (1979) on "the power of talk to enact and thus constitute organizational reality, albeit often within the established boundaries of authority and decision making for an organization" (p. 701). These researchers consider how communication creates organizations. Cheney et al. suggest that even though the bulk of communication researchers and

practitioners view organizations as bounded to one contained site, we should be thinking about identity formation "across and within sites" (p. 701).

Cheney et al.'s (2014) boundary analysis implicates multiple audiences for organizational identity, beyond ontologically-contained employees discussing, "Who are we?" For example, the authors explore the concept of auto-communication, which occurs when organizations or groups communicate with themselves, about themselves. They write that, "organizations increasingly talk to themselves while pretending to talk to somebody else (that is, in external media) in order to confirm and reproduce their own cultures" (p. 703). A contemporary platform for auto-communication involves social media, such as Facebook posts or Twitter. In fact, "technology enables or allows individuals with various types of membership to experience the organization as a resource for identity in ways that would otherwise have required physical (co)presence" (p. 705).

Cheney et al. provide examples of auto-communication in programs for corporate social responsibility, which allows organizations to connect with their internal and external stakeholders. This communication implores multiple audiences to more strongly identify with the organization's goals (see Morsing, 2006). As such, auto-communication may appear internal to members, but actually speaks to external audiences simultaneously. Such communication allows organizations to "explore the boundaries of their identities and the ideal roles they hope to play in the world" (p. 703). Yet it also runs the risk of being problematic and dysfunctional—that is a "highly self-centered undertakings, characterized by self-absorption and self-seduction" (p. 703), which may sever connections to stakeholders through excessive self-involvement. Auto-communication thus complicates the concept of organizational identity as self-referential.

With this complexity in mind, Cheney et al. (2014) invite us to think differently about organizational membership in terms of audiences for organizational identity performance. They disrupt the conventional binary of *member* and *non-member* in organizational communication research. The authors argue that not all relationships between identity and organizations are identified in current literature. For example, they review trends like temporary work, virtual work, and membership negotiation. Their discussion of technology and site-less-ness invites us to consider the messiness of organizational membership (see also, Kulik, Pepper, Shapiro, & Cregan, 2012). Cheney et al. specifically call for research into organizations' influence over one another as a form of organizational identity wherein "organizations are constantly communicating messages to express themselves as special and unique" (p. 705). Here, audiences for organizational identity may include other collectives and interactions around their similarities and distinctions, which is akin to Albert and Whetten's (1985) classification. As we think about going beyond member and non-member to see the mutual audiences and participants of organizational identity communication, it may also be important to theorize beyond just staff, managers, and stakeholders to consider all those who are served by the organization. In other words, *who we are* as a collective may be bounded to *who we serve* as a collective.

Indeed, a particular theme that arises when theorizing organizational identity audiences is the topic of legitimacy. Here, I return to Albert and Whetten's (1985) discussion of "minimally sufficient" (p. 265) statements of identity as a "political-strategic act" (p. 268). That is, communicating a minimally sufficient identity allows organizations to strategically attract multiple audiences. Yet simultaneously communicating to multiple audiences creates potential challenges around questions of legitimacy. This might occur, for example, in the case of multiple

audiences questioning the legitimacy of organizational auto-communication (Cheney et al., 2014).

Gill and Wells (2014) offer a poignant discussion of the relationship of organizational identity to legitimacy in their review of nonprofit organizations (NPOs). In NPOs, legitimacy is "commonly understood as the extent to which behavior reflects communication, or *does the nonprofit do what it says it will do*? Yet in seeking to achieve this kind of legitimacy, NPOs must navigate the expectations of multiple and sometimes competing audiences" (p. 27, emphasis in original). Gill and Wells position the legitimacy of NPOs as rhetorical to elucidate "how NPOs are beholden to the values and expectations of powerful donor/volunteer bases and allows us to understand how legitimacy is predicated on how well an NPO creates an identity that privileges volunteers and donors" (p. 27). Here, NPOs at least have two key audiences: (1) those who pay to support their efforts and (2) those who give their time to support their efforts. Privileging of those who give support (e.g., financial, time, in-kind donations) is what the authors term the "donor gaze," which depicts how NPOs favor the "values, symbols, and practices of the donors/volunteers" (p. 46). Gill and Wells thus suggest that NPOs face unique challenges to "carefully craft identity messages that generate buy-in and increase the resources available to them" (p. 30), and that their organizational legitimacy is predicated on this modulation of organizational identity. Additionally, Chen and Collier (2012) address how fundraising efforts in identity-based NPOs may "erase clients' diverse cultural identifications" in order to communicate fundability (p. 44). In other words, an organization may utilize a strategic approach that "forwards an image that is *perceived* as legitimate" to its possible donors (Gill & Wells, 2014, p. 31). This focus on legitimacy to varied audiences furthers Cheney's discussion (2014) of thinking beyond member/non-members. The importance of theorizing and conducting

empirical research about varied audiences for organizational identity could be an important new direction for organizational communication scholarship.

However, some scholars appear unwilling to consider the complexity of diverse audiences because they situate organizational identity as purely a managerial and/or strategic endeavor. In fact, a common research and lay perspective on organizational identity is that managers and leaders in organizations create and/or control organizational identity through top-down messaging. Alvesson et al. (2008) would term this "extra-individual force" of organizational agents/elites. Gilpin and Miller (2013) similarly note that organizational identity research is laden with managerial bias. Many "authors either implicitly or explicitly locate the establishment of an organization's identity within the executive class" (p. 159). Alvesson (2011) even notes how scholars interested in organizational identity tend to take "more functional and promanagerial" (p. 20) approaches rather than poststructural or even interpretive orientations. While sometimes a point of critique, such as communication scholarship on organizational identification and concertive control (Cheney, 1983b; Tompkins & Cheney, 1985), the managerial and/or strategic biases are often left uncontested.

In other words, organizational identity may be reduced to only what managers want it to be and how they enforce it via different strategic communication strategies. Marketing and public relations research treat organizational identity as something to be communicated *to* audiences (e.g., employees, stakeholders, members served) without understanding of how identities are created or sustained in communication *together*. In fact, much organizational identity research cited in the *Communication and Mass Media Complete* database, particularly in the last ten years, is published in managerial, marketing, and PR journals and/or frameworks. This research emphasizes a variety of related themes including: harnessing customers'

identification with organizational identity (Fombelle, Jarvis, Ward, & Ostrom, 2012; Marín & Ruiz de Maya, 2013), expertise in public communication (Horst, 2013), reputation building and branding via identity communication (Huang-Horowitz, 2015; Wæraas, 2008; Zachary, McKenny, Short, Davis, & Wu, 2011), organizational responses to external pressures in their marketing (Martin, Johnson, & French, 2011), the co-influence of organizational identity, CSR, and PR (Ozdora-Aksak & Atakan-Duman, 2015), vertical communication to managers in increasing organizational identification (Postmes, Tanis, & de Wit, 2001), and the tensions of uncertainty and control in the strategic organizational identity communication (White, Godart, & Corona, 2007).

As I have argued above, some scholars contend that these managerial, PR, and marketing approaches should be theorized instead as corporate identity, organizational image, or reputation (Corley et al. 2006) as they misrepresent organizational identity, which is actually about self-referential communication. I do not dismiss the impact of managerial communication (and enforced structures), strategic communication, public relations, and marketing as shaping organizational identity, but I invite us to think beyond these approaches to multiple audiences and authors of organizational identity. Considering multiple audiences and authors also allows us to examine how we create organizational identity through our communication, which I argued above is always occurring and also feels most poignant to members in critical moments (see Alvesson et al., 2008).

Other scholars focus specifically on organizational communication as a combination of so-called "external" and "internal" communication and with diverse audiences (see for example my discussion of Hatch & Schultz, 2002, above). This seems to rightfully delimit organizational identity, as Cheney et al. (2014) call for, but it also may reinforce the outside/inside of a

container imagery to use the "external" and "internal" language. Yet communication that creates organizational identity often requires conveying and "distinguishing between public and private identity" (Albert & Whetten, 1985, p. 269). Albert and Whetten suggest, "publically presented identity" is understood as more positive and monolithic than insider experiences of organizational identity. They compare this to how individuals present different versions of their identity publically (p. 269); the authors note that too much separation between public organizational identity and insider organizational identity may negatively impact organizations. Additionally, Gilpin and Miller (2013) situate organizational identity as "a combination of shared internal perceptions, representational choices made by decision makers, and external impressions and expectations of the organization…[that] are constituted through mediated and interpersonal communication" (p. 159). Their conceptualization invites us to go beyond current literature that delineates stakeholders as either outsiders or insiders. Overall then, despite conflicting theorizations, it is important to examine both diverse audiences for and creators of organizational identity in our research moving forward. I now turn to thinking to the future in my second question for organization identity research.

Where will organizational identity literature go in the future?. I began this chapter considering organizational identity as a popular, compelling, and lasting topic of scholarship in organizational communication and broader organizational studies. I embrace this lasting influence, and I simultaneously want to push where we might go from here given widespread interests continuing academic work about organizational identity.

First, I have reviewed the potential of examining multiple authors and audiences of organizational identity in my synthesis of diverse research programs, which is one hopeful direction. We would benefit from better delineation of the varied co-constructors of

organizational identity and how their communication together sustains and changes organizational identity.

Second, organizational identity research might explore more opportunities of partnership with organizational participants through engaged scholarship (see Barge & Shockley-Zalabak, 2008; Deetz, 2008). Engaged scholarship approaches vary immensely from willingness to report findings to participants to volunteering-based fieldwork to co-generated theories to participant-driven research projects. Cheney et al. (2014) call for engaged directions in organizational identity research. To conduct engaged organizational identity research would allow researchers to "advocate [for] critical reflection by producers and consumers of the key messages that represent organizations, especially with an eye toward agency and pragmatic implications of such messages" (p. 710). Here, the authors see engagement as reflection of communicating organizational identity messages. Other scholars may pursue engagement approaches that tie to the ongoing social construction of organizational identity with varied audiences. Interpretive scholarship can allow for greater understanding through rich description and voicing diverse narratives from empathic rapport with participants. Critical scholars may also work with participants to critically rework stagnant and/or problematic constructions of organizational identity. As a specific example, Gill and Wells (2014) call for creating best practices for NPOs around legitimacy and organizational identity, such as via alliance-based communication with marginalized community members (see also DeTurk, 2011).

Third, in my research, I was struck by the differences among approaches to researching organizational identity and how these approaches could benefit from more dialogue between one another. This mirrors Corley et al.'s (2006) claims about the breadth of research being conducted tied to organizational identity and the need for crisper theorizations and better conversations

among perspectives. I concur and push further to address a specific void in the literature: Why do we not see organizational identity studies in conversation with studies of identity and difference in organizations and organizing? One reason could be that they come from "two camps" of organizational research that rarely to speak to one another. Often research on "identity, difference, and/or intersectionality" (the focus of Chapter Two) fall within critical, feminist, and critical race communication projects whereas organizational identity literature from interdisciplinary scholars are often driven by business and managerial norms that may ignore concerns of difference and intersectionality. Asking these theoretical camps to speak to one another is an important contribution for organizational communication theorizing.

For example, a recent exemplar of connecting research that has not previously considered difference and intersectionality comes from Malvini Redden and Scarduzio (2017). Their analysis theorizes emotional labor and dirty work in bureaucratic organizations through a unique inclusion of intersectional identity markers. Their essay takes "dirty work" and "emotional labor" theories that have not adequately accounted for difference or intersectionality in the past and puts them into conversation to theorize a new construct called "hidden taint," a co-construction of taint where members' identities intersect.

Like Malvini Redden and Scarduzio, I want to bridge divergent literature by linking the (1) organizational identity and (2) difference and intersectionality literatures in organizational communication. Also, my question of identity and difference studies as ignored in organizational identity studies ties to "levels" issues in identity research (see Cheney et al., 2014; Alvesson et al., 2008). I am perhaps perpetuating this gap by addressing the organizational level in Chapter One and moving to address individual level in Chapter Two. Nonetheless, I believe we could enrich both areas by putting these two perspectives of identity in organizational research

together. Chapters Five and Six address the relationship of members' identities to organizational identities, and I return to this contribution in Chapter Seven. Specifically, I wonder what we can theorize about the organizational identities of an identity-based organization (see Reid, 1999) that advocates for the individual identities and subsequent needs of their members.

Fourth and finally, as we embrace the legacies of organizational identity scholarship, let us also remain skeptical about its potential and open to how we might combine organizational identity with other approaches. It enlivens our research to consider how theory and practice might be otherwise. If organizational identity is a discourse in vogue (Alvesson, 2011), what are we missing when we are gripped by this very discourse? For example, Cheney et al. (2014) present the understudied "darkside" elements of organizational identity and identification and directly question "the desirability" of experiencing identification and advancing communication around unifying identity. Thinking beyond identity may also be useful in organizational practice as much as it is in academic scholarship.

In closing this chapter, I end by proposing my first research question following my review of organizational identity research.

Research Question 1: How do Transgender Resource Center of New Mexico (TGRC) staff and guests communicatively construct organizational identity?

The following chapter will conceptualize participants' "individual" identities, including how participants' identities are shaped by organizational identification, transgender identities, and how transgender identities intersect with other facets of difference.

CHAPTER TWO: INDIVIDUAL IDENTITIES: IDENTIFICATION, TRANSGENDER IDENTITIES, AND INTERSECTIONALITY

While the previous chapter theorized organizational identity as a *collective* endeavor, this chapter investigates how *individual* organizational members understand and construct their identities through communication. Understanding individuals' identities in my fieldsite of a transgender outreach organization is crucial to theorizing its organizational identities. In researching an identity-based organization like the Transgender Resource Center of New Mexico (TGRC), members' organizational communication constructs their experiences of a "shared" identity category, in this case transgender identities. This chapter therefore explores organizational members' individual identities and how they communicate their identities and subsequent outreach needs to identity-based organizations (see Reid, 1999).[2] My inquiry herein focuses on how individuals' communicative construction of their identities may directly impact organizational communication for transgender outreach.

Organizational researchers often express interests in examining organizational member's identities. They research identity "as encountered by individuals, understood as social beings embedded in organizational contexts" (Alvesson et al., 2008, p. 6). More specifically, Alvesson et al. (2008) suggest "(a) that personal identities are negotiated—created, threatened, bolstered, reproduced and overhauled—through ongoing, embodied interaction; and (b) for both form and substance, personal identities necessarily draw on available social discourses or narratives about

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[2] Only one other communication study uses the construct "identity-based organization." Chen and Collier's research (2012) engaged intercultural communication theory in their comparative study of two identity-based nonprofits (one that served Asian people and another that served Hispanic Women). They utilized cultural identity theory and compared status positionings of group members in order to extend Collier's own intercultural communication theory. While our approaches consider different areas (e.g., their focus is intercultural theory and mine is on organizational identity), both projects can enliven communication theorizing of identity-based organizations. I return to the benefit of their comparative analysis methods in Chapter Seven.

who one can be and how one should act" (p. 11). Organizational researchers thus may explore how individuals negotiate their identities and also are influenced by social and organizational norms.

In introducing this chapter, I first set the stage by advancing a *social constructionist* lens to theorize identity. According to Foster and Bochner (2008), social constructionist approaches are impactful for communication researcher goals because they examine how language becomes meaningful in our human interaction, subsequently creating our own and others' realities. Much of social constructionist research conducted in communication follows Berger and Luckmann's famous work (1967) *The Social Construction of Reality*, in which they theorize that: "*Society is a human product. Society is an objective reality. Man is a social product*" (p. 61, emphasis in the original). Foster and Bochner therefore claim that "Berger and Luckmann placed communication processes and everyday interactions at the center of inquiry into how knowledge is generated and transformed in social life" (2008, p. 88). Berger and Luckmann's (1967) foundational work detailed how, through processes of *institutionalization*, we create the social worlds which we often experience as-if objective reality, and are thus in part also created by those practices. They write that, "the relationship between man, the producer, and the social world, his product, is and remains a dialectical one. That is, man (not, of course, in isolation but in his collectivities) and his social world interact with each other. The product acts back upon the producer" (p. 61). The dialectic that they describe showcases how we are created by and simultaneously co-create our social worlds. This is a claim that offers exciting potential for communication scholars.

After reviewing 40 years of social constructionist research in communication, Foster and Bochner (2008) present six of the most common findings. These include: (1) "Language, embedded and exchanged through communicative action and performance, is central to the

construction of social worlds;" (2) "Many social realities exist;" (3) "Meanings are the products

of understandings negotiated in and through relational communication;" (4) "Contexts matter.

The terms by which we understand the world are socially, historically, and culturally situated;

once in place, they enable and constrain meanings and actions;" (5) "we affect what we study but

also that what we study, in turn, affects us;" and (6) "Social constructionist inquiry is necessarily

moral, ethical, critical, and political inquiry. The idea that we should preserve a complex,

nuanced understanding of the social world is itself a moral and ethical stance" (p. 92). These six

overarching components of social constructionist communication research illustrate the

importance of language, communication as creating multiple interpretations, contexts, ethics, and

the impact of research on the researcher.

Due to my social constructionist approach, I also follow Alvesson's (2010) metaphor of

organizational research that examines organizational members creating their identities through

struggle. His "struggler" research metaphor focuses on individuals "constructing a view of

themselves" amidst uncertainty (p. 200). Alvesson examines how the struggler as an, "identity

constructer relates to more active efforts of oneself fighting through a jungle of contradictions

and messiness in the pursuit of a sense of self" (p. 200). The struggler metaphor situates identity

as a communication process of "forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising the

constructions that are productive of a sense of coherence and distinctiveness" (p. 201). Using a

struggler metaphor positions identity as "becoming, rather than [as a fixed] being" (Alvesson et

al., 2008, p. 15). Identity is thus understood as unfolding and always subject to revision via

communication. The struggler metaphor also complements Yep, Lovaas, and Elia's (2003)

analysis of queer and transgender communication scholarship. Such scholarship frames identities

as "multiple, unstable, and fluid social constructions intersecting with race, class, and gender,

among others, as opposed to singular, stable, and essentialized social positionings" (p. 4). Individuals, then, are constantly navigating the messiness of becoming through their ongoing communication. As a result, researchers can both observe participants' co-construction of their identities and also probe participants to reflect on these processes.

To elaborate and deepen this approach, I proceed in this chapter by discussing *organizational identification*, which is a popular theory about the relationship of individual identity to organizations from communication studies. Next, I examine the context of transgender life in the United States and explore *transgender identity*, as this dissertation specifically examines a transgender outreach center. Lastly, I will discuss the concept of *intersectionality*. This focus is necessary because in my emic study, despite the organization's centering of transgender identities, its staff also navigated intersectional identities of the people they served.

Organizational Identification

Since the 1980s, organizational communication scholars have examined the importance of theorizing organizational identification. In this section, I will briefly review foundational organizational identification theorizing. Then I will overview contemporary scholarship that extends the possibilities of organizational identification research.

Organizational Identification Foundations from Cheney and Tompkins

Current organizational identification research can be credited to two foundational scholars: George Cheney and Phil Tompkins. From 1983 to 1987, both Tompkins and Cheney advanced and applied the construct "identification" to organizational communication (see Cheney, 1983a, 1983b; Tompkins & Cheney, 1985; Cheney & Tompkins, 1987). Cheney (1983a) situates identification as a broader communication process:

> Identification—with organizations or anything else—is an active process by which
> individuals link themselves to elements in the social scene. Identifications are important
> for what they do for us: they aid us in making sense of our experience, in organizing our
> thoughts, in achieving decisions, and in anchoring the self. Perhaps most important for
> students of communication, identifying allows people to persuade and to be persuaded.
> (p. 342)

He thus links identification to an active communication process, persuasion, sensemaking, decision-making, and individuals' identities.

Cheney and Tompkins primarily built their theories of organizational identification through extending research by political scientist Herbert A. Simon and rhetorician Kenneth Burke. It is beyond the scope of this study to review these source theories. Suffice to say, however, that Tompkins and Cheney's innovations extending Simon's work showcased how employees' identifications have consequences for organizations, as employees will enact their decision-making based on how they are "biased toward alternatives tied to his/her targets of identification" (1985, p. 192). Similarly, Cheney followed Burke's recognition of organizations as "vital in that they grant us personal meaning" through our "cooperative association with social units" (1983a, p. 347). Cheney (1983b) also argues that one way we communicate identification is through labels or names, such as naming organizations for which we work as part of our identities. Cheney and Tompkins subsequently elaborated their own theoretical contributions, including through: (1) depicting identification as inherently a communication process, (2) conceptualizing identification as a form of covert power (or "unobtrusive control") practiced in organizations, and (3) establishing identification as mutual influence (see Cheney, 1983a, 1983b; Tompkins & Cheney, 1985; Cheney & Tompkins, 1987).

Extending Organizational Identification Scholarship

Organizational communication and interdisciplinary scholars continue to advance research on organizational identification. Four current themes of this scholarship are: (1) organizational identification as concertive control, (2) organizational identification as a process, (3) multiple organizational identifications, and (4) diverse applications of organizational identification theories.

First, scholars continue to theorize organizational identification through theorizing control. For example, Barker's work is an exemplar of organizational identification research that illustrates how self-managing teams may become more rigid than prior models of direct supervision. Teams create rigidity through the use of *concertive control*—or value and consensus based rules that employees willingly enforce (see Barker, 1993). Because of employees' identification with their organizational norms, they may create and uphold rules that are less lenient and flexible than their former manager-enforced norms (see Barker & Cheney, 1994). This creates a paradox of concertive control where, "[i]ncreased worker participation also increases the total amount of control within the organization" (Barker & Tompkins, 1994, p. 237). Importantly, Larson and Tompkins (2005) later extend this program of research to showcase how managers also may be controlled by concertive control through value-based control. Additionally, even organizational members' dissent may be encouraged through organizationally preferred channels (see Kassing, 2000) and through supervisor trust (Payne, 2014) due to organizational identification. Therefore, some organizational identification scholarship examines how identification sustains control.

Second, researchers continue to investigate organizational identification as a process created through communication. For example, Myers, Davis, Schreuder, and Seibold (2016)

conducted survey research on students' organizational identification with their universities

through their communication with one another. Through interpersonal communication, students

began to identify as organizational members of their universities and with their university's

goals. Similarly, Morgan et al. (2004) illustrate the circular relationship of communication to

social construction of employee identities. They write, "As employees discuss their identities,

they become their identities. In turn, as employees assess the identification process, they will

reveal in their narratives the sources of inspiration for those identities" (p. 362). Elsewhere,

Scott, Corman, and Cheney (1998) applied structuration theory to position "identification as both

a process of attachment and as a product of that process" (p. 302). They argue that identifications

are "situated in contexts of interaction in the presence of other social actors (or in reflection of or

in anticipation of such)" (pp. 304-305). An empirical exemplar of this approach is Kuhn and

Nelson's (2002) longitudinal study of a municipal government organization. They suggest,

"organizational identification should not be seen as simply a top-down shaping of the individual;

it is also a process of shaping the very organizational identity structures to which members

attach" (p. 7).

Third, as discussed in Chapter One, communication researchers are interested in studying

multiple organizational *identifications* (see Kuhn & Nelson, 2002; Scott et al., 1998; Morgan et

al., 2004; Larson & Pepper, 2003). For example, Larson and Pepper (2003) investigated a

technical organization going through extensive organizational change with "multiple

targets/sources of identification [that] serves to uncover communication processes that influence

the construction of members' identities" (p. 529). Similarly, Morgan et al.'s (2004) research

challenges Cheney and Tompkins' use of the "target" metaphor, arguing it implies that

"identification is a deliberate, focused choice that 'aims' the employees' attachments in a certain

direction" (p. 362). They instead argue that identification happens through our communication organically and advance "sources" as a better term, which "reveals the more organic, intuitive connections people make with their organizations. At the same time, they can use these sources to consciously develop a relationship with the organization" (p. 362).

Finally, I consider "diverse applications" in order to capture the various types of research advanced under the umbrella of organizational identification research. A common trend in organizational identification research, for example, is the study of how this process both persists and evolves in contexts of change and crisis (Barker, 1993; Barker & Tompkins, 1994; Chreim, 2002; Larson & Pepper, 2003, 2011; Myers et al., 2016; Ploeger & Bisel, 2013). This trend is noteworthy given the similar focus organizational identity research (see Chapter One). Other researchers have examined when organizational identification first begins – for example, in relation to anticipatory socialization (Gibson & Papa, 2000; Morgan et al., 2004; Stephens & Dailey, 2012). Another popular topic is the connection of technology to cultivating organizational identification (Fieseler, Meckel, & Ranzini, 2015; Larson & Pepper, 2011). Lastly, researchers also connect organizational identification to diverse factors such as organizational secrecy (see Askay & Gossett, 2015; Scott, 2013), group communication processes (Silva & Sias), and national identity (Maneerat, Hale, & Singhal, 2005).

In closing this section on organizational identification, I note the importance of connecting organizational identification and identity. Cheney et al. (2014) discuss the possibilities of theorizing both identity and identification in organizational communication research. They call for research that will "emphasize the necessary interplay between operationalizations of individual identifications with organizations, organizational formulations of identity, and the larger social landscape for identity formulation in the contemporary world"

(p. 696). Their perspective mirrors this dissertation's aim to study the communicative construction of organizational identity and individuals' identities. I now examine an important aspect of organizational members' identities for my project: their transgender identities.

Transgender Identities

The following section examines the importance of transgender identities and experiences for my research. To contextualize the current context of transgender life in the United States, I begin with a section on national representative research on transgender people that reveals the significant discrimination many people who identify as transgender face in their lives. Next, I explore the timeliness and importance of researching transgender identities and a newer research area of transgender communication studies. Finally, I theorize transgender identity as a fluid category constructed through participants' communication.

I use the terms "transgender" and "gender nonconforming" throughout this dissertation. Here, I follow historian Susan Stryker's definition of *transgender* as categorizing individuals "who move away from the gender they were assigned at birth, people who cross over (*trans-*) the boundaries constructed by their culture to define and contain that gender…it is the *movement across a socially imposed boundary away from an unchosen starting place*" (2008b, p. 1, emphasis in original). Her definition importantly showcases movement from away from an "unchosen" gender and to move outside of boundaries of gender that are socially constructed. Importantly, she does not define transgender as moving toward a certain gender but simply away from a gender that is imposed and ill-fitting for the person. A second important term for my dissertation is *gender nonconforming*, which is used by individuals "who do not follow other people's ideas or stereotypes about how they should look or act based on the female or male sex they were assigned at birth" (Sylvia Rivera Law Project, 2015). People may choose to use gender

nonconforming (or GNC) or non-binary (as beyond the gender binary) in lieu of or in addition to transgender in order to signal that they do not seek to "transition" to another gender. Throughout, I will primarily use "transgender" as an organizing term unless a participant specifically highlights "gender nonconforming," "non-binary," or other language as their preferred gender identity term(s). I made this decision because my research site uses "transgender" as an umbrella term attempting to be inclusive of all gender nonconformity. I explore potential challenges of transgender as an umbrella term in Chapters Six and Seven. From this overview of terms, I now examine the current picture of transgender life in the United States.

Injustice at Every Turn: A Survey of Transgender Discrimination

In 2011, the National Center for Transgender Equality (NCTE) published a report detailing findings from a nationally representative survey of 6,450 transgender people conducted from 2008-2009 (Grant et al., 2011, p. 2). In titling their report, *Injustice at Every Turn*, NCTE presented the severe challenges transgender and gender nonconforming people face in the United States. The report offered a central claim: "It is part of social and legal convention in the United States to discriminate against, ridicule, and abuse transgender and gender nonconforming people within foundational institutions such as the family, schools, the workplace and health care settings, every day" (p. 8).

Injustice at Every Turn specifically examined injustices experienced by transgender and gender nonconforming people in the United States and territories as compared to the "general" *cisgender* population. Cisgender refers to those who do not identify as transgender. I use "cisgender" in lieu of other constructs like "gender normative," as a gender normative caricature reinforces that there is a "natural" way to express gender in relationship to biological sex (see Green, 2006). Consciously using the term cisgender in our communication also showcases that

people who do not identify as transgender still *choose* their gendered identities (Stryker, 2008b) and also purposefully marks cisgender privilege that often remains invisible. Naming cisgender identity also confronts language that normalizes and centers cisgender experiences (i.e., that is referred to as *cissexist*) or language that explicitly discriminates against transgender people through fear-based claims, which is known as *transphobia*. As communication scholar Julia R. Johnson argues, "As is true of all discourses, cissexism and transphobia manifest in our gendered attitudes and actions, including our assumptions about what are considered ''normal'' (legitimate) embodiment, activity, and modes of being/belonging" (2013, p. 138). Cissexism and transphobia thus have drastic material consequences for transgender people.

In December 2016, NCTE released its second survey reported called the *2015 U.S. Transgender Survey,* or USTS (James, Herman, Rankin, Keisling, Mottet, & Anafi, 2016). The second report more than quadrupled the response rate with surveys completed by "27,715 respondents from all fifty states, the District of Columbia, American Samoa, Guam, Puerto Rico, and U.S. military bases overseas" (p. 4). Like *Injustice at Every Turn* (Grant et al., 2011), the USTS revealed, "disturbing patterns of mistreatment and discrimination and startling disparities between transgender people in the survey and the U.S. population when it comes to the most basic elements of life, such as finding a job, having a place to live, accessing medical care, and enjoying the support of family and community" (James et al., 2016, p. 4).

Importantly, the USTS also reported notable shifts in visibility and acceptance since the first report. In addition to four times the respondents, the researchers found that one-third of USTS respondents identified as *non-binary* and/or gender nonconforming. They define non-binary as "people whose gender identity is not exclusively male or female, including those who identify as no gender, as a gender other than male or female, or as more than one gender" (p. 7).

As such, research on and resources for transgender people should also include a focus on non-binary and gender nonconforming identities. James et al. also found that respondents reported more support from family and colleagues in their lives, including support from coworkers (68%), classmates (56%), and immediate family (60%) (p. 7). This contrasted to the first report with 57% experiencing family rejection (Grant et al., 2011). However, such supportive stats should not erase the violence many transgender people face from the families that they hope will support them, such as 10% of family members enacting violence toward their relative because of their transgender identity (p. 8), 54% experiencing intimate partner violence (p. 15), and 46% being verbally harassed in the last year (p. 15).

In fact, both of NCTE's reports present the harrowing weight of systemic discrimination that results in high disparities for people who identify as transgender and gender nonconforming in the United States. Some of statistics from the USTS (see James et al., 2016, pp. 4-17) include:

- S*evere economic hardship and unemployment*: 29% of respondents reported living in poverty compared to 14% of the cisgender population. "[P]eople of color, including Latino/a (43%), American Indian (41%), multiracial (40%), and Black (38%) respondents, were up to three times as likely as the U.S. population (14%) to be living in poverty" (p. 6). Additionally, 15% of transgender respondents being unemployed compared to 5% of the cisgender population. Unemployment varied based on race and ethnicity, such as higher unemployment among Middle Eastern (35%) and American Indian (23%) transgender people.

- *Workplace discrimination:* 27% "reported being fired, denied a promotion, or not being hired for a job they applied for because of their gender identity or expression" (p. 12), and 23% experienced workplace mistreatment in the previous year, such as

being outed by a boss or coworker or "being told to present in the wrong gender in order to keep their job" (p. 13). 77% worked to avoid mistreatment, "such as hiding or delaying their gender transition or quitting their job" (p. 13).

- *Healthcare hardships*: 33% had negative healthcare experiences including 25% that encountered insurance challenges because of their transgender identity, and 55% were denied coverage for transition surgery. Additionally, HIV rates were almost five times higher at 1.4% compared to 0.3% in the cisgender population. These rates increased substantially for transwomen (3.4%), specifically for transgender Latinas (4.4%), American Indian transwomen (4.6%), and Black transwomen (19%).

- *Psychological distress and suicide:* 39% "experienced serious psychological distress" in the month before taking the survey (vs. 5% of the cisgender population). 40% attempted suicide, almost nine times higher than the cisgender population (4.6%).

- *Educational harassment*: 77% reported being mistreated in K-12 school if they were expressing their transgender identity then, including 54% who were verbally harassed, 24% physically attacked, and 13% who were sexually assaulted. 17% left K-12 because of severe mistreatment in K-12 schools.

- *Sexual violence*: "Nearly half (47%) of respondents were sexually assaulted at some point in their lifetime, and one in ten (10%) were sexually assaulted in the past year. Respondents who have engaged in sex work (72%), experienced homelessness (65%), or identified as people with disabilities (61%) were more likely to have been sexually assaulted in their lifetime" (p. 15).

- *Police interactions and prison conditions:* 58% experienced mistreatment when interacting with the police, and 57% would not feel comfortable to ask police officers

for assistance if they needed it. Also, if incarcerated, "Respondents were over five times more likely to be sexually assaulted by facility staff than the U.S. population in jails and prisons, and over nine times more likely to be sexually assaulted by other inmates" (p. 15).

- *Barriers to updated identification*: "Only 11% of respondents reported that *all* of their IDs had the name and gender they preferred, while more than two-thirds (68%) reported that *none* of their IDs had the name and gender they preferred" (p. 9).

- *Public accommodations:* In places like governmental offices, restaurants, and shops, 31% experienced mistreatment. 59% avoided public restrooms due to fears of confrontation, and 32% restricted their food and water intake to avoid using public restrooms in the last year. 9% were denied access to the restroom in the past year.

- *Housing and homelessness discrimination:* 30% of transgender people reported experiencing homelessness in their lifetime. "More than one-quarter (26%) of those who experienced homelessness in the past year avoided staying in a shelter because they feared being mistreated as a transgender person. Those who did stay in a shelter reported high levels of mistreatment: seven out of ten (70%) respondents who stayed in a shelter in the past year reported some form of mistreatment, including being harassed, sexually or physically assaulted, or kicked out because of being transgender" (p. 13). 23% of respondents also had experienced housing discrimination like being denied an apartment. Homeownership was also uncommon with only 16% owning homes compared to 63% of the cisgender population.

- *Underground economy participation:* "One in five (20%) have participated in the underground economy for income at some point in their lives— including 12% who

have done sex work in exchange for income—and 9% did so in the past year, with

higher rates among women of color" (p. 14). These respondents also experienced high

levels of police harassment (86%), intimate partner violence (77%), and sexual

assault (72%).

These statistics present the continued injustices, discrimination, and violence "at every turn" for

many transgender and gender nonconforming people in the United States.

NCTE's research continues to offer the only nationally representative picture of

transgender and gender nonconforming people's lives. The results point to what transgender

legal scholar Dean Spade describes as "an enormous number of people facing a series of

interlocking problems" (2011, p. 11). These problems demand governmental, practitioner, and

researcher responses. In the release of the 2008-2009 survey, Grant et al. called scholars to action

to respond "with an eye toward much-needed future research" in order to "work continuously

and strenuously together for justice" (2011, p. 8) for transgender and gender nonconforming

people in the United States. In 2016, James et al. requested "public education efforts to improve

understanding and acceptance of transgender people are crucial. The rates of suicide attempts,

poverty, unemployment, and violence must serve as an immediate call to action, and their

reduction must be a priority" (p. 7). I view this dissertation as joining the call for public

education and future research for justice for transgender people—goals which I explore further in

Chapters Three and Seven.

Importantly, while NCTE offers a representative sample, their researchers also carefully

complicate false notions of "transgender people" as a static category or group of individuals with

universal experiences. For instance, NCTE's first report centered on a "combination of anti-

transgender bias and persistent, [where] structural racism [is] especially devastating" (Grant et

al., 2011, p. 2). In the USTS, James et al. (2016) focus more on the "compounding impact of other forms of discrimination" to note that "a clear and disturbing pattern is revealed: transgender people of color experience deeper and broader patterns of discrimination than white respondents and the U.S. population" (p. 6). I have included examples of these compounded problems around race and ethnicity above in the overarching statistics. The USTS also reported undocumented transgender people encountered high levels of physical violence (24%), intimate partner violence (68%), and homelessness (50%). Transgender people with disabilities experienced high poverty (45%) and unemployment (24%), as well as psychological distress (59%), suicide attempts (54%), and healthcare mistreatment (42%) (p. 6). Examining participants' compounded experiences of discrimination and privilege from overlapping identities will be a theoretical focus below in the intersectionality section.

Reviewing NCTE's reports about the challenges transgender people may face is important for this dissertation. Systemic discrimination and violence impacts individuals' lives and how they use communication to construct their identities. These statistics also showcase varied disparities and experiences of people who identify as transgender and gender nonconforming in the United States and thus present examples of the diverse gender identities people may communicate and experience as organizational members of a transgender outreach center. Next, before theorizing transgender identity, I first explore the societal and academic timeliness and importance of a transgender communication studies dissertation.

A "Tipping Point" of Transgender Visibility and Research Potential

In the United States, we are currently experiencing a considerable shift in national discourses about people who identify as transgender and/or gender nonconforming and their related needs. The shift moves transgender identities from the periphery to more publicized

visibility and activism. Transgender concerns are still not "mainstream," and transgender equity is still unsupported by many U.S. Americans. My noting the rising visibility of national discourse about transgender people is no way ignores the histories of transgender activism from diverse communities. Rather, transgender visibility is increasing, and as I suggested above, there is a pressing need for more scholarship across the academy on transgender challenges to respond to current societal exigencies. To further illustrate such possibilities, I now present two brief subsections: (1) increased transgender visibility in U.S. society and (2) growing transgender communication studies scholarship.

Increased U.S. transgender visibility. Historically in LGBTQ popular discourse and research, transgender issues, gender identity concerns, and trans individuals have been included haphazardly or, worse, ignored entirely. Transgender people have continuously experienced invisibility, marginalization, and placelessness. According to Stryker's historical research, medical science said transgender people "were sick; political progressives said we were wrong; and feminists (particularly of lesbian separatist type) said we were bad" (2008a, p. 217). Such historical discourses still permeate much of U.S. public opinion.

Yet, given contemporary shifts, we may be experiencing what *Time Magazine* termed the "Transgender Tipping Point" (Steinmetz, 2014). *Time*'s "tipping point" coverage included the lives, triumphs, and hardships of transgender people in the U.S. The magazine featured Laverne Cox, a transgender African American woman famous for her role in the Netflix series, *Orange is the New Black*, on its cover—the first transgender woman to be featured on a prominent U.S. magazine. Steinmetz's tipping point essay addressed increased recent coverage, narratives, and media representations of transgender people. Another surge in popular culture coverage came in 2015 with news of Caitlyn Jenner's transition, her Diane Sawyer interview, and her July 2015

cover feature of *Vanity Fair*, which yielded over 10 million Google searches of her name in the first week of June 2015 (Sanburn, 2015). The "Jenner effect" created an explosion of discussions on transgender identities in more normative cisgender culture unfamiliar with transgender people; such coverage was often limited to a narrative of affluence and whiteness and positioned transgender women as "items" of consumption (Cheng Thom, 2015). Skerski (2011) has considered the complications of increased visibility of gender rebellion in media representation potentially being co-opted and potentially jeopardizing gender norm resistance.

Additionally, in 2015, the Director of the National Center for Transgender Equality (NCTE), Mara Keisling circulated an email video that defined this decade as "this amazing moment in history where trans people are finally asserting themselves and speaking up." While this seems to leave out historical speaking out and acting up (see Stryker, 2008b; Shepard, 2013), Keisling's institutional video from NCTE also marked the increase in mediated representations and conversations about transgender people and gender identities. The 2016 NCTE USTS report also addressed this increased visibility (James et al., 2016), which I have previewed above.

Stephen Whittle summarizes some of these contemporary shifts in the late 20th/early 21st century in his introduction to the first *The Transgender Studies Reader* (2006):

New communities of transgender and transsexual people have created new industries, a new academic discipline, new forms of entertainment; they offer new challenges to politics, government, and law, and new opportunities to broaden the horizons of everyone who has a trans person as their neighbor, coworker, friend, partner, parent, or child. Any Internet search, whether of Web sites, news articles, academic papers, will produce thousands of results. A recent Google search for "transsexual" gave 3 million hits. Using

the term "transgender" in an attempt to reduce the number of porn sites actually retrieved

far more: 7.5 million hits. (p. xi)

As a reference, on December 14, 2017, transsexual (an older term that often signified a

"medical" transition) yielded 38.9 million results and transgender yielded 82.8 million Google

results. What a difference eleven years can make in increasing transgender coverage and the

demand for transgender scholarship.

A tipping point of transgender communication research. Increased contemporary

transgender visibility is also translating into a possible tipping point of scholarship on

transgender people and their identities and experiences. Recent milestones in transgender

scholarship include the publication of *The Transgender Studies Reader 2* (Stryker & Aizura,

2013) with 50 essays focusing on charting new interdisciplinary directions. The first journal

dedicated to transgender studies, *Transgender Studies Quarterly,* was established in 2014.

Transgender communication studies are also beginning to blossom across the discipline. Johnson

(2013) describes the past pervasiveness of cisgender theorizing in communication studies, even

in intercultural and gender studies: "Most gender research published in communication studies

assumes a gender and sex binary, even in cases where the authors commit to examining gendered

power and oppression…This perpetuates thinking about sex, gender, and sexuality in terms of

woman/man, feminine/masculine, and gay/straight" (p. 136). Rather than perpetuate binaries,

transgender communication research can instead provide "powerful theoretical and political tools

for examining the production and constitution of modes of difference" (Yep, 2013, p. 119).

Notably, the first edited volume on transgender communication was published in 2015,

Transgender Communication Studies: Histories, Trends, and Trajectories (Spencer & Capuzza).

Given the recent and timely publication of this volume, we can read Spencer and Capuzza's text

as showcasing a potential tipping point of transgender communication studies scholarship and propelling future potential. Spencer's introduction of the edited volume (2015) asks, "students and scholars of communication to think seriously and thoroughly about gender identity on its own terms" (p. ix) and what transgender "can mean" in communication research. The edited volume reviews the current landscape of transgender communication studies. Spencer situates transgender studies as largely new to communication studies and suggests that their relationship could be a fruitful one. He cites Chávez and Griffin's (2012) state-of-the-art literature review that details how there were very few articles prior to 2014 on transgender people or theories in our communication journals. Even now, some transgender communication scholars must go outside our journals to publish our scholarship. Spencer's (2015) own review first found nearly 40 articles where the word "transgender" appeared in the essay. However, in many of the 40 articles, transgender and bisexual (TB) were simply added on as keywords to what was really just gay and lesbian (GL) scholarship (see also Gross, 2005, for this critique). The current trend of tacking transgender onto LGB demonstrates the need for more communication scholarship on transgender people, identity, rhetoric, organizing, communication, and so forth.

Overall, Spencer and Capuzza's (2015) edited volume is instrumental in marking what transgender communication scholarship offers us today. As editors, they chose to organize the text by sub-areas of the communication discipline. This decision comes at the expense of failing to engage a broader communication studies conversation. Instead, the text details sub-areas, such as the growth of transgender inclusion in health communication topics, intercultural communication (including Karma Chávez's, 2013, edited issue of *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication* as the first NCA journal focused on trans and queer concerns), and interpersonal and family communication foci on "coming out" issues. Additionally, Spencer

notes how the bulk of transgender communication scholarship is found within "media studies," as well as some rhetorical studies on activism, history, legal rhetoric, and performance.

For organizational communication research, the editors present Dixon's (2015) chapter on workplace socialization for transgender people. Spencer and Capuzza (2015) cite only one other article from an organizational communication perspective, which is another Dixon article (Dixon & Dougherty, 2014), from the same research project on LGBT workers. Organizational communication, then, appears to be an even more understudied area than other sub-fields in transgender communication studies (for exceptions, see LGBT studies by Meyer, 2004; Drumheller & McQuay, 2010).

Dixon's chapter focuses on interviews with ten transgender workers and their navigation and use of "nondiscrimination" policies as a subset of a larger study on LGBT workers. Dixon's project can be read as an effort to bring in transgender workers to theorizing topics like work, organizational policies, and discrimination. While calls for organizational communication researchers to join efforts to "demystify what it means to be transgender" (2015, p. 31), she centers her research on broader inclusivity and justice policies at work (e.g., workplace discrimination policies centered with transgender discrimination as one "type" to examine).

Organizational communication scholars may consider future transgender work(ers) research following Dixon. Others may expand to examining organizations focused on transgender identities, transgender grassroots organizing, and transgender activist organizing. My dissertation focuses on transgender outreach organizational communication and organizational members' transgender identities. As such, this project appears to be the first ethnographic study of a transgender-centered organization conducted in organizational communication. It is also one of the few interdisciplinary studies that consider transgender identities and outreach

organizations together, and thus cultivates richer understandings of organizing for and with

transgender people. This is a ripe "tipping point" moment to connect organizational

communication research to broader transgender research and vice versa. I now shift to theorizing

transgender identities for this dissertation.

Theorizing Transgender Identity

The following section reviews relevant literature about transgender identity and situates

related identities as social constructions created, maintained, and transformed through our

communication. I first consider the complexities of studying transgender identity as a fluid

category, and then, I examine how individuals construct their gender identities in relationship to

the transgender identity category.

Transgender scholarship focuses on "transgender" as a term, category, and identity that is

left purposefully fluid, open-ended, and attempting to embrace all non-cisgender identities. The

purposeful fluidity generates possibilities for theorizing how individuals who identify as

"transgender" construct their unique identities—both trans and otherwise. Ultimately, I am

interested in how participants understand their relationship to transgender identity, how this

impacts their everyday lives, and how this may influence the kind of organizational efforts

undertaken on the behalf of transgender people. Thus, the project is grounded in efforts to

understand the creation of transgender as a category with which individuals identify, their

experiences of such categorizations, and organizational directives aimed at transpeople.

The etymology of *transgender* is first attributed to Virginia Prince to "describe her desire

to become a woman socially without having to modify her genitals" (GLBTQ, 2004). Distinctive

from transvestite (seen as episodic) and from transsexual (viewed as surgical), transgender also

created space for people who identified as non-binary or gender nonconforming (see Stryker,

2006). Historically, transgender "came to function as an umbrella term signifying gender non-conformity" (Papoulias, 2006, p. 231). By conceptualizing transgender as an umbrella term—sometimes also referred to as a gender spectrum—transgender people could attempt to go beyond medicalized pathology of their gender and also distinguish their gender identities from their sexualities. The umbrella term sought to include all non-cisgender gender identities.

Historically the transgender category arose in "uneven, often contested ways, primarily in white, middle-class activist contexts in New York and California in the 1990s, although it appears to have had earlier manifestations in California in the 1980s" (Valentine, 2007, p. 33). As transgender spread as a buzzword, national, statewide, and local organizational efforts began to focus on transgender outreach and needs. It therefore marked "a significant shift in discourses, practices, and personal identities around gender variance in an astonishingly short period of time" (Valentine, 2007, p. 34). Importantly, the category has evolved and will continue to do so. Transgender does not have a stagnant or universal meaning, and gender nonconforming individuals' chosen identity labels (or lack thereof) differ immensely.

In fact, one of the potential distinguishing features of transgender as an identity category is the diversity of identities that can be encompassed by the term. Transgender as an identity category details the variety of language used to describe the "wide range of 'gender outlaws'" who so often had language placed upon them by scientists, doctors, and cisgender people (Feinberg, 1992/2006). Gender outlaws coming together under a "transgender" category also opened the possibility for common ground and action against shared injustices. Feinberg explains, "It's hard to fight an oppression without a name connoting pride, a language that honors us. In recent years a community has begun to emerge that is sometimes referred to as the gender or transgender community. Within our community is a diverse group of people who

define ourselves in many different ways" (p. 206). Feinberg argued the transgender label, then, matters discursively for collective organizing and for challenging gender oppression together despite the varied, even disparate, gender outlaws. As such, a communication perspective is an especially productive lens to understand the richness of individuals' relationship to transgender as a word, identity, and/or community.

Feinberg (1992/2006) also specifically positioned transgender as an *adjective*, rather than as a noun. Using transgender as an adjective continues to gain prominence and has largely replaced other usages of the word as: a past participle/adjective ("transgendered"), a verb ("transgendering"), or as a noun (e.g., "a" transgender). Transgender studies scholars explicitly address language fluidity and ask for tolerance from contemporary readers and activists in eschewing the older language that may now seem stigmatizing. As Boyd explained, "for the people who were first writing about these issues, no one knew what the grammar was; we were making it up as we went along" (in Boyd & Boylan, 2015). Similarly, Finn Enke (2012) details the important need for flexible labels and acknowledgement of how we create language. Transgender studies scholars continue to think critically about the power of language and what it means to be transgender, and communication scholarship can fruitfully join such conversations.

Transgender as an identity category, then, may be thought of as a "subject-in-movement…but not one that relies on rigidity or fixed identity" (Spencer, 2015, p. xi). Transgender as an adjective describes the need for "a political alliance between all individuals who were marginalized or oppressed due to their difference from social norms of gendered embodiment, and who should therefore band together in a struggle for social, political, and economic justice" (Stryker, 2006, p. 4). My project, then, uses transgender as a descriptive adjective rather than a noun. I explore the rich "variety of experiences" for "anyone who does

not feel comfortable in the gender role they were attributed with at birth, or who has a gender identity at odds with the labels 'man' or 'woman' credited to them by formal authorities" (Whittle, 2006, p. xi). Importantly then, my communication studies approach will respect that transgender is an identity category with many different meanings and potential conflicts.

Given the fluidity of transgender identity, I provide two theoretical perspectives promoting research of diverse individuals identifying with a category while simultaneously questioning the category itself. First, I focus on David Valentine's (2007) rich anthropological and historical account of the institutionalization of "transgender" as a category. Second, I consider how individuals may understand their relationship to transgender as an identity category through the process of detypification (Jenness, 1992).

To begin, Valentine evinces how transgender as a new identity category created distinctions between gender and sexuality, thereby simultaneously failing to perpetuate conventional conflation of gender and sexuality. I mirror Valentine's approach to understanding transgender identity, as he both illustrates the importance of studying participants' communication of their transgender identities while also questioning a fixed or flattened transgender category. Using ethnography and historical textual analysis, Valentine traces the development of "transgender" as a term and catalogues "how the collective mode of transgender both succeeds *and* fails to account for the identities and communities so described" (2007, p. 69), which could be similarly argued for other identity categories.

Valentine originally sought to study "transgender people," but instead through his ethnography, he found that his New York City participants resisted that very naming. Many participants who he identified as transgender women of color communicated "gay" as their most salient and impactful identity. Through data analysis, Valentine refigured transgender as what he

calls an "anthropological imaginary"—that the terminology and meaning existed more as an imagined object in his ethnographic inquiry than as a salient identity for his participants. He consequently invites readers to consider the challenges of organizing around a "transgender community" and instead recommends theorizing organizing for shared practices (pp. 98-104).

Valentine (2007) also cautions how—despite aims for fluidity—transgender can still serve as a potentially exclusionary, fixed, and stale identity category. Because categorization is "never neutral" (p. 5), he discovered the muddiness of participants' identities were actually "upset[ting] the terms of a stable transgender community [he] was attempting to study" (p. 6). Valentine's research points to the complexities of studying participants who identify and come together as connecting to transgender identity while concurrently troubling the idea of any kind of fixed, universal community or category. Furthermore, he marks the institutionalization of transgender as a category that "cannot account for the experiences of the most socially vulnerable gender-variant people" (p. 14) under the trans umbrella. The word transgender is historically tied to whiteness, affluence, surgical interventions, etc. and thus may fail to fully account for diverse transgender subjects and their varied experiences.

Valentine also draws upon Michel Foucault's genealogy and Judith Butler's performativity to question how the transgender category may actually delimit what transgender can be and mean. In other words, through what Butler terms performativity, an identity category is "produced and restrained by the very structures of power through which emancipation is sought" (1990/2007, p. 4). The category becomes regulatory and exclusionary (p. 6) as it is ritualistically performed and thereby limits what we consider intelligible (p. xv). Performativity accordingly impacts "transgender" despite attempts to understand the category as fluid.

However, we can concomitantly recognize how using categories are *practically* useful in mobilizing and organizing transgender people (see Feinberg, 1992/2006). Flores and Moon (2002) describe a similar constraint in challenging race essentialism called the racial paradox. They write that, "we see how the tensions between exposing the social construction of race while living in a world in which race is as real as our physically different bodies complicate both the theory and practice of race" (p. 182). Their analysis points to the importance of understanding how categories can be strategically useful for collective organizing. Flores and Moon ask, "How do we undermine essentialist takes on race without risking social, political, legal, and rhetorical gains that rely upon racial categories? Given that race is simultaneously ideology and material reality, how do we produce new ways of thinking and doing race?" (p. 199). Likewise, Butler explains that the mobilization "of identity categories for the purposes of politicization always remain threatened by the prospect of identity becoming an instrument of the power one opposes. That is no reason not to use, and be used, by identity" (1990/2007, p. xxviii). In other words, categories always fail us, constrain us, and are bound in relationships of power, but they also can be used toward alternative effects. Thus, it is important to understand the language participants use to explore their transgender identities.

While I have argued that transgender is both (1) a purposefully open-ended category that attempts to avoid fixation and (2) still potentially produces its own closure, we also need recognize how individuals communicatively constitute their gender identities. A second useful lens here is Jenness' (1992) conceptualization of *detypification*. Although Jenness writes about women's relationships to the category lesbian, her examination of the relationships of individuals' identities to categories is pertinent here. She investigates "the interaction between culturally available categories, the interpretation of experiences, and the adoption of identities"

(1992, p. 66). In reviewing women's biographies about their same-sex relationships and subsequent identification with the term "lesbian," Jenness found that many women did not principally relate themselves (or in communication with others) as a "lesbian" because they did not fit their own typification of that category (e.g., the historical, unexamined, indeterminate, oversimplified image of lesbian). This mirrors Valentine's (2007) findings of his participants refuting transgender as a label that accounted for their identities.

Consequently, Jenness theorized a distinction between "doing" and "being" a lesbian (p. 66), and she argued that for subjects to identify with a category required a process she termed detypification. Jenness defines detypification as:

> *the process of redefining and subsequently reassessing the social category 'lesbian' such that it acquires increasingly concrete and precise meanings, positive connotations, and personal applicability.* Transformations along these lines point to a patterned process of interpreting, evaluating, and adjusting to the social world that women proceed through in order to arrive at a lesbian identity, and thus claim membership in the social category of lesbian. (1992, p. 66, emphasis in the original)

Detypification, then, can be conceptualized as a communication process that enables a researcher to understand the relationships of individual identities and categories. Additionally, participants' adoption of the category lesbian also varied based on their other differences (e.g., nation, class) and experiences in Jenness' work. She notes the ways categories are constructed in relationship to other differences (which I examine further below), and she also charts how we can socially shift from seeing a category as vague, negative, or incongruent (p. 67) to then detypify that category in our interactions and our reflection on "doing" it.

Detypification may allow individuals to reimagine how they view themselves in relationship to a shared identity category. Jenness found three common themes in her analysis to detypify a category: (1) the category becomes connected to personal detail via lived experience and feels more concrete in the process, (2) the category's connotations are experienced as more and more positive, and (3) the imagery of the category becomes more "congruent" via one's own experiences (p. 70). Her analysis illustrates how "women simultaneously reconstruct what it means to be a lesbian and reassess themselves as an instance of that particular category" (p. 71).

Although this can lead to constituting a social world where we become merely "type constructs" (Jenness, 1992, p. 72) or where we are performing a category in a normative fashion, there could also be opportunities for individuals to disrupt flattened constructs and embrace new possibilities in theirs and other's identities. For example, Halverson (2010) updates Jenness (1992) with a hopeful reading. She argues that via communicating with peers, individuals can detypify identity categories and understand themselves in relationships of empowerment and community belonging with others. Halverson showcases how, through detypification, LGBTQ youth uniquely constructed their complex identities. Communication researchers, then, can join other scholars to understand how participants construct their transgender identities in their interactions and reflexive accounts. I now turn to understanding transgender identities in relationship to other social identities and participants' experiences of difference.

Conceptualizing Identities as Intersectional

In this chapter, I have explored how identity categories are socially constructed and examined how our identities become meaningful through our communication. My final section explores communication about identities as intersectional. I specifically include intersectionality because throughout my research, some participants described how their multiple, overlapping

identities impacted how they experienced TGRC and its services. Additionally, the TGRC Directors and staff invoked a relationship between participants' transgender identities and other identities in their organizational communication. Including the concept of intersectionality thus will allow me to examine participants' communication of their overlapping, salient identities that they hoped TGRC would serve and address in my upcoming analysis chapters.

Intersectionality is important for this project because the concepts of organizational identification (i.e., how employees identify with their organizations and may be moved to decision-making based on that identification) and transgender identity (i.e., how people identify their gender as outside of their assigned sex at birth) are insufficient to fully capture participants' communication about their multiple identities and interrelated experiences. Therefore, I will discuss intersectionality here in order to anticipate and frame TGRC members' communication about salient, overlapping identities as one emic theme in upcoming analysis chapters. Importantly, my discussion of intersectionality will be limited to conceptualizing only those intersections of identities that TGRC guests, staff, Board Members, and Directors communicate as salient in their lives and for their organizational efforts.

In this section, I first introduce and examine intersectionality's heterogeneous heritage grounded in work from women of color activists, scholars, and practitioners. I then discuss how practitioners, activists, and/or members of identity-based organizations might use intersectionality to address the identities and subsequent needs of those they serve. Lastly, I address the productive tension created for this study by both centering transgender identity and invoking the analytic concept of intersectionality.

Heterogeneous Histories of Intersectionality

The term *intersectionality* theorizes the importance of considering multiple identities (e.g., of race, gender, and class) as interacting and shaping one another. It is perhaps the most popular feminist theory today, and with its popularity comes conflict around its meaning and usage among interdisciplinary scholars and activists alike. Sociologist Kathy Davis (2008) examined how and why intersectionality became one of the most popular "buzzwords" of feminist, critical race, queer, and other difference theorists and activists. Using a sociology of science analysis, Davis attributes intersectionality's popularity to its ability to: (1) refute the sexist, objectified category of "woman," (2) offer a novel linkage of feminism to other difference inquires, (3) welcome both specialists and generalists, and (4) offer ambiguity and incompleteness as a term that opens extensive research possibilities under this term. Such implications showcase intersectionality's popularity, ambiguity, and potential complexity.

In a new, comprehensive book, Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge (2016) agree that there is "tremendous heterogeneity that currently characterizes how people understand and use intersectionality" (p. 2). They note, however, that there is some common ground among scholars and practitioners due to what they call "intersectionality's core." Collins and Bilge repeatedly use the term "practitioner" in their book to refer to people attempting intersectional practices in their communities, organizations, and lives, and I follow their meaning herein. They describe intersectionality's core as: "major axes of social division in a given society at a given time, for example, race, class, gender, sexuality, dis/ability, and age operate not as discrete and mutually exclusive entities, but build on each other and work together" (p. 4). Intersectionality's core, then, is the interlocking identities that connect and divide people in current historical contexts.

Collins and Bilge also explain that, "Many people typically use intersectionality as a *heuristic*, a problem-solving or analytic tool," such as students advocating for campus diversity and inclusion across identities or the historical work of Black women advancing multiple-axis political movements (p. 4, emphasis in original). The heuristic quality of intersectionality enables researchers and practitioners to utilize it as a tool for varied purposes and with diverse interpretations, which Davis' (2008) analysis revealed analogously. Collins and Bilge further claim, "Even though those who use intersectional frameworks all seem to be situated under the same big umbrella, using intersectionality as a heuristic device means that intersectionality can assume many different forms" (p. 4). Here, they suggest that we may think of intersectionality as an umbrella construct with multiple forms and potential usages. This importantly mirrors the way I conceptualized transgender identity above with multiple gender nonconforming identities described as being part of the transgender umbrella (see Papoulias, 2006). Here, Collins and Bilge introduce the possibility of multiple interpretations and versions of intersectionality. Therefore, holding both transgender identity and intersectionality as umbrella constructs enables me to focus on how organizational members use and understand their identities uniquely in their organizational communication.

Collins and Bilge (2016) also provide an open definition for intersectionality to capture both its core and heuristic qualities:

> Intersectionality is a way of understanding and analyzing the complexity in the world, in people, and in human experiences. The events and conditions of social and political life and the self can seldom be understood as shaped by one factor. They are generally shaped by many factors in diverse and mutually influencing ways. When it comes to social inequality, people's lives and the organization of power in a given society are better

understood as being shaped not by a single axis of social division, be it race or gender or class, but by many axes that work together and influence each other. Intersectionality as an analytic tool gives people better access to the complexity of the world and of themselves. (p. 2)

Their lengthy and open definition showcases intersectionality as an analytical tool, a way of understanding social interaction around multiple axes of difference, and a construct for critique of power and inequality.

Beyond exploring intersectionality as a heuristic, it is critical to understand the historical roots of intersectionality. Collins and Bilge (2016) review the *multiple* histories of intersectionality, dismiss authoritative accounts, and argue that "[i]ntersectionality's history cannot be neatly organized in time periods or geographic locations" (p. 63). They critique scholarship that assumes intersectionality began with the term itself. For example, Sojourner Truth's 1851 famous "Ain't I a woman?" speech is one of the first cited public performances of an intersectional perspective (see Brah & Phoenix, 2004; Collins & Bilge, 2016). Instead, Collins and Bilge note one wave of intersectionality's history beginning in:

the 1960s and 1970s, [when] African-American women activists confronted the puzzle of how their needs simply fell through the cracks of anti-racist social movements, feminism, and unions organizing for workers' rights. Each of these social movements elevated one category of analysis and action above others, for example, race within the civil rights movements, or gender within feminism or class within the union movement. Because African-American women were simultaneously black *and* female *and* workers, these single-focus lenses on social inequality left little space to address the complex social problems they face. Black women's specific issues remained subordinated within each

movement because no social movement by itself would, nor could, address the entirety of

discriminations they faced. Black women's use of intersectionality as an analytic tool

emerged in response to those challenges. (p. 3)

Importantly, from this historical account of Black women workers' multiple identities interacting

together, we also learn that intersectionality began as a practical tool embedded in social justice

organizing and activism, which I return to momentarily. This account also points to the

importance of intersectionality for understanding interconnected needs for social justice and

activist work based on members' diverse identities.

Honoring and embracing intersectionality's heritage in Black feminist activist thought is

also central to recognizing the politics of intersectionality and avoiding the whitening of its

origins (Bilge, 2013) through appropriation (Luft & Ward, 2009). Collins and Bilge (2016) note

how Black feminist activist organizing and key writings of the 1970s and 1980s linked what

would come to be thought of as intersectional theory and practice. These writers and activists

critiqued the untroubled status of the category "woman" in white feminism and in society, and

they questioned how "race" was understood in isolation from other aspects of identity. For the

1970s, Collins and Bilge cite examples such as Frances Beal's (1970) essay that critiqued sexism

in the Black Power movement and racism in white women's liberation (Beal, 1995/1970). They

note the impact of Toni Cade Bambara's edited volume *The Black Woman* (1970) where, "the

essays point out how black women would never gain their freedom without attending to

oppressions of race *and* class *and* gender" (Collins & Bilge, 2016, p. 66, emphasis in original).

Other 1970s Black feminist writers and organizers like the Combahee River Collective stressed

the challenges of "not just trying to fight oppression on one front or even two, but instead to

address a whole range of oppressions" (1977, p. 415). The Black lesbian founders of the

Combahee River Collective provided an "intersectional analysis in the context of social movements for decolonization, desegregation, and feminism" (Collins & Bilge, 2016, p. 68). Collins and Bilge also credit some texts from the early 1980s as inspiring intersectionality (see A. Davis, 1981; Lorde, 1984).

Importantly, Collins and Bilge also note that intersectionality is often only attributed to African American women, but that such a history misses key writings and organizing by other women of color at the time. They write, "it is tempting to grant African-American women ownership over the seeming discovery of the then unnamed intersectionality…in the United States, African-American women were part of the heterogeneous alliances with Chicanas and Latinas, Native American women, and Asian-American women" (p. 71). Early examples of the heterogeneous alliances include research and activism addressing intersectional challenges for: Chicanas and Latinas (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1983/2015), Asian American women (Asian Women United of California, 1989), indigenous women (see Smith's historical account, 2009), and Black women (see Collins' historical review, 2000). The collective organizing and scholarship of these women of color created space for the eventual naming of intersectionality.

In 1989, Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term "intersectionality" by building on the earlier work by women of color activists and scholars. Crenshaw specifically investigated how legal discourses commonly suppressed black women's experiences by depicting their different identity categories as if separable, and their cumulative significance of those categories as if additive (i.e., black + woman). She subsequently argued that, "the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism" (1989, p. 140). Intersectionality theorizes that any one category of identity (e.g., race) is actually experienced *in relationship* to other experiences of identity. Here, identities are viewed as *not* fixed, isolated, or independent. Instead, their

interaction should be viewed in relationship to both historical and contemporary discourses of privilege and discrimination. As Crenshaw explained in 1991 as she developed intersectionality further, "categories have meaning and consequences. And this project's most pressing problem, in many if not most cases, is not the existence of the categories, but rather the particular values attached to them and the way those values foster and create social hierarchies" (pp. 1296-1297). Here Crenshaw shows how identities impact people's daily lives based on how they are valued or undermined in our cultures. Like the women of color who came before Crenshaw, we are reminded that intersectionality is always tied to its activist and practitioner roots. I now move from the heterogeneity and history to further explore the importance of intersectionality as a practical application.

Intersectionality as Practical Application

What is crucial in this brief account above is its depiction of how the concept of intersectionality rapidly evolved to become a relatively abstract object of theoretical and philosophical inquiry. Alternately, my intention in this dissertation is to use intersectionality to explore the ways in which my participants communicate how their identities are interconnected, and how TGRC Directors and staff respond to these expressed salient identities by invoking interconnected identities in their work. As previewed above, intersectionality's origins are *grounded* in practice and activism, so a focus on organizational members responding to intersectional needs certainly fits within the realm of intersectionality research and application. For example, sociologists Luft and Ward (2009) present intersectionality "not only as an analysis of the multiplicative nature of oppression, but also as a political intervention that deconstructs social relations and promotes more just alternatives. In this way, from its inception, intersectionality has been a political strategy as much as it has been a theoretical lens" (p. 10).

Thus, I plan to use intersectionality in this study to account for participants' experiences of their overlapping identities, and how those constructions impact how they understand their transgender identities and TGRC's outreach efforts.

In this process, I follow Luft and Ward's calls to "relink intersectional discourse to practice, justice, and outcomes" (2009, p. 19) and to stimulate intersectionality's practical purposes. In fact, Crenshaw herself champions both empirical and practical work that showcases "what scholars, activists, and policymakers have done under [intersectionality's] rubric" (as cited in Bilge, 2013, p. 412). Communication scholar Karma Chávez (2012) also situates intersectionality as grounded in "localized and specific knowledge," (p. 31) including the importance of community coalitions, dialogues, and action. Thus, I focus on intersectionality within the local context of TGRC to better understand how participants describe their multiple, overlapping identities as salient for their individual lives and for TGRC's collective organizing.

According to Collins and Bilge (2016), intersectionality truly requires both researcher inquiry and critical praxis by both academics and practitioners. By *critical praxis*, they refer "to *the ways in which people, either as individuals or as part of groups, produce, draw upon, or use intersectional frameworks in their daily lives*—as everyday citizens with jobs and families, as well as institutional actors within public schools, colleges and universities, religious organizations, and similar venues" (2016, p. 32, emphasis added). I thus seek to examine participants' intersectional critical praxis in relationship to theorizing their transgender and organizational identities. This approach mirrors Collins and Bilge's use of critical praxis linking scholars and practitioners. They argue that we should not treat scholars as "providing theories and frameworks, and practice relegated to people who apply those ideas in real-life settings or to real-life problems. Instead, this set of concerns sees *both* scholarship *and* practice as intimately

linked and mutually informing each other, rejecting views that see theory as superior to practice"
(p. 42). My proposed approach to studying participants' potential practical intersectional
communication is thus already embedded in the existing literature.

Additionally, the concept of intersectionality can be relevant for an organization like
TGRC that attempts to address social inequalities and salient identities for its members. Collins
and Bilge (2016) specifically describe the importance of practitioners engaging intersectionality:
"Practitioners and activists are often frontline actors for solving social problems that come with
complex social inequalities, a social location that predisposes them to engage intersectionality as
critical praxis…For practitioners and activists, intersectionality is not simply a heuristic for
intellectual inquiry but is also an important analytical strategy for *doing* social justice work" (p.
42, emphasis in original). Here, Collins and Bilge note the importance of intersectionality as
critical praxis and a potential organizational lens for enacting social justice.

Thus, researching how organizational members attempt to respond to their members'
salient identities offers potential contributions for both intersectionality inquiry and praxis.
Collins and Bilge describe how "[g]rassroots organizers look to varying dimensions of
intersectionality to inform their work on reproductive rights, anti-violence initiatives, workers'
rights, and similar social issues" (2016, p. 1). Intersectionality, then, can be a tool to inform
organizational communication for social justice organizers. They discuss how such
organizational efforts "remain understudied. Yet recent scholarship, especially that drawing upon
intersectionality, has pointed out the importance of intersectionality within grassroots
organizations' political praxis" (p. 43). They call for the importance of more scholarship to
examine contextualized examples of intersectionality praxis in grassroots organizations. I will

specifically examine TGRC's responses to their members' communication about their salient identities, privileges, and challenges.

Researching Intersectionality and Centering Trans Identities

Finally, it is important to address why I am examining participants' transgender identities *and also* their intersectional identities. As an interpretive researcher, I am accounting for TGRC's mission to center transgender identities. As my discussion above uncovered, TGRC *also* supports the claim that transgender is a malleable identity category and that people's experiences of identifying as transgender are compounded by other identities. Simultaneously, some of TGRC's members communicate the ways in which their transgender identities can be understood through the interaction of their gender identities with other salient aspects of their identities and experiences, such as their race, class, education level, housing, etc. TGRC Directors and staff also recognize the larger discrimination that I previewed above in the NCTE national data due to both intersecting identities of transpeople, and they attempt intersectional praxis in relationship to their transgender-centered organizing. I thus follow the efforts of TGRC to center transgender identity while also taking into account differences that participants and the organization communicate as salient in specific contexts and interactions. In the case of my dissertation, intersectionality becomes a salient theme to be explored in emic analysis in relationship to organizational identities, rather than an abstract or etic theoretical commitment.

Research can examine how organizations respond to their members' individual identities through critical intersectional praxis (see Collins & Bilge, 2016). For example, participants may specifically use the word "intersectionality" in their formal organizational communication. In fact, some organizations are founded on and use intersectionality in their missions. Sara DeTurk's (2015) communication ethnography of San Antonio's Esperanza Peace and Justice

Center is an exemplar that considers the intersectional, "multidimensional nature of identity" in their organizational mission. Given that TGRC does not explicitly position their mission as "intersectional," I am interested in how TGRC members may navigate intersectional praxis in relationship to also centering transgender identity in their organizational identities.

Researchers offer different responses to the question of whether centering an identity is possible or problematic when using intersectionality. Scholars approach this question from varied directions, and some intersectionality scholars would dismiss any project that centers one identity category. Others note how in intersectionality theory, "one social category cannot be understood in isolation from another social identity category" (Kroløkke, 2009). Yet while researchers may understand social identity categories as interconnected, Kroløkke notes that scholars must also consider the "reoccurring question…[of] which intersection(s) to analyze?"

One highly cited potential response comes from McCall's (2005) review of three potential approaches to researching identity categories in intersectional research. First, there is an *anticategorical* approach that treats identity categories as "social fictions that produce inequalities in the process of producing differences" (p. 1773). Much of poststructural, queer, and transgender scholarship utilizes anticategorical intersectionality. An exemplar of this approach is McDonald's (2015) proposal for a queer organizational communication intersectionality approach. McDonald argues for an anticategorical intersectionality that theorizes normativities and how they are enacted through organizational communication. He uses an anticategorical approach to center "communication processes, rather than stable identities" (p. 323), which he argues better fits the telos of communication research. McDonald suggests that, "difference is not only performed in relation to identity categories, but also in relation to various societal and organizational norms. As such, rather than foregrounding identity categories,

analyses of difference can foreground the multiple ways in which organizational members enact

societal and organizational norms" (p. 317). His suggestion is to go beyond categories to

critiques of normativity and how normativity is established in organizational norms.

McCall's second approach is *intracategorical* intersectionality. Intracategorical

researchers "tend to focus on particular social groups at neglected points of intersection…in

order to reveal the complexity of lived experience within such groups" (2005, p. 1774). McCall

places early critiques by feminists of color like Angela Davis' (1981) research on black women's

experiences of sexual violence in this camp. Intracategorical scholarship often uses case studies

as "the starting point for analysis of a new or invisible group" (Wright, 2016, p. 351). McCall

also notes that scholars may use anticategorical and intracategorical intersectionality in

conjunction with one another.

McCall's third approach is *intercategorical* intersectionality where "scholars

provisionally adopt existing analytical categories to document relationships of inequality among

social groups and changing configurations of inequality along multiple and conflicting

dimensions" (2005, p. 1773). McCall herself uses the intercategorical approach that attempts to

understand inequality relationships by examining "multigroup" subjects using "systematically

comparative" methods (p. 1786). She says this approach is the least known and utilized of the

three. In her own research, McCall examines macroinequities and wage inequalities among

groups in various U.S. cities and does not assume *a priori* what inequalities she might find. She

also does not focus on individuals' experiences of their identities, which is often a norm in

intersectional research (including in my own project). Instead, McCall analyzed population and

wage-gap data across group intersections. For example, she found that in Miami, there was class

and racial inequality (but more gender equality), whereas St. Louis had lower class inequality,

but higher racial and gender inequality. Wright (2016) also recently extended McCall's intercategorical approach using a multi-group qualitative method instead of McCall's quantitative wage data analysis of male occupations. McCall's three frames illustrate the breadth of intersectionality scholarship and scholars' use of identity categories from rejection to useful skepticism to strategic usage.

Beyond McCall's three frames, other research considers the challenges of strategically focusing on an identity category (or categories) while also considering identities as overlapping in practice. One approach comes from what postcolonial scholar Gayatri Spivak (1988) terms *strategic essentialism*, which is a discursive move practiced by subaltern group members to temporarily essentialize a shared identity in order to promote desirable political action or change. In other words, a group might treat transgender as a unified category or community by temporarily flattening diverse transgender experiences in order to come together to advance justice that serves the larger collective. I discussed this approach above in the transgender history section (see Feinberg, 1992/2006). This temporary strategic choice "avoids viewing social categories as either closed or static" (Kroløkke, 2009). Parker (2014) describes strategic essentialism in organizational communication research in "potential emancipatory projects [that] happen through the temporary bracketing of difference-as-accomplishment" (p. 625). She cites some of her own research on Black women executives as an example of how through temporarily bracketing Black women executives as a group—suspending acknowledgement of the communicative construction of their varied racial, gender, power, and occupational identities—she was able to understand new narratives that countered the whiteness of executive roles. As I previewed above, rhetoricians Flores and Moon (2002) also describe a connected

challenge called the racial paradox, the "tension between imagining identities beyond race while still recognizing the material reality of race as a fundamental organizing construct" (p. 181).

All of these scholars contend with using identity categories strategically for the purposes of critique, emancipation, and/or social justice. Relatedly, organizational communication researcher Harris (2016) describes how researchers may initially appear to make identity categories strategically distinct, but then undo those very categories through intersectional writing. Interdisciplinary researchers thus contend with identity categories both as imaginaries but also as structures creating material implications in people's lives. This includes Crenshaw's (1991) own intersectionality theorizing. There is certainly precedence, then, to utilize identity categories—while recognizing the communicative construction of those very categories—within intersectional research.

Lastly, past scholarship also has advocated for intersectional work that specifically examines the salient intersections that *research participants* themselves view as *meaningful* intersections for their identities and their organizational efforts. Chávez (2012) reminds us that communication research examining intersectionality does not mean that all possible identities need be in play at once. From an intercultural communication approach, she explains that intersectionality communication theorizing:

> does not demand that every identity needs to be addressed in every given analysis. As I heard the black feminist scholar Brenda J. Allen quip at a National Communication Association panel on intersectionality that Cindy L. Griffin and I organized in 2009, intersectionality is about attending to "differences that make a difference." There are certainly no rules to delineate which differences matter, but it seems vitally important for critical intercultural communication scholars to continue to develop theoretical,

methodological and pedagogical tools and resources to facilitate finding out, in vast and

varied local contexts. (pp. 31-32)

Chávez, building on Allen's personal communication, notes that in research studies and contexts,

scholars may highlight different intersections because they surface as more salient in fieldwork,

collective organizing, etc.

In other words, intersections may become significant because of researcher observations

and/or participants' communication about their identities. Focusing on what intersections are

most significant in a given context provides an alternative to what Bilge (2013) critiques as

intersectionality as merely "a shopping list of categories" (p. 420) where researchers simply

deploy exhaustive identities without digging into their significance. Thus, I focus on

intersectionality when it is applicable for participants' communication concerning the importance

of multiple identities impacting their lives and/or the organizations' collective efforts. I also

continue to center transgender identity because TGRC is a transgender-centered organization and

responding to transgender needs remains a central focus for their outreach.

I thus end this chapter with two final research questions about individuals' identities in

relationship to TGRC's organizational identities.

Research Question 2: How do TGRC staff and guests communicatively construct the

intersectional relationship between transgender identities and other salient identities?

Research Question 3: How do TGRC staff and guests communicatively construct the

relationship between TGRC's organizational identities and participants' transgender and

other salient identities?

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

My dissertation presents an ethnographic account of the Transgender Resource Center of New Mexico (TGRC). In this chapter, I introduce my methodological commitments to interpretive and engaged inquiry, provide further orientation to my dissertation site, detail my researcher role and data collection methods, and present my data analysis and writing approaches.

Interpretive and Engaged Organizational Communication Inquiry

My methodology is centered in the process and value of interpretive inquiry. Interpretivism allows researchers to trace the richness, complexities, and emic meanings of participants' communication. This dissertation uses an interpretive methodology to *attempt* to understand TGRC's organizational communication through inductive, partial, and emergent experiences with participants (see Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p. 9). I say "attempt" here because "interpretivists do not believe it is ever truly possible to see the world [completely] from their participants' eyes" (Tracy, 2013, p. 41). I position this dissertation more specifically as an ethnography due to my "long-term immersion" (Tracy, 2013, p. 29) for three years from August 2013 to July 2016.

My dissertation is also driven methodologically by a commitment to doing engaged scholarship. I follow Sarah Tracy's (2008) call for interpretive communication research that can be used for the "common good" and her claim that "qualitative data can be systematically gathered, organized, interpreted, analyzed, and communicated so as to address real world concerns" (2013, p. 4). I see this project as engaged in multiple ways: my personal focus, researcher roles, and research products. First, my decision to focus the largest project of my career thus far on a transgender outreach organization is inherently tied to my own personal

advocacy for transgender justice that preceded this project. Discrimination and violence against transgender people is a crucial "real world" and political concern. I have dedicated extensive time—both in my fieldwork and volunteering—to understand TGRC's organizational communication because I value the role of transgender-led outreach and justice for transgender people. Second, I see this project as engaged because of my researcher role. From this project's inception to its conclusion, I took an active role as a volunteer at TGRC, which meant giving time to the organization I was studying both independent of, and in conjunction with, formal research. During a farewell party given for another volunteer and me in July 2016, the Directors noted that I was the longest-running volunteer in the organization's history. In addition to my volunteer and researcher connection (something I explore further below), I see my researcher role as situated on Deetz's organizational communication engagement continuum (as cited in Dempsey & Barge, 2014). That continuum examines researcher engagement from disengaged ("conceptions coming mostly from the researcher's disciplinary community") to collaborative ("participatory action research projects and cogenerative theorizing") (p. 669). My researcher role with TGRC falls in the center of his continuum in what Deetz terms "applied," which focused on "problem-directed studies…[for] reaching conclusions for the external community" (p. 669). In other words, the project is not what Deetz would term collaborative because I am not fully co-researching with my participants; however, it specifically engages issues participants surface as important to their identity.

Third, my engaged scholarship methodology comes into play in my planned circulation of research projects that will come from this dissertation. My accounts of TGRC will allow me to showcase unique communication experiences of transgender participants, important organizational efforts for transgender empowerment at my site, and possibilities for future

change in other cities and regions. I view this research as tied to a national call for action from

the National Center of Transgender Equality via my ethnographic study of the Transgender

Resource Center of New Mexico.[3] I plan to develop findings from my project not only in a

standard dissertation format, but also in journal articles, a potential book, conference and

community presentations, reports and presentations to (and with) TGRC, and white papers and

resources prepared for broader audiences on organizational communication about transgender

outreach. I have already discussed partnering with participants to share stories of TGRC to

broad, interdisciplinary audiences in both writing and community forums. I return to these plans

in Chapter Seven. I now turn from my methodological overview to a description of my

dissertation fieldsite and do so by beginning with a vignette.

The Transgender Resource Center of New Mexico

* * *

Henry looks at me through his squinted eyes, the midday sun glaring into his face. I

notice how his beard glistens as I listen intently to him and study his nonverbal communication.

We are standing in the parking lot of the Albuquerque Homeless Space, a Christian facility

serving homeless people that runs an emergency winter shelter in the outskirts of the city limits

housed in a former prison. Henry and I are debriefing our meeting that ended minutes earlier,

which I orchestrated for us to investigate the limited emergency winter shelter options for

transgender people in Albuquerque given the cold winter nights and overcrowded sex-segregated

shelters. The city has a substantive number of transgender people who are homeless.

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[3] In fact, while in Washington, D.C. in November 2013 for the 99th annual meeting of the
National Communication Association, I met with Lisa Mottet, the Deputy Executive Director of
NCTE, explaining my planned dissertation. In personal communication, she explained the
importance of *stories behind the numbers* for national change initiatives for transgender people,
verifying the need for qualitative data to compliment the quantitative data spearheaded by NCTE
for both social change at local and national levels and academic and theoretical growth.

Transgender women of color are especially impacted by homelessness, although there are no

clear statistics on the local transgender homeless population because, as Henry said in our

meeting today, "people don't *even bother* to measure or count them." We linger in the parking

lot with sweat bubbling on our foreheads discussing the interconnectedness homelessness to

transphobia to racism to addiction to underemployment to street/survival work to criminalization

of transpeople.

I piggyback on Henry's talk about interconnections to ask him about the mission of the

Transgender Resource Center of New Mexico (TGRC), the fieldsite for this dissertation. TGRC

is a grassroots Albuquerque nonprofit organization that Henry co-founded in 2008 where he

currently serves as the co-Director.[4] TGRC's organizational mission particularly references

organizing for "all facets of transgender living." Given what Henry just detailed about structural

conditions leading to transgender homelessness and the overlap of transgender and racial

identities with homelessness, I propose a classic chicken and egg question: "What came first?

The mission for organizing for all facets of transgender living, or was it noticing all the facets of

transgender living and then engaging in outreach based on that?"

Henry hesitates and laughs, "The second. Well, the first too." He explains that "what

came first" was Brooks, the co-founder and co-Director, and him first meeting one another via

transgender male discussion boards online. They immediately bonded over their similar

harrowing experiences of what Brooks described as being an incredibly lonely, confusing, and

uncertain process of how to even begin to think of transitioning from female to male. In their

online discussion board communication, Henry first realized that his own problems were likely

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[4] Of note, this organizational name is *not* a pseudonym. TGRC leadership requested that in all
research that I conduct uses their "real" organizational name, and CU's IRB approved this
request. Although the organization uses "TGRCNM" for their acronym, I am abbreviating it for
reading ease to "TGRC" throughout, which participants also use colloquially.

systemic, and through communication with Brooks, Henry recognized that transmen did not have to transition alone without resources. Transitioning in Albuquerque could look, feel, and be experienced differently through support and shared knowledge, the two argued. As a TGRC institutional profile document details, "We have been in existence since 2008, when we put up our first website and started doing transgender cultural competency education." As they began to build resources for transitioning support for Brooks, the men realized that the resources and needs they both required mirrored other gaps and challenges for transgender people—namely transgender men—in Albuquerque and the greater state of New Mexico.

Henry and Brooks began passionately considering what a resource and justice organization could look like for addressing such outreach demands in the city and state. Two years later in 2010, in applying for the organizational incorporation IRS Form 1023 that would lead to their 2011 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizational status, the Directors were required to craft mission language to narrate their organizational goals. Henry tells me today in the parking lot that his mom actually helped them author the "all facets of transgender living lingo when she heard all the goals we had. She helped me craft that specific language for our mission."

Henry pauses in the story, his belt buckle shining in the sun against his dark-washed blue jeans, "But of course, what I *thought* was all facets of transgender living, was just the beginning. Brooks and I were, well we are, two *white* transgender *men*. We started with what we knew, what we were experiencing. It started online with people with Internet access, right? People with Internet access like us, namely white transgender men dealing with similar problems to us." Henry details how starting the Transgender Resource Center of New Mexico quickly dovetailed into a multitude of "Oh, wow!" moments of their own education around broader transgender needs, especially for poor and homeless transgender women of color who may experience

discrimination and violence differently from white transgender men. He expresses that he is

retrospectively "embarrassed" at his initial frames in beginning the organization, "but then you

learn. And I learn everyday." He says, "So it turns out, the mission came first. And luckily, we

could grow into it. As I began to see what *all facets of transgender living really is*, the mission, it

still applied. It just meant way, *way* more than we first imagined."

* * *

As my vignette previewed, the Transgender Resource Center of New Mexico (TGRC)[5]

has a relatively young organizational history, having formed nine years ago as a local response to

personal experiences of transphobia and needs for community resources and education in

Albuquerque, New Mexico. In this section, I first expand on the brief history of the center to

describe the physical locations of TGRC in order provide an important "narrative tour" (Tracy,

2013) of the organization. I then detail TGRC's organizational mission of outreach both at the

physical "drop-in" center and "out" in local communities in Albuquerque and across the state.

TGRC's Organizational Spaces

I first visited the initial location of TGRC's drop-in center in May 2013 after conducting

online research to identify a potential dissertation fieldsite. The building was located just south

of the historic Route 66 in the trendy Nob Hill area of Albuquerque, New Mexico, amidst neon

signs, shops, restaurants, and empty buildings. Their first building on Silver resembled a very

small strip left untouched since the 1970s. I walked in the front door, noticed it felt hot, and

heard someone rustling papers and walking in my direction. Mary, a white, middle-aged,

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[5] While TGRC is not a pseudonym, all individuals' names herein are pseudonyms. Given the
importance of naming for transgender people, participants chose their own pseudonyms unless
they asked me to assign one for them. Also to protect third party subjects, I assigned people or
organizations mentioned by participants pseudonyms and/or deleted their names entirely.

cisgender female staff member and social worker (who later told me that she was married to a white transgender man), greeted me. She immediately asked me to sign in on a clipboard, which she explained was important because state-based funding required staff members to count those who came in for services. Mary talked to me about volunteer opportunities, the work TGRC was currently doing to provide food, social support, and computer services at their drop-in location, their statewide transgender education training, and their eagerness to have people like me invested in transgender justice involved at the center.

TGRC's initial modest space on Silver had one small office for the Directors, and one rectangular computer room with four computers where staff and community members (called "guests") sat. Brochures and materials about transgender people and their needs were placed at the entry to the space, and there was also a small backroom with a couch for sleeping (used especially by those without housing for a safe sleeping space during drop-in hours), and a small common area room where staff held support groups. This office space was connected through a narrow hallway with two gender neutral small bathrooms to an HIV/AIDS queer organization that shared the building with TGRC. During my first visit, two transgender people of color who I now know well greeted me in the common area while they worked on creating collages from magazines onto poster boards. They told me how they loved to come to the center to create art, bond with one another, and receive resources. They also told me they would love to have me visit the space regularly. Partly due to these positive interactions, I experienced an immediate excitement to learn more about TGRC, and it rose to the top of my list of organizations I toured and researched as dissertation sites.

Later in September 2013, I first met with Director Henry to learn more about volunteering (which I will detail below) and to discuss possibilities of conducting research about

the organization. From the beginning, Henry supported my involvement with TGRC. He was especially eager for me to understand, recognize, and give feedback about their unique organizational efforts as one of the only transgender-centered outreach organizations in the United States. I wanted to learn about TGRC's organizational communication and continue my previous research and advocacy for transgender identities initiated in Boulder, Colorado. After choosing to research TGRC, I was thus expecting to spend a lot of time over the next years in this location.

Yet just as I began my fieldwork in August 2013, Henry and Brooks decided that what they termed the "crappy shoebox" Silver location was no longer serving organizational needs, especially given their landlord's refusal to provide accommodations they had paid for in rent (like air conditioning). TGRC was also experiencing growing demands that far overextended their space or sharing of a small building with another organization. Apropos of these needs, and the serendipitous availability of a space nearby where they once held support groups, the Directors decided to move TGRC's drop-in center in September 2013. Following the circulation of a "help TGRC move" email and Facebook requests, volunteers came in droves to clean the old space, to pack, move, and unpack boxes and furniture, and to paint the walls of an old white stucco house less than one mile away from the first location.

Bordering the division between commercial and residential buildings, the new location on Morningside resembled any other 1950s Nob Hill casita from its exterior. However, the casita was also marked with subtle organizational artifacts recognizable to those "in the know." These included a blue and pink transgender flag and an enormous black-and-white "TGRC" wooden sign posted above the door with a gender nonconforming symbol. The Morningside casita—technically a three-bedroom home with its corridor doors removed—offered what participants

describe as a "homey" feel. After entering through a small, enclosed screened-in patio with bars on the windows, there were tables with pamphlets and information. Opening an interior door off this tiny patio revealed a family room with a sooty, non-functioning wood-burning fireplace, with plush chairs placed in front of it. Community awards and a giant photo canvas of the original TGRC location sat above the mantel. Front-desk staff members and guests joined together in conversation regularly in what they called the "heart of the center." The casita also featured a computer room, a quiet room for sleeping, two offices (one for the Directors and a catch-all office for counseling, harm reduction needle exchange, job outreach, and peer support). Other features included: a bathroom with a tub/shower combination and one toilet, an enclosed backyard, and a back garage with a clothing donation closet. There was also a washer and dryer (which only functioned for a few months), and a large storage space with boxes and piles of miscellaneous items that resembled a junk drawer in someone's home.

Despite a general affection for the Morningside casita from staff members and guests alike, troubles with TGRC's new landlord began to mount, including his refusal to fix plumbing, a power outage in the garage, and a non-functioning stove in the kitchen. Henry and Brooks began contemplating a third possible move for TGRC's physical space. While there were some anxieties around moving locations again so quickly, the casita was often crowded and remained unrepaired by the landlord. The co-Directors attributed the landlord challenges to a shady business ethic and to transphobia. For example, the landlord complained to the co-Directors about homeless guests and sex workers (or "street people" and "hookers" in the landlords' words) frequenting TGRC for services. The landlord even accused Henry and Brooks of being pimps of the transgender women of color sex workers who came for services at TGRC. Henry laughed from deep in his belly to me as he and Brooks recounted the landlord's accusations, "I

would *love* to see Brooks and me *try* to get the girls' money, honey. And if I were a pimp, I would sure hope my car was nicer, and we could afford to pay Brooks' and my full salaries."

Humor aside, the Directors had an opportunity to investigate a move down the street about a mile east to a new location on Jackson. Attached to the office of a BDSM phone-sex company, the new potential location was a fully divided, functional, stand-alone, and clean 1970s office space. In January 2015, Brooks sent out a "welcome home" email to staff and posted changes to Facebook, Twitter, and hardcopy flyers on Morningside house notifying everyone of the move. With these communications, TGRC officially found its third and current home called the Jackson location. Participants expressed both excitement (like more space for multiple-needs and a professional vibe) and trade-offs in this move, including the loss of a shower, laundry space, and the "home" like quality. Since moving to the third location, the BDSM company relocated, and TGRC now occupies "both sides" of the building, doubling its original size.

Today guests can enter the Transgender Resource Center of New Mexico today through a small discrete door on the side of a rectangular corner building in Nob Hill just north of Route 66 on Jackson Street. The current location is the closest location to the San Mateo and Central corridor of the three TGRC locations. This area offers a main public bus route, commercial spaces near single-family homes, a heavily policed area, and the beginning of a street where sex work and drug economies prosper. When arriving at the center, guests are likely to see people congregating on the pebbled rocks out front chatting, smoking cigarettes, and soaking up New Mexico sunshine. Opening the door leads into TGRC's first true reception desk, similar to a modest medical office with professionally printed green, yellow, and blue posters of the TGRC Guiding Principles (or rules) posted above the desk. TGRC's three Guiding Principles are:

(1) *Respect Each Other*: Everyone is welcome. Respect people's differences and identities. Be mindful about music volume and conversation volume.; (2) *Respect the Staff*: The staff is responsible for ensuring a welcoming space for everyone. Please be considerate if you are asked to change a behavior or leave for the day. While we serve community members who may have used before arriving to the center, active use of drugs or alcohol on the premises is not permitted.; and (3) *Respect the Space:* Clean up after yourself. Return items to where they belong. All guests are expected to follow the guidelines at all times. If these guiding principles are not followed, staff may ask you to leave for the day. If this happens it is important to realize that we care about you and that you are welcome to return to TGRC the next day.

A volunteer staff member sits at the front desk underneath these rules to direct guests to needed services. The entry room also features: a computer used to sign guests in, and this is the first time the sign-in process has been digitized rather than having a volunteer enter all the visitor information from hand-written sign-ins on clipboards into TGRC and state databases. All visitors are asked to place their belongings in lockers in the entry room to decrease theft, deter on-site drug and alcohol use, and to provide a private personal space. A large resource table and standing rack tower nearby feature over one hundred items of information and resources. Topics and genres include: upcoming events, listings of supportive trans-friendly businesses, churches, medical providers, and arts and performance events such as film festivals or drag shows. The reception room also hosts a coffee pot, a standing dispenser for hot and cold water, and snacks.

Since early 2016 when TGRC acquired both sides of the building, the center has been divided into two spaces: (1) a space open to all and (2) a trans-only space. First, the open-to-all side hosts a series of small offices for TGRC programs, some of which are funded by the State of

New Mexico and the Department of Health. The first space is a new waiting room (it was once a

computer lab) for people who come to TGRC to access their Harm Reduction Program (or HRP),

involving needle exchange connected to both intravenous drugs and hormones. The waiting

room has a large donated flat screen TV, and a DVD player to play movies for those waiting for

exchange. When TGRC moved to this building, they gained a dedicated HRP space for the first

time in the organization's history. Marie—a white, cisgender, bisexual volunteer social worker

intern—described this change as influencing how, "TGRC is quickly becoming the fastest

growing harm reduction site in the city." This development created interesting communication

tensions among transgender and largely cisgender needle users to be treated in Chapters Six and

Seven.[6]

Down the hall, there is also a small office, and guests use this space for a variety of things

including: counseling, HIV/AIDS testing, AccuDetox, healthcare outreach, and other secluded

small group meetings, such as an occasional nail salon hosted by an indigenous transgender

woman. Across the hall from this office is a storage closet with t-shirts, water bottles, and an

assortment of gender nonconforming pins that TGRC sells for small scale fundraising and

branding. On the right, there is a large multiple-purpose space with a few mismatched chairs, a

large sofa, and unfolded metal chairs stacked the back wall. This room now hosts multiple types

of events, including: craft work, private conversations, safe sex group training, etc. Sometimes

this room functions almost solely as a space where people who are on drugs, under the influence

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[6] Of note, during the final two weeks of my research in July 2016, Henry and Brooks began restricting access for the harm reduction guests to the community rooms and kitchen on the "open to all" side. This was largely attributed to tensions displayed between cisgender and transgender guests, limited summer volunteering staffing, and the increase concerns about feared drug use at TGRC (e.g., worries that HRP guests would get clean needles and try to use the bathrooms as safe injection sites). Thus, the former open-to-all side became only an open waiting room with snacks and TV for harm reduction guests as I exited the fieldsite. I will explore this further in Chapter Six.

of alcohol, and/or suffering from sleep exhaustion from sleeping on the streets congregate and "crash" here in the dark. TGRC has always held a space for "crashing" during my research. As the TGRC rules I listed above previewed, while TGRC has rules against active use of drugs and alcohol in the space, staff members do not turn away people who may have used before arriving to the center—a tolerance that separates TGRC from other Albuquerque centers.

At the end of the hallway on the left, there is a kitchen table space and sink for dirty dishes, although no dishwasher. Food is provided when it is available (especially packaged items like granola bars or Ramen noodles), and guests do dishes, although sometimes dishes stack up and fall to staff responsibilities. Two gender-neutral bathrooms are available with a total of four stalls and two urinals, no shower, no laundry, and large "getting ready" spaces with multiple mirrors.

Going back up to the front reception area, turning right leads to the "trans-only side" of TGRC. This decision to create a "trans-only" space came after participants complained that the burgeoning Harm Reduction Program was taking away the trans-specific space of TGRC (treated in Chapter Six). Directors Henry and Brooks have a private office located by the entry to the trans-only side where they hold meetings almost daily with community members, potential funders, guests in need, and organizers from other local and statewide organizations. Opening the next door reveals the heart of the center: the main living room area. Donors have provided comfortable leather reclining couches, a table, a large TV, and rugs to make the space feel "homey" like the Morningside casita did despite the divided office space layout. Participants often hang out here to talk, watch Netflix, listen to music, sleep, and eat. Against the wall is a large-built in bookshelf of a lending library sorted by categories like transfeminine, race, and fiction.

Behind the living room is a second staff desk. Staff members at this desk help facilitate communication on the trans-only side and ensure that only transgender and gender nonconforming people (and 1-2 family or friend cisgender visitors) come to this side of the building. There is a second set of lockers here where staff lock up items. In the large open space behind the living room, there are areas with art supplies, magazines, condoms, lube, snacks, a refrigerator, and a community table. Donated art on the wall features local nature pictures and inspirational femme quotes (e.g., She believed she could, so she did; Be Your Own Kind of Beautiful). There are also buckets of donated clothing, shoes, and beauty supplies that come in for guests of the center.

Down the hall, people congregate to check emails, listen to music, apply for jobs, and gossip in the tiny computer room; it features three donated Dell computers, and guests can use headsets to listen to music. Across from the computer room are two other storage rooms: one for guests' belongings who are currently homeless so they can store their valuables and the other for food and supplies to run the center. These rooms make up the physical center outreach space of TGRC's drop-in center.

TGRC's Organizational Mission

With its third location on Jackson Street and larger outreach activities outside of the organizational "site," TGRC members continue to support their community members' growing needs, including:

> snacks, a place to rest, someone to talk to, and a safe place to be yourself; computer usage and training; a lending library; support groups; free anonymous HIV testing; youth programming; an open donation closet for guests who need clothes, binders and other items; case management; help, information and referrals on name change, medical care

and more for the transgender and gender variant people of New Mexico and their loved

ones. TGRC also engages the communities with social events and partners with many

organizations and agencies all around the state to make New Mexico a better place for us.

We provide free counseling with volunteer therapists, six hours per week of employment

search assistance, and we intend to be developing even more resources around housing

and employment in the next year. (TGRC, "About Us," 2015)

TGRC staff members also attempt to address a breadth of goals for transgender and

gender non-conforming people's work-life in the state of New Mexico, which is a tall order. This

work takes place through volunteers (many of whom work on specific events or needs outside of

the drop-in center), allied partner organizations, governmental and nonprofit funding, and a small

(mostly unpaid volunteer or intern) drop-in staff (ranging from 4-12 members during my

research). From Monday-Saturday from 1-6 PM, the outreach center physical location continues

to be open to all transgender and gender non-conforming people, their families, friends, and

those in support of these groups. The Harm Reduction Program now runs Monday-Saturday from

1-5 PM.

TGRC events, individual and group needs, and community outreach efforts far exceed

drop-in hours. For example, TGRC offers the following bimonthly support groups in the

evenings from 7-9 PM: Rainbow Friends (for "everyone"—for all trans people and family

members, friends, and allies), Partners of Trans and Gender Variant Persons, Transfeminine

(MtF), Transmasculine (FtM), Youth Group (ages 25 and under), Kids' Playgroup and Parents'

Support (children ages 12 and under and their parents), and a newer community-created and led

Non-Binary Group.

TGRC's drop-in center and support groups are important core efforts for the organization. However, TGRC can be thought of as simultaneously having a physical outreach center and as a "site-less" community collective, as staff members are often responding to different arising and evolving needs (e.g., gender neutral bathroom reform policy in Santa Fe, a transgender justice march, police training in Farmington). Staff members participate in varied community-wide outreach, including—but not limited to—HIV/AIDS testing events, Pride parades and tabling, and community activism in solidarity with other collectives (i.e., city council meetings for responsible speech coalitions, partnering with the university's LGBTQ Center, protests with the Red Nation—organizers for social justice for the large New Mexico indigenous populations and against stolen land and ongoing colonization). Since 2008, the Directors and what Henry calls his "hand-selected" speaker's bureau have offered over 500 "Trans 101" trainings to businesses, schools, governmental agencies, and other collectives across the state. Typically the trainings detail information about transgender people, ethics, and conduct Q&A in order to increase education. An educational focus is meant to decrease cisgender violence (including: fear of the unknown, transphobia, and physical assault) and to improve future communication among transgender and cisgender people. Members of TGRC's Board, the Directors, and the speaker's bureau also meet with different groups for rallying around transgender-based justice issues. From this overview of the fieldsite spaces, artifacts, and practices of TGRC's organizational communication, I now move into recounting my data collection.

Data Collection

In this section, I first outline my volunteer role. I then review my ethnographic methods of participant observation, interviews, document and artifact analysis, and creative focus groups.

My Volunteer Role

In August 2013, I began volunteering, hanging out, and participating in formal and informal events at and with TGRC in Albuquerque, NM. As I briefly mentioned above, before beginning my volunteering at TGRC's second location, I met with Director Henry at the first location to seek access to the organization as a potential research site. Before this initial meeting, I had trouble reaching Henry over email—a common challenge for him given his many demands that he and others have described in my research. I felt nervous at first about seeming "radio silence" from Henry and projected the intent of his silence, such as questioning, "Is he put off by my inquiry?"

One afternoon in August 2013, my local colleague and friend, Rachel, mentioned that I might have a chance to meet Henry at an even happening that very night in town. Rachel told me that Albuquerque's Board of Education would be hearing community members' arguments for allowing youth to use bathrooms of their preferred gender in K-12 schools. I thus attended this public meeting as my first part of data collection. After this meeting, I was able to introduce myself to Henry upon recognizing his face from TGRC's website bio. He was eager to chat, excited that I attended the meeting supporting transgender and gender nonconforming youth in Albuquerque, and told me he was planning on returning my email over the weekend. We scheduled a meeting in that moment, and we were able to meet at TGRC's first location within a few weeks.

When I arrived to meet Henry, he invited me into his cramped office where he was meeting with Mariah, a TGRC board member and a Native transgender woman active in public health organizing. Henry asked me what generated my interests in the Transgender Resource Center of New Mexico and transgender justice issues overall, and Mariah listened intently as I

spoke. I explained my past experience volunteering at and coordinating CU Boulder's

TRANSforming Gender Symposium with Dr. Scarlet Bowen. I detailed my investment in

making changes to injustices presented in the National Center for Transgender Equity's report as

a cisgender person working in solidarity with transgender people. I also presented my training as

an organizational communication and feminist scholar and teacher. We talked about TGRC

needs, my skills, and my training and growing knowledge as a SOFFA (Significant Other,

Family, Friend, and/or Allies of transgender people). Both Henry and Mariah smiled as I talked

and seemed excited about developing a volunteer and research partnership with me. Mariah soon

departed for another meeting.

Henry and I continued to talk, and he listed many areas where he could see my skills

being an asset to TGRC. These included: volunteer coordinating ("We have lots of interested

people but just no great way to coordinate them, assess their skills, plan them, or organize them,"

he told me), organizing resources for a database, staffing the drop-in center, and offering résumé

and job search assistance. We reviewed opportunities for my volunteer involvement with TGRC

to both contribute to their mission and to share my organizational communication training.

At this stage, I desired a hands-on, in-person role to facilitate participant observation

(rather than a behind-the-scenes volunteer coordinator). Conveniently, the current job search

volunteer, Joel, was transitioning into a new role as a New Mexico HIV/AIDS grant for

transgender and Native people. As a result, Henry and I both saw a hole that I could fill in taking

over the job search volunteer position. I subsequently met with Joel (who uses the pronouns

they/them/theirs)[7] to learn about their volunteer history and approach before I began volunteering

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[7] Joel is one of multiple participants who use they/them/their pronouns instead of gender binary pronouns like he or she. Despite potential initial grammatical confusion, I use they/them/their pronouns when participants identified those pronouns as appropriate for their gender identities.

in October 2013. They talked to me about the importance of being patient until guests trusted my role and involvement in the center, holding regular and consistent hours, and recognizing that many (but not all) of the people needing job support experienced needs outside of "traditional" professional white-collar communication approaches. Guests' challenges included: no (or no legal) job history, criminal records, limited literacy, no high school degrees or GEDs, etc. I used Joel's expert knowledge to shape my initial volunteering approach, and later I developed the position further into what I called a "Work Outreach Coordinator."

My Work Outreach Coordinator volunteer position consisted of providing employment-based outreach and coaching to guests visiting TGRC. This included holding sessions for an average of three hours a week at the center for about 12 regular guests and also assisting about 70 guests who only visited me once or twice. I also often worked 1-3 hours a week at home in this role. I helped to: build résumés and cover letters, assist with job searches, plan new job trajectories, offer informal feedback, and provide work-life and general informal counseling. I was also frequently asked to engage in "vetting" an organization before participants would apply to positions (i.e., to be sure organizations were trans-inclusive employers), and to coordinate Trans-101 training as needed for those organizations. I also helped to develop a job search and resource database with transgender-friendly organizations in the state of New Mexico. I later trained another volunteer to hold work outreach hours, and she took over the coordinator position my last six months of research. During those months, I limited my volunteering to bimonthly shifts because of recovery from a surgery that I had. My volunteer role also included general staffing, facilitation of Rainbow Friends Support Group meetings, and opening or closing the drop-in center when coverage was limited.

During my volunteering, I was also very open about my dissertation research with members of the organization (both with staff and guests), and people were largely excited to participate in my research. Some immediately consented to participate via participant observation, and others specifically asked to join the study in semi-structured interviews. Guests and staff's interest or disinterest in my study did not shape my volunteering commitments; in other words, I volunteered and worked one-on-one with participants who both wanted to be in my study and those who did not. I often did not bring up my research project until I had met someone multiple times, unless our interaction occurred during my fieldwork at a special event.

My study was approved by the University of Colorado IRB (protocol # 14-0063) in May 2014 with approval to count all prior collected notes as retroactive data with permission from participants, which is a process I undertook with positive feedback from participants. From these details of my preliminary research, I now introduce my data collection methods, which include: (1) participant observation, (2) interviews, (3) document and artifact analysis, and (4) creative focus groups.

Participant Observation

Participant observation was a central method for my research to understand organizational and transgender identities of TGRC participants. As Lindlof and Taylor (2011) detail, participation observation helps researchers to "gain insight into the obligations, constraints, motivations, and emotions that [organizational] members experience as they complete their everyday activities" (p. 3). I conducted participant observation at/with TGRC as a participant-as-observer, where "*observing* in this role flows from the perspective of *participating*" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p. 146). Tracy (2013) calls this being a "play participant" where members of the community are fully aware of the researcher while also

recognizing that the researcher will participate in the community and will be "able to *feel* along with participants" (p. 109).

During my three years of fieldwork and volunteering at TGRC, my research participant identities evolved. As a feminist qualitative scholar and as a white, cisgender woman with housing and a graduate degree, I quickly recognized the importance of preliminary community building work before conducting interviews or doing even more regular participant observation at TGRC. I spent much of my first year of fieldwork from August 2013 to August 2014 learning about TGRC, about the unique context of Albuquerque, and its diverse transgender community. I recognized complexities of their organizational outreach that differed from my volunteer work in Boulder, CO (a predominantly white and affluent college campus) to working with TGRC guests, many of whom experienced racism, colonization, poverty, homelessness, addiction, and/or survival sex work. Additionally, through my Women and Gender Studies certificate at the University of Colorado Boulder, I recognized that transgender people have had extreme experiences of being stigmatized in research by cisgender researchers (see critiques by Butler, 2001; Martin & Meezan, 2003; Bettinger, 2010), although recent queer and transgender studies research offers thoughtful and respectful research lenses for qualitative researchers. I was also cautious of my privilege and power in my own discipline, as largely white cisgender scholars are theorizing transgender communication studies (Spencer, 2015). Thus, developing an exhaustive rapport in this community was key before beginning any social science research (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). In Chapter Seven, I return to my own identities and privilege in relationship to my participants and how this impacted my research.

Over time, I followed the practice of participant-as-observer task to "try to make ourselves [as researchers] increasingly useful to the group" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p. 147).

As my project became more engaged with the organizational needs, I became a bigger part of the

TGRC community over time. Given my volunteer roles, my varied expertise, and even

friendships with some participants, my participant-as-observer role evolved. Other organizational

communication approaches use a breadth of terms to describe an engaged scholar and more

extensive participant role, including applied organizational and work-life communication

research (Buzzanell, Sterk, & Turner, 2004), care-based fieldwork (Candrian & Fortney, 2014),

and pragmatic fieldwork (Huffman, 2013). Dempsey and Barge (2014) also present three major

tensions for engaged organizational communication research: (1) distance/empathy, (2)

representation/intervention, and (3) scholar/practitioner. I worked to manage these tensions,

which I also revisit in Chapter Seven. I used what Tracy (2013) describes as "consistent critical

reflection through fieldnote writing [that] provides analytic distance and helps to ensure that

researchers do not become so fully acculturated that they are unable to detect the context's

values, behaviors, and customs" (p. 109).

In addition to weekly work outreach volunteering observation, I conducted further

participant observation *at* TGRC and out in the community *with* members of TGRC. As I

explained above, the center walls do not contain the organization as a collective, so my research

was both grounded at the center and outside of it. Participant observation *at* TGRC included

observations of: volunteer hours at the center focused on work outreach (e.g., exploring my role

in creating work outreach with the participants), and also general "hanging out" at the center

associated with support groups, board and staff meetings, activities, events, etc. Participant

observation *with* TGRC included traveling throughout Albuquerque to meet staff and community

members at various events where TGRC works alongside other collectives. These events

included: Trans-101 trainings at local organizations, drag shows at local bars, support groups,

marches, meetings, events, local governance events, and more. This part of my fieldwork follows what Czarniawska (2007) calls field research "on the move" (p. 20).

In conducting participant observation, I first undertook initial rapport building with no notes in the beginning months of my observation before moving onto scratch notes (on my laptop or by hand) and then to more formal fieldnotes and memos later in my process. These raw records (Tracy, 2013) are fresh notes taken at the time of observation but that are often taken to not be too obtrusive to the group. From these notes, I composed more formal fieldnotes with thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973) and in-process analysis writing (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011), which I detail further below under data analysis. I took scratch notes only after obtaining consent from participants during volunteer sessions or other forms of participant observation. At large public events or meetings, I asked presenters and/or TGRC staff to allow me time at the beginning of a session to announce my observation and show and provide copies of my participant observation script approved by IRB. I detailed my study, the confidential nature of my notes, and how participation was voluntary. I allowed participants who wanted to "opt out" of being included in my notes to let me know before, during, or after events. Over the course of my research, I conducted 415 hours of participant observation.

Interviews

Additionally, I interviewed TGRC staff and guests to understand transgender and organizational identities in my fieldsite. I sought participants' rich experiences and openness while simultaneously recognizing my power in guiding our interview conversations (see Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008). I followed Alvesson's (2003) framing of organizational interviews as a reflexive pragmatic process. He specifically challenges the dominant constructions of interviews in organizational research as either an instrument or as a human encounter. Specifically,

Alvesson calls for engaging interviews via "conscious and consistent efforts to view the subject matter from different angles and avoid or strongly a priori privilege a single, favored angle and vocabulary" (p. 25). I echo Alvesson's goals to both remain reflexive about interviewing by remaining fluid in my inquiry but also recognizing that pragmatically data analysis must eventually occur for some theoretical output and practical implications. Thus, I thus relied on his call for theorizing research interviews as an interplay between the role of language, the interviewee, and the communication encounter of researcher/interviewee (p. 31).

For this dissertation, I utilized two kinds of interviews: (1) ethnographic interviews, or chance conversations, and (2) semi-structured interviews. During my participant observation, I collected numerous ethnographic interviews—or those that occurred "in the midst if some other social action, often while the sights and sounds that triggered the question are still fresh in the minds of the researcher and the participants" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p. 176). The vignette I shared in this chapter of my conversation with Henry at the Albuquerque Homeless Space is an example of an ethnographic interview. Such informal, in-the-moment interviews sometimes may also be a form of what Blaufuss (2007) terms a "chance conversation." Blaufuss particularly invites researcher reflection on the ethics of such conversations when researchers have been conducting ethnographic fieldwork for a prolonged time. Concentrating on the ethics of chance conversations is key because as the relationship of researcher to acquaintance to friend becomes muddier; participants may forget about the underlying research intent of the researcher's role.

Since chance encounters for ethnographic interviews during participation observation or informal events happened often in my ethnography, I began a practice I what I call "frequently re-marking my researcher status." This involved me formally asking if I could use a conversation confidentially in my project even after a participant had provided consent to participate in my

research. In order to err on the side of caution, I often asked again *and again* if someone wanted to participate in my research, if a particular topic could be included, or if I could take notes on our conversation. In such conversations when participants consented to including a story in my research, I incorporated our ethnographic interviews them into my fieldnotes rather than take out a recorder to later transcribe.

Toward the conclusion of my extensive time in the field, I conducted a second type of interview: semi-structured interviews (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011) with TGRC staff, Board Members, and those who work with and are served by TGRC. For these interviews, I developed an interview guide that "consists of a list of topics and questions that can be asked in different ways for different participants" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p. 200). In other words, I did not seek to have completely identical interviews with participants, but instead, rich conversations that were guided by my questions and tailored to their unique experiences and their responses. My interview guide is included in Appendix A. Interviews were open-ended since additional questions emerged within interviews. I also viewed interviews as moments to document the fleeting, reflexive, conflicting communication about organizational and transgender identities. I used the guide as a helpful sketch rather than as a series of finite, fixed, or packaged questions to help me arrive at a singular, objective "Truth" based on "triangulating" my interviewees' comments.

For semi-structured interviews, I met with participants in private, quiet locations, almost always in all-purpose office at the center on the "trans-only" side. This room was already comfortable to me, as I also used it to hold work outreach hours, and to participants as they often interacted with me as a staff member or with other staff in this space. My interviews took place while the drop-in center was open, during evenings, during early mornings, and during

weekends. I also met participants off-site upon request. I recorded these semi-structured interviews with a small Olympus digital recorder. I conducted 36 interviews totaling in 64 hours of interview recordings. The average interview lasted 1 hour and 46 minutes. The shortest interview was 56 minutes, and the longest was 2 hours and 48 minutes.

From the audio recordings, I proceeded to transcribe interviews and de-identify the transcripts. In addition to transcribing interviews myself, I used confidential transcription services. To support some of these transcription costs, I utilized funding from CU's Department of Communication to transcribe a pilot interview ($88) and the Center for Advancement of Research and Teaching in the Social Sciences (CARTSS) for key participant interviews ($1000).

Document and Artifact Analysis

Third, I collected limited documents and artifacts by and about TGRC. I say "limited" because TGRC only recently began to use more written and visual communication with staff members, such as a training manual. Examples of documents included: news stories, emails sent by directors of the organization to the general public and staff, rules/guidelines documents, and schedules. Here, I follow Lindlof and Taylor's (2011) view that, "communication events are encoded and preserved as documents," and that organizers use documents to communicate with their various audiences. I photographed, copied, and/or collected these documents physically and digitally for analysis. By artifacts, I mean "objects such as technological equipment, toys, furniture, or artwork" (Tracy, 2013, p. 83). I included accounts of artifacts throughout my fieldnotes, and I also saved digital images of artifacts. Examples of artifacts included: photos I took at events and the organizational space, photos and memes other posted to public Facebook pages, flyers, memes, etc. Of note, I excluded any photograph that shows identifying images of any participant in order to protect participants' confidentiality.

Creative Focus Groups

Fourth and finally, during summer 2016, I developed a new method to collect data with TGRC participants shortly before my exit from the fieldsite. I call this method a "creative focus group." My creative focus groups invited participants to create individual pieces of art (collage and/or drawing) about who TGRC is as an organization. Then, I conducted focus group interviews with participants about the art they created, its meaning for them, and the benefits and limitations of this approach to communicating about TGRC's organizational identity.

Developing a creative focus group became an important artistic data collection approach to supplement my "traditional" qualitative research methods like participant observation and interviews (see Ellingson, 2009). I added this new method to my IRB protocol via an addendum, and CU's IRB approved this addition in June 2016. Creative focus groups allowed me to examine participants' artistic representations of TGRC and to access information about organizational and transgender identity in this project differently. Adding an arts-based approach enriches the rigor and creativity of this study to compare these findings with other data collected.

Adding creative focus groups also specifically made sense for TGRC participants for three reasons. First, collage and art are processes increasingly used by qualitative researchers to access significant dimensions of lived experience and social action (e.g., imagistic, impressionistic, etc.) that are typically neglected or excluded by linguistic and rational methodologies (see Knowles & Cole, 2008). Collage as a method is specifically cutting and pasting magazine images into a new image a participant makes, which allows using "found images from popular magazines as a reflective process, as an elicitation for thinking, writing, and/or discussion, and as a conceptualizing approach" (Butler-Kisber, 2010, p. 102). Creative drawing allows for unique expression of participants' perspectives and has been used in prior

organizational communication research to complement individual semi-structured interviews (Tracy, Lutgen-Sandvik, & Alberts, 2006; Tracy & Malvini Redden, 2016). Davison, McLean, and Warren (2012) term methods like my own in organizational qualitative studies "visual elicitation."

Second, members of TGRC already utilized creative methods to express themselves and reflect on their experiences in individual and group activities. TGRC provided different artistic avenues during my time volunteering and observing at the center, including: making signs for marches, coloring contests, collages, photos, puzzles, etc. As I detailed above, my very first exposure to TGRC on my first tour of the organization in May 2013 included meeting participants who were collaging together. Third, participants engaged one another frequently in confidential support groups, and participants who may not have felt comfortable with an individual semi-structured interview with me could feel more comfortable to participate and share their voices and experiences of TGRC via an artistic session and focus group interview. Artistic expression also can be "very helpful in emotionally difficult situations" (Tracy & Malvini Redden, 2016, p. 243), such as participants' recounting experiences of discrimination connected to their identities, and for participants to potentially represent organizational experiences "with less anxiety" (Vince & Broussine, 1996, p. 17) than formal interviews. Overall, including these creative focus groups thus harnessed local ways of knowing I was not able to access with other forms of data collection.

To prepare for the creative focus groups, I used a collection of popular fashion magazines I collected for teaching at a local community college, such as *Marie Claire* and *In Style.* I recognized the specific white femininity of these magazines, and so I was delighted to use numerous other magazines brought in by a donor to the center, including *Simple Life, Oprah,*

Men's Health, National Geographic, Time, and *Metro.* I applied for a grant to support this project and buy even more magazines that might appeal to my participants, like *New Mexico, First American Art*, *Ebony,* or *Latina*, but the grant was not funded. The limitations of the magazines for collage are something I invited each focus group to discuss with me. In addition to magazines, I purchased glue, scissors, markers, colored pencils, and construction paper for their art. TGRC reimbursed me for the money I spent on supplies, which I then left with the center after the project for future art projects.

I created an interview guide (see Appendix B) for my creative focus group method that used open-ended questions. I chose to conduct these creative art projects in groups because of the value of focus group "chaining," where "each person's turn of the conversation links to, or tumbles out of, the topics and expressions that came before it" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p. 183). This method began with an artistic session with participants working individually to collage and/or draw their responses to prompts one hour. During this time, I went around to participants to discuss their TGRC experiences and to build rapport if I just met the participant for the first time. I then facilitated a focus group interview for 45 minutes to 1 hour discussing the art, participants' decisions about creating their art, and their reactions to the process. Using a focus group interview allowed me to observe participants "engaged in collectively constructing a narrative about a topic" (Belzile & Öberg, 2012, p. 462). I audio recorded both the informal creative session conversation and interviews with my audio recorder. I also collected a sheet of paper about participants' initial reactions to the process (a form of quiet free-writing before our discussion) and information about their identity demographics if they chose to disclose them.

I conducted five creative focus groups in July 2016. Creative focus groups brought familiar and new participants to my project. This method was especially helpful to include

participants that attend confidential biweekly support groups that I do not know and could have never met because of the "closed" support groups spaces that I could access due to my gender identity (e.g., Transmasculine, Transfeminine, Non-binary). I only had been able to access the Rainbow Friends support group before as a participant and a group facilitator. In doing so, I never took fieldnotes because support groups follow a "Las Vegas rule"—what happens in support group stays in support group—and I wanted to honor that rule in my research. Both my gender identity and the Las Vegas rule prevented me from conducting research with the support groups before my creative focus groups. Yet with my new method, I was given regularly scheduled support group time with the permission and consent of group members to conduct creative focus groups with the: (1) Rainbow Friends, (2) Transfeminine, (3) Transmasculine, and (4) Nonbinary support groups. I also conducted a creative focus group during drop-in hours, which included predominantly indigenous transwomen many of whom I had not been able to interview one-on-one because of challenges with their unpredictable schedules. My creative focus groups resulted in 9 hours and 20 minutes of audio recordings to transcribe. Creative focus groups were an average of one hour and 52 minutes. The shortest was one hour and 39 minutes. The longest was two hours and 25 minutes.

A part of my method was also to allow participants to keep their art and/or give it to TGRC. All but two participants left the art to TGRC for public display. With the permission of participants, I took photographs of their collages and/or drawings for the study so I could analyze their pictures alongside other data from these sessions. On my final day of research at TGRC, TGRC guests helped me hang all of the creative focus group art in the community room to make a collage of the collages about TGRC's identity (see Figure 3.1, below). From this discussion of data collection, I now turn to my data analysis and writing approaches.

Figure 3.1: Collage of Creative Focus Group Collages, July 29, 2016

Data Analysis and Writing

The process of data analysis asks the researcher to consider: "What does it mean? Or to frame the question in a way that reflects the real nature of the struggle (and potential triumph): What sense can I make of it?" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p. 241). Qualitative researchers utilize analysis processes throughout data collection, and my project is no exception. As Lindlof and Taylor (2011) suggest, "Data analysis often begins informally at the very moment that fieldnotes, interview transcripts, and material culture or document notes are created. As the researcher is busy making this descriptive record, he or she is also reflecting on these past events and discourses" (p. 244). Following Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995), Lindlof and Taylor (2011) present three forms of in-process writing that are the beginning of data analysis: asides, commentary, and in-process memos. Asides are brief notes about an interaction that a researcher is in the process of documenting, and commentary includes longer reflection about interactions

and may even connect to topics across fieldnotes or transcripts (p. 244). In-process memos are "sustained analytic writing and require a more extended time-out from actively composing fieldnotes" (Emerson et al., 1995, p. 103). As Lindlof and Taylor detail, "a memo usually develops a theme or issue from several incidents" (2011, p. 246). My data collection utilized all three types of in-process analysis.

While my analysis was ongoing throughout this project, I now turn to the final stages of data analysis that led to my three findings chapters. Lindlof and Taylor (2011) present three necessities of data analysis: (1) data management, (2) data reduction, and (3) conceptual development, which I follow. For *data management*, I organized my data files on my password-secured personal laptop by type of data: (1) participant observation notes, (2) interview recordings and transcripts, (3) documents and artifacts, and (4) creative focus group transcripts, recordings, and photos of participants' art. This allowed me to find a source of data easily among the categories if I wanted to search for a particular document. I also utilized a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS). Use of a CAQDAS enabled me to both search across data for keywords or phrases and to use their "code-and-retrieve programs" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). I specifically used Dedoose, as it has advantages to other CAQDAS I have used in the past. Dedoose was cost-efficient for me as a graduate student with a monthly price instead of a larger up-front cost. It is a web-based, password-protected, encrypted service that allowed me to access my data online and did not require large, cumbersome files that may "crash" during use, as such with NVivo.

For *data reduction*, I chose data most relevant to this project "according to emerging schemes of interpretation" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p. 243). I specifically culled data that were "only tangentially relat[ing] to the evolving research questions" in my project (Tracy, 2013, p.

195). For example, I did not analyze fieldnotes that were from my early fieldwork that did not connect to my research questions on organizational identity and transgender identity, especially early data that focused on transgender worker experiences. I was also able to reduce the overall data I analyzed through the third aspect of analysis presented by Lindlof and Taylor: conceptual development.

For *conceptual development*, I utilized coding to surface and shape directions for analysis and ultimately focused on key areas for my analysis chapters. "Coding is the active process of identifying data as belonging to, or representing, some type of phenomenon" (Tracy, 2013, p. 189). Coding allows a researcher to "gather together everything about a topic or an analytical concept, in order to review and refine thinking" (Richards, 2009, p. 107).

For my data analysis, I utilized Charmaz's (2006) approach to grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), as her approach treats "ground theory methods as a set of principles and practices, not as prescriptions or packages" (2006, p. 9). Her refusal to follow a prescriptive approach is important for my interpretive approach herein, especially given the ways in which researchers using grounded theory sometimes adhere to positivistic assumptions, despite the theory actually being designed by Glaser and Strauss to challenge positivism in the 1960s (see p. 9). Charmaz's version of grounded theory also uniquely positions the researcher as instrument rather than following Glaser and Strauss' assumptions that theory discovery was "separate from the scientific observer" (p. 10).

My coding followed Charmaz's sequence of coding: initial, focused, and axial coding. Charmaz's *initial coding* "should stick closely to the data" and be "provisional because you aim to remain open to other analytical possibilities and create codes that best fit the data you have" (2006, p. 48). Tracy (2013) discusses how this process often uses first-level codes that "focus on

'what' is present in the data. They are descriptive, showing the basic activities and processes in the data" (p. 189). My initial coding began with line-by-line coding to encourage me to "remain open to the data and to see nuances in it" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 50). The goal of initial coding, then, is to explore the data with an open mind and not force *a priori* theories onto collected data. Examples of my initial codes include "sex work," "gender binary," "drop-in," and "health." My initial codes include "*in vivo* codes" that use participants' own language. *In vivo* codes are especially important when they include participants' shared language or when a participant uses "an innovative term that captures meanings or experiences" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 55). Examples of my *in vivo* codes include: "two different worlds" from a trans indigenous participant named Aron who explored her different Western and indigenous experiences, "straight people" to describe cisgender Harm Reduction Program guests, and "closing time" for when the drop-in center closed each evening.

Throughout the processes of coding, I created and maintained a codebook, which is "a data display that lists key codes, definitions, and examples" used in analysis (Tracy, 2013, p. 191). I also utilized Glaser and Strauss' "constant comparison of incidents" (1967, p. 106), which allowed me "to compare the data applicable to each code, and [then] modify code definitions to fit the new data" (Tracy, 2013, p. 190). I kept track of my initial code definition in my codebook and later revisions to these definitions from constant comparison.

Next, I used *focused coding* as my second stage to focus on "using the most significant and/or frequent earlier codes to sift through large amounts of data. Focused coding requires decisions about which initial codes make the most analytic sense to categorize your data incisively and completely" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 57). Through continued constant comparison, I was able to move to these focused codes that are "analytic and interpretive," (Tracy, 2013, p.

194), rather than descriptive like initial codes. Comparison helped me to hone my codes and to move me along in my data analysis process. Examples of focused codes included: TGRC as home, homelessness, and organizational identity as enduring.

I then moved onto the third step of grounded theory termed *axial coding*. This "creates a new set of codes whose purpose is to make connections between categories" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p. 252). I followed Charmaz's approach to axial coding to create subcategories in relationship to other categories, which ultimately "reassembles the data you have fractured during initial coding to give coherence to the emerging analysis" (2006, p. 60). The purpose of this process is to put codes into hierarchical relationships (Tracy, 2013, p. 195). An example of an axial code relationship is: TGRC as family as a "parent code" with TGRC as home as a "child code." Another example is "organizational identities" as a parent code with "support for all facets" as a child code and an *in vivo* code.

Through these three stages of coding, I was able to move from more open-ended initial coding to focused coding and then to axial coding to understand relationships among categories. I thus reached the process of theoretical saturation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) where new data collection and/or analysis added "little new value to the concepts" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p. 252). After coding, I continued writing analytic memos and produced outlines to begin to construct my analysis chapters. These analytic memos and outlines enabled me to "figure out the fundamental stories in the data and serve[d] as a key intermediary step between coding and writing a draft of the analysis" (Tracy, 2013, p. 196).

Of note, I included my creative focus group transcripts in this coding process, and I inserted photos of participants' art within the transcript when the participant described their art to the group. As Tracy and Malvini Redden (2016) suggest, "when coupled with interviews,

drawing encourages shared analysis. By explaining their drawings, participants provide first-order or basic interpretations that can themselves be important data for researchers. Subsequently, participant-led interpretations can generate further conversation and subsequent analytic insights" (p. 244). I specifically asked participants to begin to analyze their own collages and drawings in one-on-one conversations during the creative process and together as participants present their art to the group during our focus groups. In coding these transcripts, then, I had a unique opportunity to see what participants' initial analysis of their own responses were and then conduct my own focused analysis. Lastly, I also saved participants' art photos separately to review outside of Dedoose and to compare the photos together across focus groups in conjunction with my research questions.

Throughout my data analysis process, I also considered two cautions about common data analysis pitfalls. First, Richards (2009) suggests that despite the ease and endless possibilities with CAQDAS, "coding can be a way of never finishing your project. The problems are worse when researchers become over-zealous about coding everything, and making as many categories as possible. This sort of coding fetishism can delay or even destroy a project" (p. 109). As such, I moved onto focused coding to help me direct my project around common codes that emerged from data and also those that addressed my research questions, which I already had refined from my time in the field. Coding did take me much longer than past ethnographic projects because of the bulk of my data and my own connection to participants' experiences, which I return to in Chapter Seven. Second, Lindlof and Taylor remind researchers that in qualitative data analysis, researchers should not try "to simplify or permanently resolve the sources of [data] complexity" (2011, p. 277). The process of data analysis allows the researcher to use participants' experiences to tell *a* story about organizational communication, not *the* story. Before I turn to a story of

TGRC's organizational identities and participants' transgender identities, briefly I want to address qualitative writing.

Just as ethnographers make choices about methods, researcher roles, and analysis, we also make choices about qualitative writing as a form of representation and a demonstration of rigor and credibility. My three data analysis chapters provide an ethnographic tale of the Transgender Resource Center of New Mexico, its participants, and their complex organizational and individual identities and their interconnections. I wrote my analysis chapters using what Ellingson (2009) described as a "middle ground approach" between arts-based impressionist writing and scientific/realist writing. Where art/impressionist projects focus work to "unravel accepted truths" via art generation and science/realists hope to present objective and generalizable truths, a middle ground approach focus on situated knowledge, generating understanding, and "to trouble the taken-for-granted and to generate pragmatic implications for participants" (p. 10). For a middle ground approach, qualitative writers use first-person writing, focus on participants' narratives, and select excerpts from rich exemplars. They may take social constructionist orientations like my own, examine emerging inductive themes, and consider their own reflexivity as the research instrument. My data chapters utilize this middle-ground approach.

Ellingson (2009) also presents the potential of what she calls a crystallized approach that blends multiple orientations (art, middle-ground, and/or realist) and genres of writing, art, and performance. I first thought I might undertake a crystallized arts-based/impressionist and middle ground approach to my data chapters in order complicate and enrich findings from multiple approaches and genres of writing (e.g., creative non-fiction, art, ethnographic tales). While I do hope to incorporate impressionist writing methods and even art in future publications of this research, I found that for my data chapters, there were so many diverse accounts from

participants that only using the middle-ground approach worked best for creating this dissertation. I wanted to invite readers to understand TGRC's organizational communication through more "traditional" writing methods and by using guiding qualitative themes and sub-sections. Despite my incorporation of arts-based methods in this dissertation, I did not create my own artistic representation of participants' arts, which could be a potential avenue for future creative focus group research.

My writing also followed what Amis and Silk (2008) describe as a quasi-foundationalist approach to qualitative organizational research. They position three possible qualitative organizational approaches and their subsequent standards for rigorous research: (1) a foundationalist approach that attempts to report on an objective reality grounded in discourses of positivism, (2) a quasi-foundationalist approach that advocates for "an approximation of reality" of participants' lived experience based in researcher and participants' interpretations (p. 452), and (3) a nonfoundationalist approach that centers ethics as a standard for rigor and resists the possibility of any potential research "facts." Using the quasi-foundationalist approach in my writing enabled me to:

> describe and understand the often divergent meanings proffered by organizational members and their underlying meanings for the interpretation of social interaction…[and in so doing,] the qualitative researcher attempts to be fair, balanced, and conscientious in taking account of multiple perspectives, interests, and realities that will exist within any social setting. (p. 464)

While my unique perspectives and identities as the research instrument shaped my findings, I also valued generating rich understanding of diverse participants' experiences. I recognize that my findings were always partial, subjective, and even conflicting. Still, given my three years

studying TGRC, I valued my labor to "legitimately represent the research setting" to the best of my ability, even as I recognized "that multiple realities can exist…and that truth cannot be definitively proclaimed" (p. 465). I did not attempt to capture an objective truth but instead present rich exemplars, tensions, and complexities from my extensive TGRC research.

I now turn to my three data analysis chapters. Chapter Four will examine Research Question 2 and participants' communication of their transgender identities in relationship to other salient identity intersections. Chapter Five bridges Research Questions 1 and 3 to put organizational identity into conversation with participants' identities. It examines what I call two TGRC organizational identity "ideals" and how they were constructed via communication. Chapter Six then examines four communication constraints for the organizational identity ideals presented in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER FOUR: TGRC TRANSGENDER GUESTS CONSTRUCTING SALIENT INTERSECTIONAL IDENTITIES

The following chapter analysis addresses a principal research question for this study: *How do TGRC staff and guests communicatively construct the intersectional relationship between their gender identities and other salient identities?* This chapter specifically explores how transgender-identified participants constructed and understood their gender identities in relationship to other intersecting identities that they communicated as the most salient to their lived experiences. Earlier, I argued that participants' communication constructing their identities necessarily influences TGRC's *organizational* identities, and so it merits focused analysis herein. In Chapter Five, I will consider how TGRC's organizational identities respond to these constructions of participants' identities—particularly the identities of TGRC guests, as the organization's *raison d'etre.*

Throughout my three years of research, TGRC's guests, staff, Directors, Board Members, and community members communicated that transgender identities could not be understood in isolation. Participants described many other identities and life experiences that they understood as existing in relationship to—and overlapping with—their transgender identities. These included: addiction, age, social class, education, disability, homeless identities, incarceration, police interactions, indigenous identities, race, ethnicity, (un)employment, languages spoken, sexuality, parents and families, friendships, sexual relationships (including sex work), spirituality, religion, military veteran status, immigration status, and more. I could write a separate dissertation on the full range of identity intersections that participants communicated as meaningful. To narrow the scope of this chapter, however, I have chosen to focus on the two intersections that guests commonly expressed in my data as shaping their transgender identities: (1) homeless identities and (2) indigenous identities.

The intersections of homeless and indigenous identities with transgender identities likely surfaced as the most prominent themes because my fieldwork focused on TGRC's *drop-in guests*, in contrast to guests accessed through support groups, marches, public events, or trainings.[8] Thus, I developed rapport with and enrolled more participants who frequented TGRC drop-in hours, in part because many regularly visited TGRC for continued needed support. Frequently, these drop-in guests communicated that they required daily support and outreach *because of* their experiences of oppression and marginalization arising from their indigenous and homeless identities and related experiences. While my analysis of homeless and indigenous intersections structure this chapter, I will also discuss additional identities and experiences that contributed to the significance of those two intersections that participants depicted as intricately entwined with their homeless and/or indigenous identities. In making these choices, I have sought to follow two related imperatives of intersectional research: (1) we cannot explore all (or even most) intersections in our analysis (Chávez, 2012); and (2) as a result, we must center those intersections emphasized in the "localized and specific knowledge" of our participants (Collins and Bilge, 2016, p. 31). It is to my participants' local experiences that I now turn.

Intersections of Transgender, Homeless, and Other Salient Identities

The first theme of TGRC guests' intersectional identities is the relationship of *transgender* and *homeless* identities. For this section, unless otherwise noted, my use of the terms "guests" in this section refers to those navigating intersection of transgender and homeless

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[8] I had very limited research access in support groups because of their confidential "Las Vegas" communication rules (e.g., "What happens in support group stays in support group"). Also because support groups were categorized by specific gender identities (non-binary, transmasculine, tranfeminine), I could not access most closed groups as a cisgender participant. The exception was the Rainbow Friends Support Group, which I also sometimes facilitated. My creative focus group method did later enable me to better access support groups, which I include briefly in this chapter and treat again in Chapters Five and Six.

identities. In describing the intersections of homeless and trans identities, guests also evoked

related identities of race, ethnicity, social class, (un)employment, indigeneity, addiction,

disability, and age. Importantly, while homelessness is often perceived as an *outcome* of other

identity intersections (including social class, poverty, race, and gender) and/or as a condition of

insecure housing, many TGRC guests communicated that they understood themselves as

homeless *as an identity*. Trans guests who identified as homeless often experienced systemic

homelessness for multiple years at a time without reprieve; thus understanding themselves as

homeless went beyond housing insecurity to instead an aspect of the self that they lamented as

stable: "We *are* homeless." In this section, I will both detail *conditions* of homelessness for

transpeople in Albuquerque that participants reported and also how participants understood their

homeless and trans *identities* as intersecting. To signify these differences, I use "homelessness"

to show conditions of housing insecurity, and I use "homeless" as a self-described identity

category.

My findings herein mirror prior quantitative research studies on systemic homelessness in

the U.S. for many transpeople. For example, in the nationally representative survey discussed in

Chapter Two, the National Center for Transgender Equality (NCTE) reported that of transgender

and gender non-conforming respondents, 23% had experienced housing discrimination, 30% had

experienced homelessness in their lives, and 12% had experienced homelessness in the past year

(James et al., 2016, p.176). In October 2017, NCTE released additional state specific reports, and

in New Mexico, respondents reported even *higher* rates of homelessness than the national levels.

Here, 36% reported facing housing discrimination, 41% experiencing homelessness during their

lives, and 26% experiencing homelessness in the past year (NCTE, 2017). The only example

where New Mexico respondents reported "better" conditions than national numbers was that

20% had "avoided staying in a shelter because they feared being mistreated as a transgender person" (NCTE, 2017, p. 2; the national level was 26%).

Additionally, these findings report a grim picture of transgender New Mexicans undergoing social class struggle, living in conditions of poverty (40%), and experiencing unemployment (38%)– all of which were intricately tied to potential for systemic homelessness (NCTE, 2017, p. 1). In my study, Susie emphasized the importance of this intersection. Susie identified as a cisgender, Catholic, Latina TGRC staff volunteer in her 50s, who was raised poor, and had an unlabeled sexuality. She claimed that the largest problems for transgender people in New Mexico were intersections of what she called "economics," an intersectional category in which she included homelessness, joblessness, and the overarching poverty that transgender people (particularly those of color) experienced in an already poor state of New Mexico.

Similarly, staff member Nancy (a white, college-educated, housed transwoman in her 50s experiencing poverty and unemployment) described her and other transgender participants' experiences with homelessness as a "rollercoaster." Some participants, she reported, were able to escape the rollercoaster and find housing – although this "security" was often precarious. Even Nancy herself faced returning to the rollercoaster when her student loans did not disburse in time. As a result, Nancy viewed herself as a person with whom transgender homeless guests could identify: "They realize that I've gone through the same experiences, that I've been homeless. I've been without money, you know and now I have a place to stay, I'm going to school, so I think it helps with their feelings of my being able to identify with their situation."

Throughout my fieldwork, participants like Nancy reported that homelessness constrained how they could express their gender identities, and how those identities constrained their access to support that could assuage or end homelessness (an issue I will explore below).

For example, many homeless trans guests said that they could not safely dress and embody their gender identities while living on the streets. When they arrived at TGRC, many guests (and some staff) would change into gender affirming clothing that they would not wear on the street (and even some securely housed participants took part in changing once on site). Guests reported that their clothing and makeup were often stolen while they lived on the street. This further restricted how they communicated their gender identity because they often could not afford to purchase new clothing or makeup. Chooli (a Native transwoman in her 30s who identified as homeless and experienced ongoing addiction and former incarceration) and her partner, Steve (a cisgender, homeless, Native man in his 20s who experienced addiction and former incarceration), told me about how such losses made it hard to "start over" in acquiring a new set of personal belongings. Not surprisingly, a majority of guests chose to take advantage of bins provided by TGRC for storing and protecting their belongings, as they went years without a secure home of their own.

Many participants also experienced verbal harassment and even physical and sexual assault living on the streets. Theresa (a Black, homeless, transwoman in early 40s who survived through sex work and experienced addiction) described the everyday communication and violence she encountered walking up and down one of Albuquerque's main thoroughfares, Central Avenue (also known as historic Route 66). Theresa said, "There's a lot of people out there that do not like us. And I have had, while walkin' Central, coins thrown at me, eggs thrown at me, and it's really sad for society to be like that, but you can't change it."

Other participants also described experiencing physical violence. Chooli reported being hit in the face with a blunt object and briefly hospitalized after an attempted robbery. Some participants who were homeless transwomen of color and sex workers did not openly discuss visible injuries they had sustained, such as handprint bruises, black eyes, and new limps. Some

staff speculated that their pimps and customers perpetrated physical abuse. Staff member Adam

(a white, cisgender gay male volunteer in his 30s) described the simultaneous violence

transgender women guests experienced on the street:

> The darker aspect of being homeless is if they're doing sex work…the thing that's
>
> brushed under the rug. . . [is that] it's just inherently dangerous. . . But I think the other
>
> much *worse and darker* [condition] is the *abuse*. The Johns are abusive. And you know
>
> the girls are either beat up, or they're stiffed, they're not paid, or they're robbed…You're
>
> on the street sleeping, you've got a substance abuse problem most likely, or you've got a
>
> mental illness. And you have really nobody you can trust. But you do have groups of
>
> people that will beat the shit out of you at a drop of a hat.

Having provided this brief overview, I now focus on two specific sub-themes of how

participants embodying this intersection (1) navigated challenges associated with the policies and

conditions of homeless shelters, and (2) created their own uniquely intersectional responses to

challenging homelessness as homeless transpeople. I conclude with a brief, related account of

how trans participants described their privilege if they did not identify as homeless.

Navigating Challenges with Homeless Shelters

Transgender participants faced extensive challenges in using available homeless shelters

in the City of Albuquerque. On the surface, participants reported experiences similar to those of

Albuquerque's cisgender homeless population, such as the inability to secure any prolonged

relief through public or Section 8 housing due to multi-year waitlists. A local free paper, *The

Alibi*, reported that while over 60,000 families in Albuquerque were waiting on housing

assistance, an official conceded that "'[e]ssentially, we only have funding to support 1 in 10 of

those 60,000' (Carlson, 2015). Thus, many homeless people in Albuquerque could not exit the

homelessness rollercoaster Nancy described. However, TGRC guests also faced challenges unique to their intersecting transgender and homeless identities, including discrimination against their gender identities as homeless people. Most Albuquerque shelter options, for example, had sex-segregated bunks, and shelters only admitted transgender people to the side that affirmed their gender identity if they could provide an ID that matched their chosen sex. However, given complications and costs associated with changing ID, an estimated 58% of transgender people in New Mexico had *no* identification that matched their preferred name or gender (NCTE, 2017, p. 4). Additionally, as noted above, many participants had their identification stolen from them, which created further challenges to "proving" their gender identities (e.g., the expense and delay associated with acquiring "valid" replacement ID).

Participants also reported that their intersecting identities shaped their experiences of discriminatory housing policies and practices. For example, when I held an open creative focus group during TGRC's drop-in hours, seven out of eight guests who chose to attend identified as indigenous transwomen. Most of them identified as homeless, and two had experienced homelessness in the past. Some also described how systemic homelessness exacerbated their challenges with addiction and required their engaging in sex work (also known as "the ghetto hustle") for survival. These participants described why they chose to come to TGRC for support, and how TGRC contrasted with other organizations in Albuquerque:

Pizza: Well some of us, we don't have places to go. Because of family problems, or like drama, or because of our addictions and stuff… This is the *only* one place we all come to.

Arson: And other places, we are not allowed.

Maria: Yeah.

Arson: Not even shelters.

Maria: For real!

Pizza: And they put us on the boys' side. So.

Aron: [*mimics someone reading gender marker on an ID and making a face*] 'But you
are…? Waaaait!'

Here, Pizza and Arson depicted TGRC as a unique place where they were welcomed *because
of*—not despite—their intersectional identities, which I return to in Chapter Five. The above
examples indicate challenges faced by homeless trans guests, despite ongoing efforts by TGRC
staff, including myself, to educate shelter staff and promote related policy changes. While these
efforts were partly successful (e.g., one transitional housing program accepted transwomen for
the first time after completing trainings with Director Henry), many participants continued to
have negative experiences at shelters.

One such site was an emergency winter shelter hosted by a religious organization, the
ABQ Homeless Space. They bussed homeless people outside of the city for overnight housing in
a former prison. For example, Alyce was a Diné[9], homeless transwoman with disabilities in her
early 30s, who engaged in survival sex work and experienced drug addiction. She recounted
staying at the ABQ Homeless Space because she just wanted to be "inside, off the streets, away
from the drama and the dangers of being homeless." She described the sex-segregated bunks:

The ABQ Homeless Space staff are making me be on the "male" side because my ID
does not say female. I tried to use the women's restroom, and they stopped me and said,
"Let me see your ID." When I showed them it, and it says "M," …so they said, "You

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[9] Diné is a Navajo term that means "The People." Some participants preferred to use Diné, others
preferred Navajo, and some used the words interchangeably. I follow the participants' language
choice throughout these chapters.

can't go in there."…I want to be on the women's side because I see myself as a woman.

But they don't because of my ID.

I then asked Alyce whether she thought that if she had an "F" (i.e., for "female") marker on her ID, would she get to be housed on the women's side? "Oh yeah," she told me, "There is another transgender woman on the female side. And they don't have a problem with it, they let her there because her card says F." Here, emergency shelter staff partly supported homeless transpeople by admitting those with legal identification. However, they did not accommodate those without identification bearing "correct" gender designations.

Alyce further recounted that her experiences there were marked by a lack of privacy, and by cisgender men being "nasty and rude and going too far" with sexually explicit comments. She protected herself by using her street communication skills: "I'm used to takin' care of myself…so I know how to shut them down." Specifically, she used assertive and acerbic communication to deflect harassment from cisgender homeless men. Alyce also reported her experience of ambivalent surveillance by the staff at this shelter, who followed her as she moved around, even if she went for a drink of water. On the one hand, they appeared to be ensuring that she did not use the women's restroom. On the other hand, she believed they also "have to make sure I am safe and 'protect me'" from using the *men's* restroom (where she was vulnerable to harassment and assault). Thus, while the shelter staff displayed some understanding of the potential dangers facing Alyce, it felt "more like they are watching me more than the others, patrolling me. Like *I'm* the problem." For trans homeless people like Alyce, such were the costs of surviving Albuquerque's frigid winter: "At least I can get out of the cold, even though they are putting me in there like I'm a man."

Nonetheless, other participants reported experiencing such severe harassment from homeless cisgender men in the emergency winter shelter that they chose not to return. Haseya was a transgender Native woman in her 40s with a college degree, who identified as alcoholic, unemployed, and homeless; her partner, Javier was a Latino man in his 30s who identified as a homeless alcoholic. They expressed that they no longer felt comfortable returning to the emergency shelter. Once, when Haseya visited me for résumé support, she expressed her hope that finding employment could help her qualify for housing and end her addiction to alcohol. She described the intersections among her homeless, Native, and transgender identities as fueling her continued use of alcohol because she could not find housing to break the negative cycles of unemployment and alcohol abuse. Haseya's speech slurred just slightly as we spoke about potential job openings, and she said, "Sorry Elizabeth that my speech is like this, but I had to drink to stay warm last night." She pointed to Javier, her partner, who was intoxicated and passed out on the couch beside her. She told me they camped outside last night in frigid February temperatures and "almost literally froze to death." I asked Haseya if she knew about or used the emergency winter shelter, and she explained, "It is still not okay there for transpeople, and I don't think *they* get that in there," as she pointed to the Directors' office. Haseya told me that she experienced sexual violence one morning after sleeping on the men's side of that shelter. She awoke to a cisgender man masturbating over her; she screamed, and a staff member intervened. Because the shelter did not allow occupants' partners to be housed in the same bunk area, Javier was not there to protect her, which made Haseya feel even more vulnerable. Javier and Haseya also had previously told me that they disliked this shelter because they were often bussed separately back to Albuquerque in the morning by sex-segregated bunks, making it difficult to reconnect on the streets the next day without a phone.

Following Haseya's sexual assault, shelter staff allowed Javier to sleep on a mattress on the floor next to her for that one evening. Staff told Haseya that this experience "was a one-time thing," but she said she and Javier would not return, "because they say they are gay friendly. They say they are trans friendly. They say that here at TGRC with those flyers and, 'Oh go to the shelter!' But it's not safe for girls like me." Haseya's use of the phrase "girls like me" evoked her intersectional identities as a homeless transwoman and their distinctive, associated risk. Sadly, her experience was not uncommon; James et al. (2016) report that "[s]even out of ten (70%) of respondents who stayed at a shelter in the past year faced some form of mistreatment, such as being forced out, harassed, or attacked because of being transgender" (p. 181). Seventeen percent of these respondents reported experiencing sexual assault (p. 182).

Haseya also told me that she attempted to visit another shelter in town that "was just terrible to me for being trans." She and Javier only felt safe in one shelter that exclusively accepted people who were intoxicated. She said, "I think I should be able to be inside safely from the cold being trans without having to be drunk to do it." Haseya told me that she wanted to get sober so she and Javier could both apply for jobs. For now, perversely, she felt forced to sacrifice her sobriety for a warm and safe place to sleep.

Despite these enduring challenges, some homeless guests reported some positive experiences at shelters, in part due to TGRC's advocacy. For example, my participants included Kylo Ren (a Navajo transwoman in her 20s) and her partner Robert (a Navajo cisgender man in his 50s). Both reported identifying "homeless" as the most impactful identity in their lives, while also identifying as alcoholics. Throughout my research, both frequently described themselves by saying, "We are homeless" or "We need this service because we are homeless," and Kylo Ren also referred to herself as "a homeless transwoman." To survive, they chose to "fly a sign" (i.e.,

panhandle for money) and often slept behind an Albuquerque church. Robert also reported experiencing disabilities because, "We do a lot of walking. And my knees, my leg gets really hurt." Kylo Ren had some medical training, and kept a first aid kit to treat Robert, as well as other people experiencing homelessness and/or lacking health insurance. In hot weather, Robert and Kylo Ren used trapped heat under bridges to cook their Cup-O-Noodles on metal surfaces. In cold temperatures, they hid their blankets in bushes, hoping to retrieve them later.

As a couple, Kylo Ren and Robert would sometimes visit the ABQ Homeless Space. They reported that staff affirmed Kylo Ren's gender identity and agreed to house her on the women's side of the shelter. As Kylo Ren explained, "They said there is a law not to discriminate…Because I identify as transgender, they were gonna put me on the women's side, but then Robert is gay." Contra Alyce's experiences, Kylo Ren could have been housed on the women's side, presumably due to her ID marker of "F." But because Robert was cisgender and male-identified, Kylo Ren choosing to be housed according to her gender identity would, in turn, mean she would be separated from her partner. Because of this, Kylo Ren sometimes chose to sleep on the men's side to be near Robert, even though the shelter prohibited them from sharing the same pod as a couple. Also, like Chooli and Steve, Kylo Ren and Robert reported that because they were placed in different pods, they were often unable to find one another in the morning when they were bussed back to Albuquerque. For these reasons, Kylo Ren regretted she could not be housed safely as a woman and be near her partner; she chose to be housed on the "men's side" to partially accommodate the intersections of her sexuality and homeless identities, but this came at a cost as it did not affirm her gender identity.

In summary, although homeless transgender participants visited shelters in town, many experienced threatening conditions. These included: harassment and assault; policies that

invalidated their gender identity, sexual orientation, and primary relationships; and negative effects to their health. Some participants chose to tolerate these threats, in order to escape the violence and exposure of the street. Others chose to brave *those* conditions, in order to avoid transphobic harassment and discrimination they faced *inside* the shelters. The homeless transgender participants in my study thus faced impossible, contradictory choices, requiring creative, tactical solutions. I turn now to explore those responses.

Creating Intersectional Responses to Challenges of a Transgender, Homeless Identity

Participants varied in their approaches to negotiating constraints tied to their transgender and homeless identities. For example, many transwomen of color turned to sex work as a solution to unemployment and poverty, and because it sometimes gave them a bed to sleep in for (part of) the night. Alyce described how her family members' history of addiction and their refusal to accept her transition led her to run away at the age of 17. To cope with her subsequent homelessness, she entered sex work:

> I met these other trans girls who said, "Let's go work it." I'm like…"I'm only 17, honey. I'm a high school dropout, ran away from high school. What makes you think I know anything about prostitution?"…It wasn't comfortable for me at all. I never knew anything about giving blowjobs or sex. I was forced to prostitute.

While one reason homeless transwomen chose sex work was to find overnight housing, another was the related opportunity to travel to find temporary housing in new cities. For example, Alyce sometimes traveled out of state for sex work with other transgender women who visited the center, like Treasure, a Latina, homeless transwoman who was also a sex worker. Treasure told me that she would be visiting Las Vegas, Nevada during the next Albuquerque winter because, "It's too slow here. There is more action there you know, I can make more

there." She explained that she knew other transgender women in Vegas with whom she sometimes roomed to share housing costs. At other times, Treasure said she used varied strategies to escape the Las Vegas streets for one night, "I go the hospital [for overnight shelter]…go back to some guy's place, I make it work. I just have to give it up to God and then just do my best." Treasure thus sought temporary relief through her religious identity, community with other homeless transwomen sex workers, and city services.

Additionally, some homeless trans participants used travel to assuage homelessness, which was tied to celebration in their indigenous cultures. For example, staff member Ben-Ben (who identified as Navajo, gay, cisgender, and in his mid-30s) and Alyce both described how Navajo transwomen moved back and forth during the year between Albuquerque and the reservations where their families lived. Some Diné transwomen pursued sex work in Albuquerque during the summer's milder weather, and then returned to their reservation in the winter. As Ben-Ben explained, "In the summertime, where you don't necessarily need to like have an apartment, you can just kind of hang out and maybe sleep in the streets, or you know, crash at other people's places. There's always something to do here [in Albuquerque]. It's busier, and I think girls have also more opportunities to make money here as well." Ben-Ben further characterized Albuquerque—and especially TGRC—as having more resources for transgender sex workers than the reservations, including reliable HIV/AIDS testing, classes on safe sex, and more informal (i.e., drop-in) space for peer conversation. Some participants also returned to their reservations or pueblos to participate in traditional winter ceremonies—a co-occurrence which enabled their acquisition of temporary housing. Overall, Ben-Ben believed homelessness formed the most challenging intersection for transwomen in Albuquerque. He said, "I know it hurts me to see girls who like come in and say, 'Oh, I slept on the street again, or I slept in the alley.'"

Ben-Ben believed any suitable response (e.g., the development of trans-affirming housing and sex worker-affirming healthcare) needed to address intersections among multiple identity categories, including indigeneity, gender, homelessness, joblessness, and disability.

Beyond engaging in sex work and participating in traditional ceremonies, participants negotiated other forms of shelter for themselves, including couch surfing and sleeping in alleys, cars, woods, and abandoned homes. For example, Alice was a white transwoman in her 40s who experienced job discrimination, disability, and prior homelessness. She recounted in one of my focus group meetings how, during high school, her father kicked her out of the house for coming out as transgender (see Figure 4.1):

> I drew Alice in Wonderland going into the Tulgey Wood, which is something I identify
> with from when I was little. Alice was the first person that I identified with. And she
> always, you know, she says, "I'm just a little girl"…And also when I was older…I ended
> up living in the Sandia mountain wilderness. And I always think of it in my head as the
> Tulgey Wood. I did survival skills and stuff. I lived out there for 10 months.

Figure 4.1: Alice's Tulgey Wood

While Alice used the woods as her shelter (both literally and metaphorically), Theresa shared how she coordinated with other homeless-identified people to find shelters in abandoned homes. Through texting, word of mouth on the street, and surveying neighborhoods, Theresa and her friends created their own temporary shelters—or *abandos*—especially during harsh winter cold spells. She recounted one such experience when she was sick and immobilized, and TGRC Director Brooks brought food and blankets to her and her abando's other 15 homeless occupants, both transgender and cisgender. During our related interview during a summer month, Theresa, coincidentally, received a call from a friend informing her that his mother had kicked him out of their home. Theresa immediately invited him to her current abando and coordinated a meeting place with him. This sanctuary was precarious, however: Theresa worried about discovery and eviction by the police, and the effects of her growing frailty as a homeless, transwoman sex worker. She said, "My age is really, I don't think it's catching up to me, but I *know* it is, because I walk a lot, and I'm getting older. I'm fixin' to be 40. I need to sit down somewhere."

Another temporary solution used by participants was to live in their cars, which were often a remnant of their former employment privilege prior to transition. A few participants parked and slept outside of TGRC because they felt it was a relatively safe space. Some traveled from across the state—and even the country—to visit TGRC and establish a base of support for their transition. For example, Marilyn was in her late 50s, and identified as white, transgender, homeless, lesbian woman with college education and mental and physical disabilities. Marilyn relocated from the Midwest to Albuquerque in the fall of 2014 to transition from male to female specifically because she had read about related support provided by TGRC. Marilyn assumed that when she arrived in Albuquerque, she would quickly find employment with her technical associate's degrees. Instead, she experienced chronic unemployment, and after a period of living

in run-down hotels, she had to begin living out of her car. Marilyn told other guests at TGRC that

she feared losing this last resort, and Bridget (a white transgender woman in her 50s) curtly

replied, "Welcome to what the rest of us deal with!" For Marilyn, becoming homeless was a new

identity, despite being (in her words) "working poor" her whole life. Marilyn described how she

learned more about discrimination as a homeless transgender woman than she could have

understood before as a former masculine-appearing, poor white person. As a homeless

transgender woman, she reported feeling ostracized on the streets by other cisgender homeless

people, despite sharing a homeless identity with them.

While living in her vehicle, Marilyn was constantly victimized by theft because her

vehicle could not be locked. The most upsetting theft was when her breastforms were stolen.

Marilyn described these as "the most irreplaceable possession I had, the equivalent to a child to

me, and I will never see them again." She disclosed that because of recurring identity conflicts

associated with her fundamentalist Christianity, she had more than once burned her feminine

clothes, breastforms, and lingerie. As a person experiencing poverty and struggling to accept her

gender identity, it had taken her years to save for replacements. Marilyn experienced a mental

health crisis when her breastforms were stolen; they had provided her with a comforting

expression of her gender identity when she was safe, alone in her car. Marilyn reported that she

subsequently disclosed to the TGRC staff, 'I am a complete failure. I am a vagrant. I don't have a

job. I don't have a place to live.'" Feeling suicidal, Marilyn temporarily entered a mental health

crisis facility. She reported believing that her gender identity could never be validated as a

homeless person, and further fearing that God was punishing her for identifying as transgender.

Despite identifying as transgender, Marilyn felt restricted in expressing her gender

identity because of its intersections with her homeless identity. She reported that she did not

want to use her feminine name or female pronouns until she was housed, employed, and could dress fulltime as a woman. After some time, Marilyn's car was stolen, and she eventually sought out the city's emergency winter shelter and grew a full beard to stay warm. Later, a caseworker at a different homeless shelter helped Marilyn secure one-year housing because of her disabilities connected to aging and her lifetime of manual labor (which she tried to escape with her associates degrees in tech, although she never found tech employment). Only after finding housing did Marilyn formally start her transition through dressing in feminine clothing, painting her nails, and using her chosen name and pronouns. Before being housed, Marilyn told me, "One day you can call me Marilyn, and use 'she' for me, once I am not homeless." On the street, Marilyn survived as a white disabled transgender woman passing as male, and once housed, she "became Marilyn" in her city-subsidized apartment. Marilyn could confidently "do" her gender identity (West & Zimmerman, 1987) and become transgender via detypification (Jenness, 1991) only after dissociating her enduring transgender identity from her homeless identity. In summary, through diverse, intersectional responses, participants who identified as homeless and transgender navigated how to live safely amidst constraints.

Communicating Privilege Through Intersections of Housing, Trans, and Other Identities

To sufficiently address the intersection of homeless and trans identities, I conclude by briefly addressing participants who experienced privilege around whiteness and/or masculinity, and how they subsequently communicated that privilege so as to *not* identify as homeless. In other words, these participants understood and depicted how being homeless became a salient identity for *other* transpeople—especially transwomen and/or transgender people of color.

To begin, some transmen explicitly discussed their privilege of housing in relationship to their masculinity. Participants like Aleon (a white elder transman with disabilities) shared his

prior experience with living in substandard housing and food stamps, but he confided that he could only empathize with homeless transgender women (of color) he met through TGRC. He expressed support for programs that ensured these women could get housing in the future, but he also recognized that homelessness was an identity he could not "grasp." Other housed transmen discussed their privilege tied to their masculinity and/or whiteness as removing them from the same intersections of homelessness common for their "transgender sisters." For example, Director Brooks as a white transman in his 40s recognized his male and white privilege as affecting all his communication at TGRC. He also valued being frank about his intersectional identities and privilege in conversation with homeless transgender guests:

> Some of it for me is acknowledging even when I'm talking to folks, when they're like, "Well, you don't understand," you have to be willing to say, "You're right. You're right. I don't completely understand, but I do *care* about you, and I am listening and I'm here to try to help you the best I can, and you're right. You're right. I've *never* had to live on the street, and I'm not judging you for what you have to do to get by. I'm just trying to get a better understanding of what, what you want to do going forward."

Brooks thus attempted to affirm guests' experiences and never engage in stigmatizing their survival work strategies.

Importantly, despite their male privilege, some transmen experienced homelessness, including my own participants. One Latino transmasculine participant lived in a car in Albuquerque for months and described to me how his homeless and transgender identities fueled his lack of access to paid employment (including the inability to secure valid gender identification or a home address), which perpetuated his continued homelessness. Ethan (a transman in his mid-20s who identified as a "white-passing" Mexican and Persian) also

described his short experience with homelessness in our interview. As a teenager, Ethan was kicked out of his family's home and survived on the streets for a month before a sympathetic lesbian couple he met chose to house him and support him as a teenage transman. He said, "For me it's never been a long term living on the streets living situation. I was on the actual streets for maybe a month. I feel like a lot of people here have been for *years*. To some degree it helps me understand, and another degree it's like I can't fathom going through that for that long." Another participant, Jeremy, reported never feeling safe in Albuquerque shelters when he accessed them in prior years as a homeless, white transman in his late teens. He chose to only visit shelters for food and then left to sleep outside because the streets were safer to him than the shelters.

Second, some participants described their privileges as transgender women who had never identified as homeless. Josh, for example, was a non-binary transfeminine person who identified as Hispanic, White, and lesbian in her mid 20s. She was worried about the risk of future unemployment and homelessness as a consequence of transitioning in a male dominated occupation. She explained, "I've never had to really worry about homelessness, but it is honestly one of my biggest fears. Now that I still present as male I haven't really come across any problems with that…I really do fear the discrimination and the increased risk of losing everything through gender identity and expression. It's scary." Fear of becoming homeless actually dissuaded Josh from transitioning from a male to female identity, as she recognized the current masculine privilege enabled her enjoyment of stable housing. She feared how cultivating a transfeminine identity might connect to conditions of homelessness like other transwomen of color she knew.

A second example of privilege tied to femininity and homelessness came from Annie, a transwoman in her mid-60s who identified as WASP, college-educated with a degree, and

lesbian. Annie viewed herself as experiencing extensive privilege, and she spoke unprompted about privilege throughout her interview. In her words:

> I've never experienced homelessness, and that's one of the privileges I've had because when I graduated college I got a job, and I've been able to afford housing forever… I know that transwomen of color are much more susceptible to it. I'm not a transwoman of color. I am not a person of color at all. It's not a hurdle I've ever had. The only thing I can do about that hurdle for others is not to place it there when I have the opportunity, either to place it or not.

Annie's statement indicates how she recognized that intersectional identities impacted the likelihood of some participants becoming homeless.

As a white transwoman who worked in a government position and never experienced homelessness, Annie charted her shifting privilege across her changing gender identities: "As a *WASP* male, I was at the top of the pecking order. Not because I asked for it, but because that's how privilege works. People give you privilege, you don't take it. I was oblivious to privilege that I was receiving. Honestly, I am not aware of having lost privilege yet. Probably have, but I can ignore it and assume the privilege I had before." While Annie did not seem to question or disrupt her privilege (such as through participating anti-racist activism), she nonetheless committed to supporting TGRC and other guests, by serving as a group facilitator in local Trans 101 training and support group sessions. These were ways Annie chose to "not place hurdles."

Annie also acknowledged that her whiteness, education level, and governmental job that had all created support for her transition (both through the latter's provision of her own health insurance, and transgender competency training for her coworkers). Annie recognized that this support was incredibly rare. She recounted:

As I say, I am not *aware* of losing privilege. If people were treating me as a "transgender woman," I would be facing that. But people just treat me as another *woman*, which is what I want to be. I have said in support group. I don't want to be a transgender woman: I want to be *a woman*. Transgender was the only route. I had to be there. But I am not being treated that way.

Annie did not believe she experienced any transphobia in her daily life, except from one of her children and her ex-wife, from whom she was estranged. In closing, importantly for participants experiencing the privilege of housing, most understood from their communication with other transpeople who did identify as homeless the incredible violence, constraints, and limitations of living as transgender on the streets of Albuquerque.

Transgender, Indigenous, and Other Salient Identity Intersections

While I touched on indigenous identities above in my section on homelessness (which in turn further showcases how TGRC participants' constructed their identities as intersectional), here I contend with participants' communication about the intersections of transgender and indigenous identities and other salient identities. Indigenous identities were a unique intersection to my site as an organization located in and serving transpeople in New Mexico. Across the state of New Mexico, 10.6% of the population identify as American Indian and Alaska Native alone (U.S. Census, 2016). This percentage does not include those who may be two or more races. New Mexico is also the third highest state with Native identified people behind Alaska (19.5%) and Oklahoma (12.9%) (NCAI, 2017). Due in part to large indigenous communities in New Mexico, my participants reported the centrality of their indigenous identities (as composed of intersections of culture, family, tribes, race, ethnicity, land, and/or more) as overlapping with

their transgender identities. For some, indigenous identity came "first" and created a collective

identity that shaped how they understood all other identities, including their gender identities.

While there are not current statewide statistics on indigenous transgender people in New

Mexico, NCTE's national survey reported .7% of their respondents identified as "American

Indian or Alaskan Natives" (James et al., 2016). Despite being such a small percentage of overall

respondents, national data showcase shared intersectional experiences of extreme discrimination

and marginalization for indigenous transpeople. According to a newly released breakout report

on American Indian and Alaskan Natives from the larger USTS survey, 41% of indigenous

transgender people live in poverty, and 57% "have experienced homelessness at some in their

lives, nearly twice the rate in the USTS sample overall (30%)" (James, Jackson, & Jim, 2017, p.

3). The breakout report also reveals that 35% of indigenous respondents have worked in the

underground economy (compared with 20% in the overall USTS sample), and 23% of

indigenous transpeople have participated in sex work (compared to 12% in the USTS overall) (p.

10). Notably, 43% of indigenous transwomen and 23% of indigenous transmen have engaged in

survival sex work. In the full USTS (James et al., 2016), NCTE also uncovered that indigenous

transpeople often reported prevalent discrimination and violence as compared to other races

and/or ethnicities, including *the highest rates* of: family ending communication or relationships

with them (38%), negative healthcare communication (50%), negative K-12 experiences (92%),

job loss (66%), disrespectful police interactions (72%), sexual assault (65%), and assault in

public restrooms (24%). Despite such troubling statistics, respondents also shared positive

communication nationally at the intersection of indigenous and trans identities, such as being the

most likely to be out to their children (78%) and likely to find welcoming community (54%)

(James et al., 2016). Also, 78% of indigenous transpeople reported one immediate family

member as supportive of their transition (James et al., 2017). I included these statistics to show the particular compounding experiences of discrimination indigenous transgender people faced nationally, as these national experiences showed up for my participants in New Mexico.

Importantly, many of TGRC indigenous participants identified as Navajo (or Diné). Both the geographic proximity of the Navajo Nation in the western part of the state (and in Arizona and Utah) and formal and informal connections in Gallup through state universities and HIV/AIDS outreach organizations influenced the commonly communicated Diné identities of TGRC Native guests. Additionally, as I reported above, homeless indigenous trans participants came to Albuquerque for sources of income in and outside of the street economy because Albuquerque was the state's most populated city.

I now turn to how my participants communication constructing their identities at the intersection of transgender and indigenous identities. In so doing, I include two primary themes: (1) sisterhood of indigenous transgender women and (2) uncertain experiences with transgender as a "Western" term and potentially incommensurate with indigenous identities.

Communicating Intersectional Identities via an Indigenous Sisterhood

Despite extensive experiences with homelessness, addiction, incarceration, survival sex work, poverty, unemployment, and/or lack of health and educational access, guests communicated the incredible importance of the sisterhood they experienced at TGRC, especially tied to the intersections of transgender, gender, and Native identities. Drop-in guests repeatedly called one another "sisters." In Chapter Five, I will argue that viewing one another as "sisters" tied to an organizational family identity of TGRC as "chosen family." However, there was an even deeper shared "sisterhood" connection for indigenous transgender women who engaged ongoing communication construction of indigenous femininities.

Indigenous transgender women constructed their identities through the use of Native languages. Because most who frequented TGRC identified as Diné, this became a commonly shared and used second language spoken at TGRC. Diné trans participants told me about different dialects across the Navajo Nation due to different geographic locations, and how much they valued using Navajo language with one another to connect as indigenous women in Albuquerque, especially when they were away from their families. Participants cherished what they viewed as a unique power and history of their language, including its potential value to non-Native people. For example, Kylo Ren celebrated her Navajo language because of its history in World War II. She said, "I'm happy to be Native American 'cause within World War II, our Navajo language is the one that saved us [because of] code talkers. And I'm happy to be Native American because our language is the one that was there." Beyond appreciating her language's impact on U.S. and world history, Kylo Ren valued using the Navajo language to sustain a special sisterhood at TGRC. She explained, "I think the majority of the TGRC people that come here they are Native American, and many know the Navajo language. And when we all get together like sisters. That's why I like about TGRC." Guests like Kylo Ren thus identified with TGRC's drop-in center as a place that invited their Navajo sisterhood to flourish.

Staff member Ben-Ben (who was not transgender but identified as Navajo, cisgender, and gay), mimicked Kylo Ren's focus on shared indigenous trans intersections at TGRC:

I think just being Navajo is really a key component to the center because predominately, the girls that come through here are Navajo or are indigenous…I can talk to them in Navajo, and they can talk to me in Navajo. So we haven't lost that yet. To me, that's what *feeds* me. Having that connection there, cultural connection. Also I think that as a trans

ally, I'm still learning. I'm learning every single day from my sisters. So TGRC provides

the space and the folks who come through here allow me to learn.

TGRC, then, not only created space for shared language but also for cisgender staff like Ben-Ben to further their allyship.

Through their sisterhood, indigenous transwomen communicated their marginalized intersectional identities (e.g., as victims of violence and simultaneous homelessness, addiction, unemployment, and poverty). However, they also communicated extensively using humor to disrupt and assuage their marginalization. Humor became a communication construction of resistance to systemic, intersectional discrimination. Their humor often involved teasing one another and created bonding with other indigenous and non-indigenous transgender people at TGRC. For example, in my creative focus group, the indigenous transwomen at the drop-in hours discussed their challenges with addiction as transgender people, and how the shared systemic addiction with other TGRC guests created difficulties for them when they chose to visit TGRC. This was because many of them currently or previously experienced addiction. Rather than belaboring the challenges they had communicating with intoxicated or high guests, the women used humor to discuss their discomfort with addiction behaviors, including their own:

Maria: 'Cause sometimes when you come here, all you see is drunk people. Like going, "Blaaaaaaaah!" [*She mimics a person with their eyes barely open yelling and babbling*].

Arson: Like in there right now [*She points to the living room of the trans-only side*].

Pizza: I just sit there watching them.

Maria: It's just too much!

Aron: Like this one [*touches Pizza's shoulder*].

Girls: [*laugh together*]

Pizza: [*laughs*] I get drunk, but I don't—

Aron: Speaking of drunk [*looks to Pizza and other girls*]

Pizza: Ooooh [*gets up and pretends to grab a pillow and bends over*].

Aron: [*pretends she sees up Pizza's skirt*] Shaaaay!

Pizza: You did not see anything [*referring to herself bending over*]. I am wearing another skirt under the bottom of this thing!

Maria: Where? [*pretends lifts up Pizza's skirt*]

Aron: We are gonna see your puss.

Here, Maria began by critiquing systemic addiction and intoxication of TGRC guests, and she explained elsewhere in the creative focus group how it became difficult for her to be around and deterred her from visiting the center. The women joined together to critique how intoxicated or high guests struggled to communicate (such as with yelling or babbling). But then through humor, they address how they also identified as addicts themselves by using Pizza as an example, especially since Pizza had cut out tequila bottles for her collage to describe how "we all drink" (something I revisit in Chapter Five). The group of women joked that Pizza was an example of the yelling drunk communication, and then they teased Pizza further by joking that she flashed them while affirming her gender identity by saying they could see her "puss."

Additionally, a specific vernacular term indigenous transwomen used throughout my research occurred in this example, which was Aron's response, "Shaaaay!" In member checking, Aron explained that while Shaaaay had no "Diné meaning, it is just something that a lot of the Diné trans girls say. It equates to someone saying, 'I'm joking' after teasing someone." Here Aron used "Shaaaay!" as an example to joke about Pizza flashing them in the midst of their

conversation about the challenges of trans addiction. Indigenous participants frequently used, "Shaaaay!" as a way to communicate using humor, tease one another, and bond together.

Indigenous transwomen participants also used humor to resignify transphobic or anti-Native language. Resignification involves communication where, "one rejects a term's existing meaning's normative power, exposes how the term's meaning is constructed, and attempts to change its connotation" (DeFrancisco & Palczewski, 2014, p. 119). Staff member Debbie (a white, cisgender woman in her late 40s) described how humor and language intersected for indigenous transwomen, especially those engaging in sex work. Debbie recounted how guests would call one another names that would otherwise be harmful if cisgender people used that same language:

> The way they talk to each other, they use words that if I used it, they call each other trannies, it wouldn't be acceptable if I did that…They have names that would be totally inappropriate [for me], because that's them and *their* group and not me… [Like] Hooker, that is a favorite of some, calling each other "a boy"…She is a boy" and stuff like that. And they say it in a loving way, if that sounds right (laughs). Amongst themselves, they have a way of talking…It is not in ill regard or anything.

Here Debbie detailed how indigenous transwomen used humor to resignify transphobic language that would otherwise do violence to them like "tranny," "hooker," or "boy," especially when coming from communication with cisgender people. Through humor and "loving" teasing, the indigenous transwomen maintained their sisterhood and resignified transphobic language.

For example, in my creative focus group, the indigenous transwomen used humor to describe how some TGRC services should be limited to transgender guests whereas other outreach could include their partners. Dahha was the only participant in the group not

transfeminine or indigenous and identified as mixed race and gender fluid. Dahha and the indigenous transwomen talked quickly and fed off each other with humor when talking about rules for cisgender male partners visiting TGRC:

Dahha:	But they have to respect the space like everyone else does.
Maria:	Yeah. But they know what's up because they are going out with us. A—
Aron:	Tranny? [*smiles, rolls eyes widely*].
Maria:	A transgender, he-she.
Pizza:	A she-male.
Aron:	She-male [*laughs*].
Arson:	Lady-boy.
Maria:	Lady-boysss!
Aron:	Treasure chest.
Maria:	Treasure troll.
Girls:	[*all laugh loudly*]
Dahha:	That's horrible [*shakes head*]!

Here in their communication with one another, the transgender indigenous women listed examples of terms used against transwomen by cisgender male partners and dismissed and resignified them through humor.

In the focus group, on Facebook, and in daily communication, indigenous transwomen also joked about anti-Native communication and reframed it with humor. For example, Pizza joked while doing her collage that she could "expose some girls' stories." Maria laughed and replied that she could expose Pizza's own stories like "The 'she smells like fry bread' story." Fry bread is a particular Native bread style. Pizza laughed and explained to the other girls that there

was a man on Craigslist who responded to a post Pizza made by writing, "Don't trust this girl. She's Native American. Smells like fry bread." Dahha quipped back, "That's because she can cook. 'Cause she *cooks*. That's why!" The women then began talking about differences of fry bread among different regional styles. Here, Pizza, Maria, and Dahha disrupted an anti-Native online comment that described the smell of an indigenous transwoman as like fry bread. They instead used humor to deflate the power of these words and value Native cooking traditions.

Despite humor and potential resignification of transphobic or anti-Native language, Aron also described how using words like "tranny" could also negatively impact indigenous transwomen. Aron collaged with her sisters about how they, "should stop using tranny and other ugly words that put us down." Aron pasted the phrase, "We don't like using," onto her collage (see Figure 4.2), which was something Maria cut out from a magazine and considered using on her own collage.
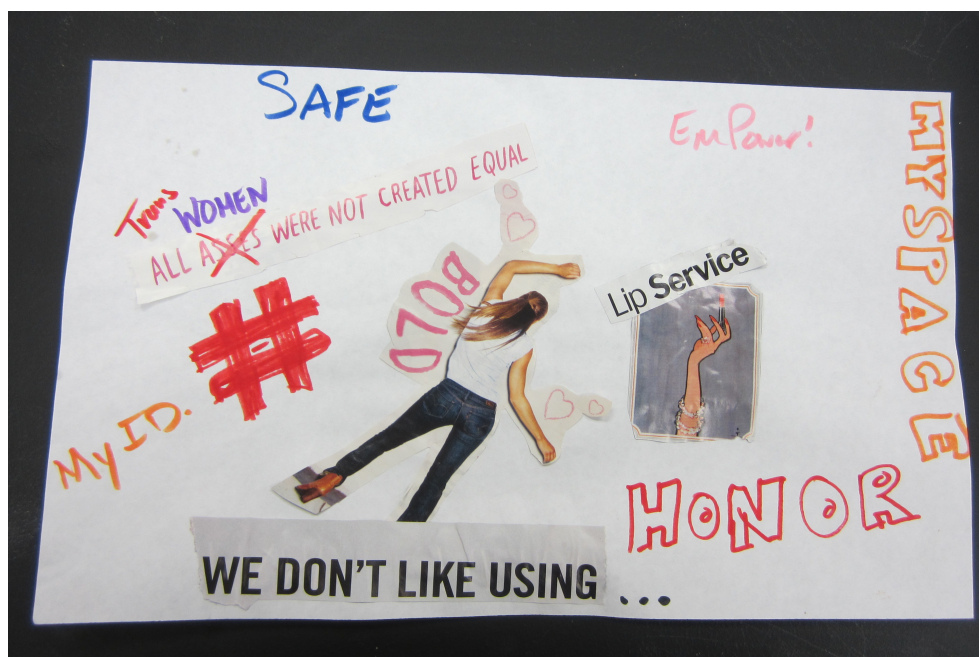
Figure 4.2: Aron's Collage

Aron chose to paste that phrase into her collage because, "'We don't like using,' challenges sometimes [how] we are being called men…We don't like that being used against us. Or

sometimes because some of us have to do survival work, we're called other names. And we don't like to use those words ourselves." For Aron, although she also engaged in humor and potential resignification of harmful words, she also encouraged other guests to avoid using words like tranny because it could further victimize them.

The above exemplars of how indigenous transwomen used communication with each other as sisters to enact their shared identities. Importantly, using humor created unique communication processes of identifying and resignifying violent language at the intersections of trans and indigenous identities. This finding extends Jenness' (1992) theory of detypification, which holds that people identify with an identity category by connecting via personal lived experience and see a category as more congruent for their lives. Here, humor was a way indigenous transwomen could detypify their experiences as transgender to create positive associations amidst pejorative transphobic and/or anti-Native language. Simultaneously, some indigenous participants specifically questioned how or if the category transgender could fit their intersectional identities, which is the final theme I now unpack.

Uncertain "Transgender" Identities as Indigenous Participants

Some TGRC guests described how their indigenous identities shaped whether or not they identified with the "transgender" category, which some viewed as a particular "Western" term. Many of my indigenous participants reported their constructing all their other identities through their indigeneity. Guests, staff, and board members alike valued their Native identities, their family lineages, and their communal and tribal connections. Staff member Ben-Ben explained how they were taught to center indigenous identities:

I think for me the most important is being Navajo first, and then everything else. Like gay, or student, or an uncle, or those identities you know are *secondary*…I think the

reason why it took me a long time to realize that was because in the Western society, it's

reverse. Because in pop culture, all you hear and see are people identifying as gay first,

and then everything else. It's like you wear your sexuality on your shoulder. And that's

what I was fed, that's what I was told, or to fit in you have to be this way. And so

deconstructing all of that, and educating myself on the background of my culture, it got

reversed.

Ben-Ben described how he learned to challenge Western norms that centered LGBTQ identities

first and foremost. Instead, he learned to communicate the centrality of his indigenous identity

that shaped how he communicated other salient intersections of gay, family, and student.

Board member Mariah was a Diné transwoman in her 40s who identified as heterosexual

and someone who was housed that previously experienced homelessness, addiction, and

incarceration. She valued centering her Diné identities in order to critique colonization that

attempted to erase her indigenous identities. Mariah explained how she and her relations, "were

being assimilated and acculturated to a certain degree for so long from preschool to high school."

She described knowledge erasures in indigenous communities through "intergenerational social

trauma" that she only learned about later in life through her own critical education. Mariah

described how her grandmother and great-uncle hid in the hills to escape being sent to American

Indian Boarding Schools. For Mariah, remembering and honoring that historical trauma was

important in all facets of her life. She said that when indigenous people critiqued colonization,

they were dismissed, "Like, 'Oh you're just angry. You're just angry Indians. You're just angry

Natives.' There's a reason why we're angry, because of the epigenetics, that trauma that

happened to my people is instilled in my DNA and my chromosomes of what happened to us,

and it angers me [*hits table for emphasis*]." For Mariah, she resignified (see DeFrancisco &

Palczewski, 2014) "angry Native" to put the onus on those causing historical indigenous trauma and created the appropriate need for anger in her communication rather than allowing stereotypes about indigenous people's communication to be perpetuated.

In addition to using education to recognize impacts of colonization on their identities, some indigenous participants also critiqued Western society's LGBTQ history that erased the intersections of indigeneity and queer and trans identities. For example, Ben-Ben disputed United States LGBTQ history that begins with stories of Stonewall. He reminded me that Native LGBTQ people, "were here *way* before Stonewall. We were in our creation stories. [For Diné people], in the separation of the sexes story, we were essential to bringing the two genders back together to bring harmony to our people. By researching those stories made me proud of who I was as a Navajo gay man first, then everything else." Like Ben-Ben, multiple Diné participants described how their tribal histories and creation stories inspired them. To see themselves in spiritual narratives through shared identities with their ancestors enabled them to question a Westernized gender binary.

Ben-Ben narrated this connection of indigenous and transgender identities:

The very unique thing about Navajo culture is that we're already part of the fabric of our existence. Transpeople were *already* there. And so when someone is trans or gay, it's just known that there's no questioning it except some of the families who are very faith-based, that's when those questions come out or resistance comes from the family. But most traditional Navajo families honor someone who is LGBTQ.

Ben-Ben's excerpt importantly revealed how only in contact with Western religion did Navajo families begin to exclude their LGBTQ relatives. He further explained how Navajo LGBTQ people always have had a role in traditional ceremonies, "like cutting firewood, making bread,

feeding people, there's always a role there, there's always a role there for GLBTQ people, like in the winter Yei'bi'ci ceremony…It's not about sexuality. It's what you bring, what you do for your family, that's what it's honored."

Navajo participants also described the term "Nádleehí" as connected to their affirming Diné creation stories and a potential Diné word in replacement of transgender as a Western category. Participants recounted the role of Asdzáán Nádleehé ("the woman who changes") in their creation stories. Historically, the Nádleehí "were the shamans. We were healers, we were negotiators, we were the leaders. We were constantly brought in as mediators to help people talk about things. We were really people to reach out to," according to Aron. Despite valuing the history of the Nádleehí and feeling some shared potential connections, Aron questioned how the Nádleehí communicated and embodied their gender identities, and if they could really be compared to trans indigenous women's experiences today. Aron asked, "I wonder how prior to the contact period [with Western societies] how we lived. Did we dress like a female because we felt like females, did we really wear dresses, or did we wear pants? Did we grow our hair out to say that we were female? All these modern characteristics you find…did we do those in the past?" Aron thus wondered if Nádleehí's embodied gender identities could be reconciled with transgender Diné women whose lives were shaped by colonization.

Others recognized the importance of the history of the Nádleehí, but they viewed Nádleehí as an inadequate representation for Native transwomen. Mariah believed that while, "people have thrown around the word Nádleehí, but we don't really have the concept of what Nádleehí really was. When you break it down, it's somewhat of a constant change. The word Nádleehí was actually for people who were born intersex." To use Nádleehí as a replacement for transgender, then, could conflate intersex identities with transwomen. Mariah instead listened to

oral histories to better understand how she and others could relate to Nádleehí. She recalled, "talking to elder GLBT communities who are medicine people or who are very knowledgeable in their culture and their language, and they described to me one time that we are not Nádleehí. That we are instead *derivative* of them."

Indeed, in a recent published report from a Navajo Nation dialogue about gender violence, Navajo LGBTQI dialogue attendees also reported valuing the history of Nádleehí to affirming their intersectional identities. They "generally observed that contemporary Navajo LGBTQI will draw upon the person of the Nádleehí in traditional stories as a way to affirm their presence and roles in traditional and contemporary Navajo society" (Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission, 2016, p. 15). While some indigenous transwomen valued the Nádleehí (and the indigenous transmen valued the female to male counterpart of the Dilbaa'), the report revealed that their community dialogues showed how contemporary Navajo LGBTQI wanted their identities to be, "extended beyond a sexual identity to the roles they brought to their families and communities as part of the kin network system" (p. 53). Here, in extensive report about dialogue over gender identity, history, spirituality, and violence, we see how the Nádleehí allowed modern LGBTQ Diné people to identify as a part of Diné family and culture and see themselves represented and tied to the Nádleehí and creation stories while going beyond the historical figures.

While the commissioned report contended that Nádleehí was more of an historical anchor than a past term for transgender, one thing Diné participants agreed upon was that "two-spirit[10]," a term commonly used to capture "indigenous" transgender identities, was limited. Two-spirit

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[10] Importantly, some indigenous transgender people embrace the term two-spirit, including 51% of respondents to the USTS (James et al., 2017). For my local site, however, most Diné transpeople refuted this terminology. This illustrates the importance of using localized knowledge and language to understand participants' intersectional identities.

did not map to their Diné identities and was actually *harmful* language from their perspectives.

Ben-Ben told me that his biggest ethical concern for my research should be to not use two-spirit

to loosely refer to all indigenous transgender participants. Although I had never used the word at

TGRC, Ben-Ben cautioned against using two-spirit in my writing:

> One of the big things that's happening locally and nationwide is using the term two-spirit
>
> loosely…as a very contemporary term. If you research it as a term, a lot of urban Natives
>
> up in Canada I think created that term to have a connection to their homeland…Like I
>
> don't identify as two-spirit. So putting that label on two-spirit is I think could be
>
> detrimental, because especially people on the reservation…if you interpret that term to
>
> Navajo, it means you're possessed.

Mariah also explained that even some Navajo transgender people she worked with used two-

spirit because it had become a popular term used to encompass universal indigenous transgender

or non-binary identities. She also echoed Ben-Ben's points about the "negative connotation, not

just to the Navajo tribe but to different tribal entities." She believed two-spirit was becoming

normative to communicate indigenous transgender identities, and that this was "sort of history

repeating itself but within our own people. We're practicing that colonization within our own

demographic and within our own tribes." She argued that two-spirit erased the Nádleehí and

estranged Navajo people from their own tribes as a form of colonizing communication. Mariah

traced two-spirit as a term "coined in the early 90s in the Bay area, and because there was GLBT,

that Native GLBT wanted a name. [They said,] 'There are other male and female spirits, and

we'll call ourselves two-spirit' basically." She believed this language created erasures of

indigenous identities, and that indigenous people should harness "knowledge that has to happen

within our Native GLBT brothers to know that they are that tribal members, that tribal entity first and foremost, and then in Western context they can be Native GLBT two-spirit populations."

In addition to exploring their history and tribal language, some indigenous transgender participants did not identify fully (or at all) with the term transgender. Many preferred to refer to themselves as "girls," "Diné," or just use their own names. Some guests did embrace transgender as an identity and detypified the category as something that fit their experience, like Kylo Ren who saw herself as "transgender." Kylo Ren and Robert also discussed "transgender" as new language to them upon arriving to Albuquerque.

> **Kylo Ren:** Well for me transgender means I wish I was a woman. I wish I was the *real* thing. There is other people out there that are like me that are, but they just come out *as a different identity*. That's why we all come over here to the center 'cause…we wanna be like one identity, but we were born like this…
>
> **Robert:** I didn't know what transgender was *until when I first came here*. That's when everything opened up. Now I know what transgender is now…I learned it from here because out there, in Gallup, I didn't know nothing about transgender, that word until I can to the center, and that's when *everything just opened up*. (emphasis added)

Here Robert and Kylo Ren examined transgender as a new Western term that TGRC taught to them, but Kylo Ren embraced the language to show how she wanted to be like "the *real* thing" as a cisgender woman. She also marked how different guests visited TGRC while coming out "as a different identity," noting that the transgender term did not capture their gender identities.

While participants like Kylo Ren embraced transgender as an identity to describe how they were not cisgender, others resisted transgender and saw it as a Westernized construct that conflicted with their indigenous identities. For example, when I asked Mariah about her

identities, she first spoke in Diné to detail her clan and her family names (which I excluded her to protect her confidentiality). Mariah explained:

> What I said in Diné where I grew up and also my grandmother grew up, so that's where my lineage is. That's how I describe myself as a Navajo individual. That's my identity *first and foremost* is that I'm a Navajo. I say it in my language because that's *who I am*. In Western concepts I identify as a Native transgender woman and that comes from colonization, assimilation, and acculturation.…Even though I went through family that didn't accept me, I went through substance abuse and stuff going through my isms and my traumas and everything that has happened, I've been resilient in knowing where my lineage comes from…But as a young adult I realized that I am Navajo. I am Diné, and that I need to get back to my roots, I need to get back to my culture, I need to get back to my *language*…I need to obtain everything that I can as a Navajo individual to be who I am because that's me first and foremost.

For Mariah, connecting to her Navajo identity as central became important even if she also used Western language to detail her "transgender identity." She tethered all her intersecting identities and experiences via her Diné identity.

Similarly, another participant Aron told me that like other Diné transpeople, she centered her indigenous identity to "honor the indigenous part. The Navajo people were almost exterminated. We were almost eradicated. We were almost killed off. I think really just emphasizing the fact that I am first and foremost Diné, really says a whole lot…We're still here even with our transpeople. We're still here." Aron also specifically contended with her resistance to transgender as a term as a Diné woman in perhaps the most critical way among my

participants in part due to her college degree, interest in continued higher education, and value of indigenous knowledge. Aron recounted the newness of transgender as a term in her life:

> Truly, honestly "being transgender" [*does air quotes*], and definitely as a transwoman, it's fairly new to me. Even the thought of saying transgender five years ago would not have been real to me like today. Because on reservation you don't hear these identities…so you just grow up to be who you are…[Trans is] more tolerated in the Navajo Reservation than accepted. Coming to Albuquerque and learning about transgender is like okay, "Is that truly who I am?"…I had to learn far more than what transgender is. You make that transgender person who *you want to be*…I say transgender because it's a political statement because looking back five years ago me not knowing that transgender people existed and even the identity existed so it really says that we are here. We exist, and we are living.

For Aron, transgender was a new Western category that she still questioned its applicability to her, but she valued transgender as a political label to show her and others living resiliently. Aron's self-reflection about her communication showcases how she learned to detypify (Jenness, 1992) "transgender" to make it "real" for her and to construct her own trans identity.

This uncertain communication about transgender identity tied to Aron and other indigenous participants' experience of what they called "two worlds," as they navigated how to communicate their identities in different cultural contexts. Aron described how:

> It becomes hectic and chaotic because you have to constantly refine yourself in two different worlds…Because if I were to go back to the reservation and say, "I'm transgender, and I'm Aron. My name is Aron, and I'm transgender." People will think, "What the hell are you talking about? What is *transgender*?" Having to learn what

transgender is and then having to go back and kind of be that person you are [on the

reservation] it's like how do I find that balance of being true to myself but yet still carry

that identity?

Aron showed a disconnect in her communication at home with her communication in

Albuquerque as like experiencing two separate worlds. In other words, she felt the intersections

among her indigenous and trans identities as a crossroads and creating tensions in her

communication in diverse settings with diverse audiences.

Aron provided an additional layer to the communication complexities of constructing

indigenous transgender identities because she also viewed indigenous transwomen as stereotyped

and stigmatized as a collective. She chose to overtly challenge stereotypes by describing her

intersectional identities in communication with cisgender people:

 [When I say] I'm an indigenous transwoman. [Others reply,] "Okay, you're an alcoholic

or a prostitute? You're on the streets, and what else?" It's like, "*No* that's a part of me. I

have done all that. But I'm also a college-educated person, I have done this. I have done

this, and I have done this." [And they respond,] "Okay, wow, I didn't know that." I was

like, "Well what you're perceiving me as is a stereotype. That's not every trans person.

Although there are some transwomen who are on the streets, who are, they're addicts,

who do sex work or survival work, some of them are college educated because they can't

find the job because of these stereotypes that you believe."

Despite encountering stereotypes about her own and other indigenous transwomen's identities,

Aron challenged their constructions of indigenous transwomen, and she instead advanced her

own intersectional critical praxis (Collins & Bilge, 2016). She described her intersectional

identity as *more* than the sum of those separate and stigmatized identities (e.g., an additive approach). She instead hailed a "multiplicative," complex framing of trans indigenous women.

Ultimately, Aron and some other indigenous participants constructed their identities as "just me" in order to move beyond limiting categories. Aron beautifully recounted how she came to construct her identity as "just Aron" when I asked her about her gender identity, "When I have to do that, I first have to think Navajo or Western? Most of the times I just say I'm just Aron. I'm just *Aron*. Publicly, when I speak in public and when I have to identify as someone who you can understand, I am an indigenous transwoman." Aron lastly to described herself as "just me" when she communicated with a Diné friend who was lesbian. Aron asked her friend about their gender identity. The friend replied, "I'm just me." Aron believed that her communication with another LGBTQIA Navajo person helped her to understand her construction of her own intersectional identities better and more fully. She explained, "That's the same thing about me, I'm just Aron. Identifying me, that I'm just me."

Aron argued that other indigenous transgender women visiting TGRC would also be best described as "just me" because transgender was a Western term. She explained:

> I bet, I'm guessing they would just be 'I'm me, I'm Aron, I am whoever their name.' I don't think a lot of them are really aware of what transgender is and what it entails and where it's come from and how it's evolved, and so I don't think they really identify as transgender. Because a lot of them are Navajo and coming from the Navajo reservation I would assume that they wouldn't know what transgender is.

She recognized how "just me" identities could resist Western norms that conflicted with Navajo norms. Like Aron described, some indigenous transwomen used "just me" language for themselves or referred to themselves as "sisters" or "Native girls."

In summary, indigenous transgender participants varied in their acceptance of transgender as an identity using communication of diverse language, humor, and intersectional identities. Indigenous participants' uncertainty of transgender as a term and identity that did not fully capture their identities in relationship to their indigeneity offers a new articulation of a critique from David Valentine's (2007) findings of how transgender as a term simultaneously "succeeds *and* fails" to represent identities of community members with diverse identities. Valentine's work pointed to how those experiencing the most oppression may find "transgender" as a term to be even more limited given the category's centering of whiteness and medical models of transitioning. My study thus extends Valentine's findings to showcase how "transgender" is a Western term that may be limited for indigenous transgender people's experiences of their gender identities. I return to another critique of "transgender" as an overarching term at TGRC in Chapter Six with non-binary guests' experiences.

Importantly, if we consider Aron's "just me" as an intersectional heuristic for all TGRC participants, we might recognize how guests and staff alike communicate unique identities that overlap and offer intricate, unique, contradictory, and complex "just me" identities. While this chapter examined intersections of homeless and indigenous identities with transgender identities, other participants' salient intersectional identities offer further extensions of the diverse "just me" identities for TGRC transgender participants. Framing intersectional identities using "just me" is provocative, and simultaneously, we can begin to see the organizational communication complexities of how TGRC might attempt to respond to *all* guests' and staff's varied intersectional identities and versions of "just me." I now turn to those complexities through examining TGRC's organizational identities in response to participants' intersectional identities in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER FIVE: INVESTIGATING TGRC'S ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTITY IDEALS

The following chapter examines organizational identities of the Transgender Resource Center of New Mexico (TGRC). Herein I share findings that respond to two research questions: (1) *How do TGRC staff and guests communicatively construct organizational identity?* and (2) *How do TGRC staff and guests communicatively construct the relationship between TGRC's organizational identities and participants' transgender and other salient identities?* This chapter extends Chapter Four's analysis of guests' communication of their transgender and other intersectional identities by exploring how TGRC advances outreach and advocacy through centering guests' construction of their identities.

This chapter is structured around what I am calling TGRC's organizational identity "ideals." Through TGRC staff and guests' organizational communication, they advanced two organizational identity ideals: (1) *TGRC as "family"* and (2) *TGRC's support for "all facets of transgender living."* I chose to focus on these two organizational identities because of participants' repeated espoused value of these ideals and their ongoing communication enabling the ideals to endure throughout my three years of fieldwork. Simultaneously as I will discuss in Chapter Six, TGRC faced constraints in enacting these ideals. These constraints included: (1) how to sustain TGRC's "family" amidst conflict communication, (2) perceived exclusion by non-binary guests, (3) tensions with its growing identity as a provider of "Harm Reduction" services for cisgender guests, and (4) the bureaucratic norms associated with TGRC's attempted resistance to the "nonprofit organizational industrial complex" (NPIC). I now focus on the first ideal: TGRC as family.

TGRC's "Family" Organizational Identity

As an outreach organization, the Transgender Resource Center of New Mexico focused on providing multiple forms of support to its guests. Here, a central goal was to provide guests with *emotional support* via organizational communication. TGRC staff explicitly named emotional support as a service in their mission statement. In my analysis, participants described the importance of emotional support through related themes of *home, family, caring*, and "*feeling love*." Here I focus on both the "home" and "family" codes to explore "family" as a distinctive type of organizational identity. I also include "caring" and "feeling love" examples when participants' specifically tie them to the family organizational identity. Overall, staff, guests, and the Directors' communicative construction of the "family" sustained this ideal as a central, distinctive, and enduring organizational identity (see Albert & Whetten, 1985).

Research has previously examined the ways in which organizational members claim connection to a family, whether as an organizational identity, metaphor, and/or value. Typically, this research depicts "organizations as families" as connoting a distinctive cluster of themes, including: shelter, safety, nurturing, familiarity, exclusivity, privacy intimacy, cohesiveness, and mutual obligation. Additionally, the metaphor suggests a hierarchical, disciplinary social structure in which adult "parents" wield superior knowledge and legitimate authority over dependent "children" (Taylor, 1997). Some research specifically examined family-owned organizations where literal family members link existing familial and organizational identities (Whetten, Foreman, & Dyer, 2014; Zellweger, Eddleston, & Kellermanns, 2010). Other studies depict how employees understand and value their organization *metaphorically* as a family. For example, Smith and Eisenberg's (1987) interview study on Disneyland investigated the park's contradictions as "the happiest place on earth" that simultaneously had labor challenges with

worker strikes. The authors analyzed contradictions of employees and managers' contrasting usage of metaphors of either *family* or *drama*. Employees identified with the history of Disneyland as a family-centered organization and critiqued the new culture as no longer fitting the deceased Walt Disney's family vision. Managers, in turn, centered Disneyland as an organization for performance and entertainment as *business*.

Other studies of family and organizations have offered an even sharper critical lens by questioning the ways in which hailing members as "family" may facilitate control. Pribble (1990), for example, studied how a medical technology company, BE, harnessed new employees' organizational identification through orientation-related communication. Here, those managers described how medical supplies like pacemakers acted as life-saving technologies that could, in the future, save employees' or customers' family members. Throughout new employee training, the organization connected the values of family, health, and work, "describing how work at BE is important because of its impact on families" (p. 259). Most recently, Kirby (2006) theorized the organizational appropriation of family roles as a colonization of workers' lives (see also Deetz, 1992). She argued that depicting employees as "helping" the organization as "family" serves to benefit "competitive advantage and cost savings rather than altruism" (p. 477).

While prior research on family and organizational communication offer important exemplars, this literature has yet to examine *nonprofit* organizations and/or organizations specifically engaging emotional support as a part of their mission, as is in the case of TGRC. Specifically, guests, staff, community members, Board Members, and the Directors depicted "family" as a primary symbolic resource for cultivating emotional support for guests and staff alike. With prior research in mind, I now describe how TGRC members communicated to create

and sustain the organizational identity of family through two sub-themes: (1) participants'
organizational identification with TGRC as a family *home* and (2) family as a form of strategic
attachment cultivated between guests and staff.

Participants' Identification with TGRC as a Family Home

My ethnographic research repeatedly illustrated that participants identified with TGRC's
organizational identity as creating a shared family. One of the primary ways in which this
organizational identity was communicated was through shared beliefs about TGRC's drop-in
center as a "home." Here, I examine guests and staff's communication about TGRC as a home,
both in terms of *physical space* and a *symbolic place* for sharing emotional support.

Guests' identification with TGRC as a family home. Primarily, viewing the drop-in
center as a home was meaningful for guests who identified as homeless. Nonetheless, non-
homeless guests who used TGRC's other services also valued the home identity, like those
utilizing support groups or community education. For example, in a creative focus group I held
during drop-in hours with predominantly indigenous transwomen, Alyce created a collage
responding to the prompt of "Who is the center an organization?" by featuring the importance of
TGRC as home (see Figure 5.1, below). Alyce identified as a Diné, homeless, transwoman with
disabilities in her early 30s who engaged in survival sex work and experienced drug addiction.
Alyce described the importance of TGRC's drop-in center as a place for "Time Off" (words she
cut out of a magazine) and "Home" (which she hand-wrote). She said that she chose, "'Time
Off' is for because on my off days, I'll come here, and I'll hang out with the girls...I could talk
about everything that's bothering me. And people understand it in here more than out
there…When you try to talk to people out there (points outside), they won't give a fuck. But
here, it's like, *they care*. And we all care about each other when we come together." For Alyce,

TGRC became a place for "time off" from sex work and street survival, and it also became a place for caring creating a home to her. Alyce also later explicitly named TGRC as a family in her interview when she said, "It's like one big giant family here. We all put up with each other, and no one's going to do that *except* family."

Figure 5.1: Alyce's Collage

In a creative focus group with Rainbow Friends Support Group guests—which included those who identified as transgender, gender non-conforming, and even cisgender family, friends, or parents—a participant named Zbigniew who never visited TGRC during drop-in hours also focused on TGRC as "home" as the primary facet of the organization's identity. Zbigniew had a young history with TGRC, having only participated in Rainbow Friends and Non-Binary support groups for over one month. They learned about TGRC via a Trans-101 university training by Director Henry and immediately began commuting to Albuquerque to attend support groups. Zbigniew identified as "a genderfluid, White, pansexual, broke ass bitch" in their mid-20s.

In narrating their own collage (see Figure 5.2), Zbigniew explained that how they viewed TGRC as a "foundation of good things," including serving as a place to come together and as home. They described the colorful pinwheels image pasted in the bottom right of Figure 5.2 to "show the vibrancy and variety of perspectives that you get if you go to TGRC in like *any* of the group meetings. And the way it brings people together…But, you know, the one that describes it most is this (points to top right): HOME! It's home. It's a good place where I can be around other really great people." For both Zbigniew and Alyce, TGRC became a home in part due to

Figure 5.2: Section of Zbigniew's collage

the emotional support and the other people that could be found when visiting "home."

Guests' organizational identification with TGRC as home also encouraged them to take an active role in providing emotional support for one another and thereby further sustaining TGRC's family organizational identity. This points to an understudied aspect of organizational identity: how those served *by* an organization also provide discourse that shapes and buttresses its preferred identities. Guests valuing TGRC as home and creating support for and with one another provided a unique "nonprofit legitimacy" (Gill & Wells, 2014), or how the organization

follows through with its claims of "who we are" as an organization. Guests, thus, helped sustain a home together and communicated further legitimacy for staff and Directors' family organizational identity through their own organizational identification (see Cheney et al., 2014).

In fact, the experience of guests sharing a home made leaving the drop-in center at the end of a day a challenge for many homeless (even *daily*) drop-in guests, as it was like being asked to leave their home. As a volunteer for three years, I observed the incredible communication difficulties associated with having guests leave the drop-in center at 6 PM, including waking people up who were intoxicated or high, gathering people and their belongings, exchanging prolonged hugs and farewells, guests pleading to stay longer, and making time for final visits to the bathroom (as many would not be able to access a free, safe bathroom until 1 PM the following day). Some guests responded to these daily exits from TGRC by beginning to play and/or sing *a cappella* a popular 1990s song called "Closing Time" by Semisonic. The song focuses on a bar closing at the end of the night, and its lyrics include the refrain, "Closing time: Time for you to go out go out into the world. Closing time: Turn the lights up over every boy and every girl…You don't have to go home but you can't stay here." Guests commonly sung the final line upon leaving, which became especially poignant for homeless trans guests who did not have a home to return to and had no shelter until the center re-opened. Some guests made snide comments to staff attempting to close the building at 6 PM, including, "Must be nice to go *home*" or "We know you have *other homes* to go to."

The challenge of the daily closing of the center as a "home" space became apparent in my creative focus group during drop-in hours. Homeless indigenous transwomen explained the pain of leaving each day at closing time:

Shade:	And then it always sucks, especially when we have to leave, because, you know—

Alyce: [*nods in agreement*] We all have to go our separate ways.

Shade: Yeah, and then it gets lonely after that.

Aron: [*nods and looks deeply into Shade's eyes*] Back to *surviving*.

Shade: Back to sucking *dick*.

Alyce: Making money for a living.

[*Other girls nod and look down*].

To leave TGRC for many, then, was to go back to survival work and to return to TGRC was to escape loneliness and to find emotional support. Overall, for many guests, TGRC was a place away from the street, a temporary home, and a place to be with other "family members."

Staff's identification with TGRC as a family home. In addition to guests' communication, *staff* also depicted TGRC as a family home. For example, a former TGRC social work intern, Monica (who identified as lesbian, Latina, cisgender, and in her 20s) told me that she described working at TGRC as "a family type of thing. But I mean I guess when I describe it, it is always like this place is pretty amazing, like, and I just kind of go on with everything they do here…It is more family oriented, more really welcoming is what I see this place as." Another staff member, Bailey (a mixed race, housed, Asian transman in his 20s, with some college education) shared how he specifically decided to become a staff member after his positive experiences attending the Transmasculine Support Group. His first impressions of TGRC were that, "It was really like laidback and personal. Like it was just comfortable; it wasn't like bureaucratic…Just kinda like a family...the way people talked, like the layout of the sessions and space [and facilitation was]… fun, enjoyable, and engaging." I will return to the tensions of TGRC being a "laidback" family as a potential challenge in Chapter Six.

Although many staff members admired and identified with TGRC as a family, other staff questioned if that identity endured as the organization grew and moved locations during my three-year study. Specifically, staff and guests characterized TGRC's third location (called the Jackson location) as "moving away" from a home space. One example here came from staff member Nancy who was a white, college-educated, housed transwoman in her 50s who experienced poverty and unemployment. Nancy described the center at the Jackson location as "sterile" and "clinical." She longed for the staff and Directors, "to be more engaging, more like family community versus clinical community. Cuz that's what it feels like right now, it's like a clinical community versus a family community."

Thus, some staff, and some guests questioned if the new physical organizational space undermined TGRC's traditional identity as a family and home, which they believed existed at the second location (the Morningside location, which had been an actual *casita*). Because the casita had required little modification except removing some interior doors, participants viewed the Morningside location as best symbolizing a home identity. Guests and staff lamented how the Jackson location's formal structure changed how they cultivated informal emotional support. Nancy specifically recommended that in the future, TGRC should move to a larger residential property, as the Jackson space felt too corporate and disconnected. She told me how multiple guests expressed that they missed the "home of TGRC." Guests also reported to me that they missed the casita's built-in kitchen, shower, and laundry facilities, even though they recognized TGRC specifically left the casita because the landlord refused to fix those very elements.

Like Nancy, other staff questioned how the Jackson location could replace the casita as home. Monica explained that, "I would have preferred like a homey feel, so [the Jackson office location] just felt more like, less family oriented, and a little more like 'Oh, here is the center,

what do you need?' Come and go kind of thing. Not that the staff or anybody made it feel that way; it was just the *location* itself." Monica and Nancy thus questioned whether and how the organizational physical space could continue to communicate "family" over time.

Importantly, many staff and guests alike also reported a new appreciation of the Jackson location once the Directors secured the entire building. The other half of the building was once occupied by a BDSM phone sex organization that then relocated. When the organization only had one half of the building on Jackson, the space was often crowded. Having only one large room did not allow staff to create a living room aesthetic because of excessive chairs and boxed-in walls. Expanding to the entire building on Jackson enabled TGRC staff to add a new living room that included couches, a wall of books, art, and a dining table (See Figure 5.3).

Figure 5.3: TGRC Jackson Living Room

Participants later celebrated how the new additions to the Jackson location helped better showcase the family identity again. Monica explained her love of the new living room and said, "I have only been here once since [my internship ended], but guests looked a lot more relaxed

and like a family again." Staff also complimented the Directors on these changes in a staff meeting. Bailey, Hunter (a white transman in his 30s), and Marie (a white cisgender woman in her late 30s) gushed over the new addition of the "trans-only" living room in the new side of the Jackson location:

> **Marie:** I love the natural light and warmth.
>
> **Hunter:** I love this room in general now. The books, the pictures!
>
> **Bailey:** It's *really* a home. We talk about it being a home, and now I love it.

Staff used self-reflexive communication (see Gioia et al., 2013) about the family organizational identity (e.g., "We *talk* about it being a home") to showcase how space affirmed that identity.

In summary, communicating TGRC as a "family" organizational identity was tied to both the situated cultivation of shared emotional support, and the physical existence of the center as a literal home. Guests, staff, Board Members, and community donors also specifically brought items into the space in order to help cultivate TGRC as home, including art, furniture, home-cooked food, and holiday decorations. Debbie (a white, cisgender woman in her 40s) described the impact of bringing in Christmas decorations and how one guest "just lit up, just like the Christmas tree." Bianca (a white, cisgender woman in her 50s) cooked meals for guests so that they would have "one hot meal—like at home." For TGRC, then, part of what Alvesson et al. (2008) describe as the "ingredients" or "stuff" of organizational identity included organizational artifacts and physical space that supported the family and home identities. Additionally, this relationship of organizational space to the "enduring" family organizational identity exemplifies what Gioia et al. (2013) described as evolving organizational identity. The authors wrote, "*the labels are stable, but their meanings are malleable*" (p. 126, emphasis in original). Here, participants continued to value the family, even as the physical space changed to reflect new

iterations of the home. The malleability of the family organizational identity also tied to the varied ways in which the construct of "chosen family" was used as a strategy for communicating attachment and organizational identification, which I now present.

"Chosen" Family Organizational Identity as a Strategy for Attachment

A second sub-theme of TGRC's family identity was how the organization became a "chosen family" through communication. Indeed, this "chosen family" identity served as an early and enduring communication strategy, developed by the TGRC Directors. Importantly, a "chosen family" is a common discourse in many LGBTQ communities. Many LGBTQ people are rejected and ostracized by their biological families. Thus, the possibility of creating a chosen family enables bonding and connections to new groups. Oswald (2002) describes this strategy of as repairing stigma and abandonment by intentionally "choosing kin" (see also Weston's 1997 ethnography on families of choice).

TGRC participants used familial language to describe how the center created chosen family for them, including how they described their own roles. Participants named guests and staff as sisters, brothers, and family; the Directors as Dads, Daddies, and Papas; and the center itself as family and home. This also showed up in written communication in greeting cards that the Directors hung on a giant bulletin board outside of their office where they were often addressed to as "Dads" in addition to their first names. Some participants thanked the Directors on Father's Day on Facebook. As for referring to one another as siblings, Kylo Ren described the center's organizational identity as tied to the people and the other "family members" who visited. She explained, "There's other sisters there, which is nice because we can all get along. I like that, and we all laugh…because that's *what the center is for*…We are all *sisters*" (emphasis added). Calling and treating one another sisters and sharing in humor was very common among

transgender indigenous women like Kylo Ren who frequented drop-in hours, as I described in Chapter Four. Other participants also commonly used family language who did not visit drop-in hours and who did not identify as indigenous, including the Board of Directors, support group members, and community members describing TGRC as family, brothers, and sisters in Trans 101 presentations, marches, vigils, support groups, and special events.

Another example of chosen family came from Theresa who was a Black, transwoman in early 40s who identified as homeless, worked in sex work, and experienced addiction. She said, "[Here] we're all family. We are all sisters and brothers and God's eyes, I mean, not from the same mother or father, but, in his eyes, we are all family. And then when we are *transgender*, we *really* family because we're one of a kind, we're unique. We're different. I mean, we're us, and can't nobody else change that." Theresa believed all people were one family under God as a part of her Christian faith, but she also specifically believed that transgender people were "really" family because of their shared experiences and challenges of not following a binary gender. Theresa also categorized TGRC's organizational identity as a family because she saw the center as a place that enabled guests to be who they were, which contrasted with her birth family that did not allow her to express her feminine identity at home. She said:

> With Transgender Resource, they have helped me identify me as a person, and I know
> I'm not alone…And because my [birth] family members, they don't approve. Like I had
> to dress different when I went back home. I couldn't be myself, I was depressed, I was
> unhappy, and when I came back [to TGRC], I was back at me. I was me, and they helped
> me realize that I am me.

Thus, Theresa and other guests saw TGRC as a family that centered transgender identities through creating a loving space and encouraged their gender expression. Theresa's framing of

realizing through her involvement at TGRC "that I am me" showcased how she came to know herself through its outreach. Her wording also mirrored Aron's description of the value of using "just me" in Chapter Four to understand guests' complex intersectional identities.

Because TGRC influenced Theresa's ongoing identity construction as "me," she continued to return to TGRC *because* of the family identity. In our final interview, she said, "[Other guests are] my family and staff, they're family. They're loving and caring…And they provide, they help." Theresa also marked TGRC's family organizational identity as *distinctive* compared to other organizations. She explained, "It stands out because they really show you that they care. I mean, a lot of organizations will say this or say that but the Transgender Resource, it stands out because they show. They just don't talk about it. They really *be* about it, and they do care." For TGRC to "really *be* about" caring and family showed how guests viewed their family organizational identity as embodied, enacted, and authentic. To "really be about" family as an organizational identity also created guests like Theresa's continued organizational identification with TGRC, as they see the center as a home that ultimately values them as chosen family.

I thus argue that guests and staff's identification with TGRC as family was an immediate byproduct of the Directors' communication strategies to center family in their emotional support work, which can be understood as central, distinctive, and enduring to the organization's identity. From TGRC's beginning, the Directors treated it a place for guests to become chosen family. For example, when I asked Director Henry to describe TGRC as a person, he replied,

> I mean it depends on the day. Today, I think of it as like an incredibly demanding special needs child of which I'm the *parent*. Today, it feels like the amount of work I can't keep up with, you know, for something that I love so dearly but is really a set of huge challenges. Then other days, I feel like it's just this *big beautiful dysfunctional family* that

I'm as much held in the embrace of as the embracer. It's easy to think that we come in here and distribute these hugs and stuff to people, but I don't feel that way at all ever. I feel like I'm *getting* the hugs as much as *they're getting* the hugs, you know? It's a place that I get some of *my needs* for love and things met too. (emphasis added)

In this passage, Henry recognized his parent role in the dysfunctional family and framed running TGRC as "special needs" and a "child" given all the complex demands for varied support from which he also benefited.

Because guests, staff, and the Directors described the centrality of the family identity, I asked Henry and Brooks about how, when, and why it became important for the organization. Henry described the family identity as something he and Director Brooks could offer without any funding when TGRC first started:

That's all we had in the beginning to offer. We didn't have anything so all we could do was extend a hand. All we could do was hug people and love them and listen to them in large part…I believed that was enough and that no matter what else we added, that would *always* be the bottom of what people need. That would always be the *bottom line*. You can get all fancy…[but] if you take those fancy things away, listening, loving and caring will work. It *does work*. It's enough to keep some people alive.

Here, Henry described the incredible life-saving importance of love to create a chosen family, especially in the TGRC early days where care and love was often all they could offer without any sustained funding. For Henry, the family identity was a foundation from which any future outreach services could be provided.

Interestingly, Director Brooks also described the center, like Henry, as a dysfunctional family and the importance of communicating love within the TGRC family. He said that from

the beginning of the organization's history, he and Henry would leave TGRC during "closing time" by saying: "We love you guys. We'll see you tomorrow." How the Directors communicated love to all participants, then, remained an enduring, strategic, distinctive, and core aspect of TGRC's organizational identity that existed before prior to outside funding.

Additionally, because the Directors valued the importance of love and family as a strategic identity, Henry and Brooks drew upon outside texts and research to buttress their efforts. In particular, Gabor Maté's *In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts* (2010) was a foundational text for TGRC's identity through its focus on building attachments and emotional support. Maté's book detailed his two decades of work as a medical doctor in Vancouver, Canada, working with drug users and understanding their addictions and needs for change. For Maté, addiction is a complex process involving multiple components including neurological pathways that become familiarized and hardened and repetitive for people experiencing addiction. He centers the importance of compassion and attachment to repair past traumatic histories that can then help recovery. Henry explained to me that reading Maté was, "life-altering to me to think about attachment that way. That's when I really started to think about it in an overt way, in an explicit way in what *we* were doing, was what does it look like to build attachment and to repair those neuropathways [*shows the brain churning by twirling his finger around*] that are broken when attachments are broken." For Henry, Maté's writing on addiction directly connected to how he hoped to help build familial attachment through emotional support of guests and staff, especially those experiencing addiction. Brooks also described that he felt it was important that new staff members read Maté to understand TGRC's focus on attachments as key to creating a family identity. In part through cultivating attachment, TGRC as family persisted as an organizational identity with which guests and staff identified strongly and helped to support.

In the above section, I described guests and staff members' identification with TGRC as family. I explored the drop-in center as helping construct and sustain a physical "home" for the TGRC family. I also examined how the Directors communicated attachment strategically to cultivate a "chosen TGRC family" In Chapter Six, I will return to some specific constraints of constructing this family ideal, but now I turn to a second important organizational identity ideal.

Support for All Facets of Transgender Living

After theorizing TGRC's "family" identity above, I turn now to another of its distinctive and enduring identities, expressed in participants' communication of needed "support for all facets of transgender living." As I previewed in Chapter Three, this "all facets" organizational identity was featured prominently in TGRC's mission statement, and enacted through the communication of its guests, staff, and other stakeholders. Specifically, that mission statement's language read:

> TGRC is dedicated to serving the transgender communities in the state of New Mexico and strives to exist as a *clearing house for resources* which can support, assist, educate, and advocate for the transgender and gender non-conforming population of this state and their families and loved ones. We provide social, educational, emotional, and functional *support for all facets of transgender living* and promote mutual understanding, acceptance, and equality to achieve a more positive and healthy society. (emphasis added)

Participants confirmed that "all facets of transgender living" were supported through TGRC's efforts to supply needs-based resources. In the following two sub-sections, I examine how participants interpreted and expressed this ideal by (1) specifying the identities and needs that characterized *transgender living*, and (2) elaborating *all facets* of their lives as a potential

intersectional organizational response to participants' identities. Combined, these two sets of practices illustrate TGRC as a complex, comprehensive, and flexible resource center serving the interests of transgender guests.

Specifying the Identities and Needs of *Transgender Living*

First, participants constructed TGRC's "all facets" identity in depicting their needs for outreach associated with transgender *living*. While it may seem tautological to argue that a transgender outreach organization's identity was to serve transgender identities, participants communicated that TGRC's support for "all facets" of their transgender living was a rare and remarkable phenomenon. To explain, I now review how participants constructed TGRC as *distinctive* because it (1) uniquely served transgender and gender nonconforming identities and (2) responded with outreach, resources, and support for those identities.

Distinctive transgender-serving organizational identity. First, participants contrasted TGRC's performance with that of other local, regional, and national LGBTQ organizations. Many expressed their experience that, within those other organizations, the "T" frequently became a forgotten or estranged symbol– a claim verified in communication studies research (Gross, 2005; Chávez & Griffin, 2012; Spencer, 2015). For example, Director Henry reflected on TGRC's uniqueness as "an historical stroke of luck for us, right? There was not an LGBTQ center here when we came into being so we did not have to fight back on that at all." Director Brooks similarly recounted the organization's history:

> In places like New York, or Boston, or some bigger cities, they have these LGBTQ centers. I think sometimes, even in those center…the T gets left out or not very well represented…We don't have to be under a LGB umbrella of any kind, or be absorbed by some bigger thing. We *never* wanted that. We *still* don't want that.

Thus, even as TGRC affiliated with partner organizations in New Mexico that addressed conditions of LGBTQ living (e.g., HIV/AIDS prevention, student life, mental health, youth homelessness, etc.), the Directors successfully harnessed a gap in existing support for transgender living.

Repeatedly, guests referred to TGRC's *name* to conceptualize its organizational identities. For example, guest Theresa said, "I think the name stands out for itself because *Transgender*. It really does. *That* stands out." Other participants similarly indicated that the organization's centering of trans identities was an obvious clue about their central identity. Like Theresa, they would repeat the organization's name and emphasize the "T" in its name.

Participants also characterized the "T" in TGRC as a *geographically*-distinctive identity, across local, regional and national contexts. First, within the city of Albuquerque, TGRC created the only place where many guests could comfortably and safely express their gender identities.
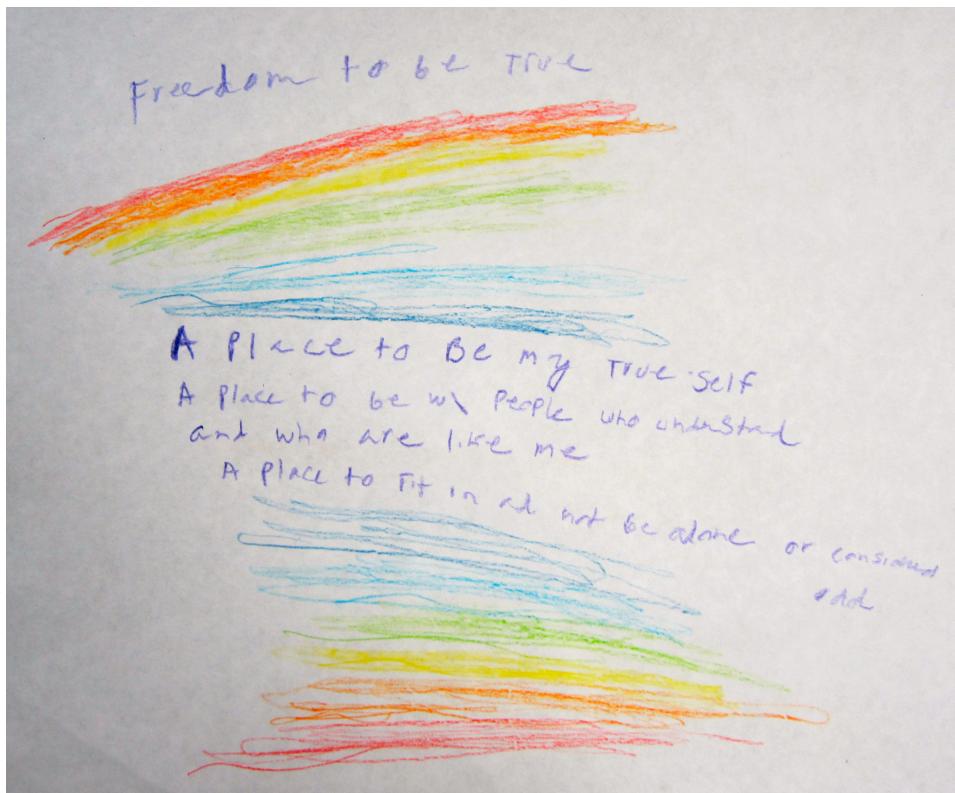

Figure 5.4: Demitri's TGRC organizational identity drawing

In a Rainbow Friends support group session, for example, guest Demitri (a white, gender neutral person in their 30s) described a transphobic Albuquerque business culture that led trans workers to suppress their gender identities for fears of employment discrimination. Indeed, Demitri expressed concern that a fellow co-worker might somehow read my research and identify them. However, in their artwork (see Figure 5.4, above), Demitri emphasized that TGRC created a space for companionship and validation: "a place to fit in and not be alone or considered odd." Demitri returned to TGRC for over six years to support groups where they experienced "the main slogan [of TGRC] is the freedom to be true." That TGRC created a place "to be true" for Demitri mirrored Theresa's focus above on how TGRC as family allowed her to "me" or Aron's being "just me" in Chapter Four. Guests, then, valued how TGRC supported their own identity constructions as TGRC attempted to cultivate outreach for what guests needed to find their freedoms to be "true." Still, some members of TGRC's Non-Binary Support Group questioned whether this "transgender living" identity truly served them as people who identified as gender non-conforming—a theme I will return to in the next chapter.

Like Demitri, Ayumi drew an image rather than creating a collage. She identified as a white, asexual, transfemale with disabilities in her mid-30s, and as a "government pet" because "everything is provided for me" through unemployment. In the Transfeminine creative focus group, Ayumi described how her drawing depicted the changes in her life created by years of attending TGRC support groups (see Figure 5.5 below). She said, "What I drew was a picture of a storm, and one pink straight line. Cuz when I think about like what the center is as an organization, it's basically just a clearer path in a really shitty situation… [TGRC] makes it clear*er*. (laughs) I wish it were *super* clear." Another participant in the focus group, Cara,

responded to Ayumi's drawing. Cara identified as a transfeminine, non-binary, pansexual, neurodivergent, Latinx, and as a full-time student in her 30s. She had attended support groups for

Figure 5.5: Ayumi's TGRC as clearer path through the storm

over two and a half years, and she echoed Ayumi's focus by saying that with TGRC, "It's still stormy, but we have that glowing pink to follow." Cara felt it was hard to depict in her drawing (which I return to below) "the sense of relief of coming to TGRC…about just finding a place where you can fit in, where you are around people like yourself."

In addition to creating a distinctive *citywide* space for transgender living, participants recognized TGRC as unique *statewide*. Staff member Susie, for example, believed that TGRC was "a Transgender Resource Center of *New Mexico*," and thus needed to serve the entire state's transgender population. Susie was a cisgender woman in her 50s, who identified as having been raised poor, Catholic, and as having an unlabeled sexuality. She believed that TGRC's support could even be a *worldwide* model. She said that TGRC's "advocacy…is this huge projection of

how the world should be." Similarly, staff member Monica lamented that aside from TGRC, there was "nothing" available for transgender people in the state. She said, "If you belong to this community, there is only literally one or two places you can really go to have your needs met, I mean for *all their* needs, I mean *all* they need. And they have so many needs."

As discussed in Chapter Four, both staff and guests commonly relocated to Albuquerque from across the state of New Mexico *because of* TGRC. Additionally, some even relocated *nationally*. Staff member Jessie, for example, had traveled across the country to intern with TGRC. Jessie identified as a white, transgender, genderqueer college student in their late teens. They noted how this was:

> the first time I've ever heard of a center being specifically *for transpeople*. And being a trans person myself, it was like kind of magical! And I was like, Wow! This is a place *just for me* and my resources *I need*. There's no one else really getting any of the spotlight like they usually do in LGBT centers. (emphasis added)

Similarly, guests like Marilyn (a white transwoman in her 50s) risked coming to Albuquerque "because of the research that I'd done. I was coming here without knowing anybody, without know any place, no job, no place to live, etc." Marilyn faced daunting uncertainty and leaped anyway. While Marilyn questioned if she would move again because she had experienced unemployment and homelessness after her move, she added, "On the other hand, I came down here, I've met the people that I've met here. I've gotten the services that I've gotten at TGRC."

In this way, many participants marked TGRC as *nationally* distinct. For example, guest Patrick was the ex-partner of a transgender woman, and he identified as a Black gay man in his 30s. He explained that, "Unlike places like…New York or California, a big sprawling metropolis [TGRC] is extremely unique…I've heard people…say they've never seen anything like this

where they come from. So I just think it's probably revolutionary in the movement of the transpeople." Like Patrick, Board Member Mariah viewed TGRC as revolutionary. Mariah was a Diné transwoman in her 40s who identified as heterosexual, and someone who—while currently housed and employed—had previously experienced homelessness, addiction, and incarceration. She emphasized the value of TGRC organizing "from the bottom up," and compared this with national organizations:

> A lot of the organizations and community centers that I've known of throughout the country have started with money or have started with programs that have money…When it started from top down, it doesn't work. It's better when it's grassroots or starts from a seed to grow, and it's just something that's developing. I think that's why TGRC has been sustainable. They have been resilient, and they're continuing to grow because of that factor, because it started *by* trans populations, *for* trans populations, *of* trans populations, *with* trans populations.

Staff member Erin, a Diné transwoman in her 20s, also described TGRC's distinctive approach where the Directors, "saw a need in *their own* community, and they acted and they did something." According to Mariah and Erin, TGRC's distinctiveness included being a transgender-*founded* and *led* grassroots organization.

Such accounts displayed the influence of what Alvesson et al. (2008) have described as *anti-identities*, which can serve through opposition as a symbolic resource for communicating organizational identity. For example, Board Member Mariah viewed TGRC as nationally distinct because it was *not* top-down, corporate, or tacked onto LGBQ organizing. Similarly, Board Member Polly (a white, queer, cisgender, middle class woman) echoed Mariah by noting TGRC as nationally distinct due to its "grassroots nature…focusing on *transgender exclusively*."

Similarly, Cheney (1983b) has noted that use of *antithesis* may create stronger identification for organizational members—a claim supported in this case by the fact that Mariah and Polly had served as Board Members since TGRC's inception in 2008, and guest Demitri returned for six years to TGRC because it offered them the only organization that welcomed and inspired "the freedom to be true."

In closing, Penny poignantly summarized her view of TGRC's nationally distinct identity. Penny was a guest who also volunteered as a Trans 101 speaker and occasional support group facilitator. She identified as a Caucasian, transwoman, veteran, LGBTQ leader in her 50s. She described TGRC's focus on transgender living as "amazing and incredible, and there are bigger, more trans notable cities in the US that didn't even have this." She continued:

> It's not a laid-back support group focused organization. They're into *every aspect* of *transgender life*. They *take it all on*. They try the make health care better for us. They try to educate us. They speak for us. They try to educate others. They provide support groups. They have a center that we can say, "Here it is. It's on the map. There's a place in New Mexico that the trans community can *call home*." That is huge. (emphasis added)

Penny thus emphasized TGRC's comprehensive focus on "every aspect" of transgender living, a theme on which I now elaborate.

Distinctive "all facets of transgender living" organization identity. In addition to TGRC's *distinctive*, focused support of transgender living, participants emphasized the uniqueness of its *comprehensive* support for "all facets" of this life. Many nonprofit organizations, including LGBTQ-identified or other identity-based collectives, often choose one area of emphasis (e.g., health, employment, homelessness) for their outreach, and TGRC resisted this approach. Subsequently, when asked to describe TGRC, guests, staff, Board Members, and

other stakeholders often provided a laundry list of TGRC's services. They would often get lost in describing the many aspects of transgender living TGRC supported, and would circle back later to list other examples, saying, "Oh, and I forgot to add…" Participants thus valued the extensive services offered at TGRC, and/or that TGRC could connect them to partner organizations. In this subsection, I explore how TGRC developed "all facets" as a strategy to serve transgender identity, and also how it served guests' and staff's *other* salient identities.

Director Henry believed that because TGRC was "the only trans resource in a huge rural state," it must encompass *all facets of transgender living*. In first designing TGRC's online content and services before opening a physical center, he repeatedly asked himself, "*What else can we do*? I did not want people to look at the website and think, 'Well, since my problem is a legal problem, I'm not even going to call TGRC because it says, what they are all about is trans healthcare.'" Henry instead wanted to create an organization that could comprehensively serve transgender needs and to which transpeople would see themselves and their needs represented.

Throughout the course of my research, Henry and Brooks referred to this strategy as a "three-pronged" approach in to their communication, including Trans 101 trainings and funding pitches. Their three prongs included: *advocacy, education*, and *direct services*. Staff member Cassandra described these three prongs as a pithy frame for communicating TGRC's identity. Cassandra identified as a cisgender, not-heterosexual woman, who was white, and in her 50s. She explained that because TGRC's "all facets" identities were "broad," the three prongs allowed them to describe the regional and national distinctiveness of TGRC. Cassandra explained that through attending "a number of national conferences" she recognized "there really is *no other group* that does what we do, *the breadth* of what we do. There's *so many* things that go on. Food and clothing. You know, creating some sort of connection with people as a *family*

feeling. Then, services, in terms of work support, counseling support, medical support, legal

support and more" (emphasis added). Director Brooks echoed this claim:

> We don't have a lot of other trans organizations, and *still* don't, that are working with
>
> trans folks, or non-binary folks, or GNC folks in prison, or serving people who have
>
> trouble accessing food…If [TGRC was] going to do something, we just had *to do all of it*
>
> because *nobody else* is doing those things. I think in bigger cities and other places, there's
>
> lots of amazing work going on with trans folks, but it is typically focused on *one aspect*
>
> *or another*. And so, you may have to go to three different places, but you're going to get
>
> all that taken care of because there are lots of organizations doing the work. With us,
>
> there just isn't. (emphasis added)

Staff described how TGRC's "all facets" approach endured through their outreach and

guests' reliance on their approach. For example, Anna was a TGRC intern with a Master's

degree who identified as a Native American, Hispanic, able-bodied, cisgender heterosexual

woman in her 30s, who had experienced unstable housing. She described:

> TGRC [as] almost like a hub of resources… [with] wraparound services here with the bus
>
> passes to food to internet to job search…I really wish more places would have multiple
>
> services *all connected* because it easier for the clients to succeed. I think that's why the
>
> center *has stayed a pretty active* center because of all the services that they offer. That's
>
> going to bring in people at different points of their life for specific services…I think that's
>
> why there's *such a need* for center hours. (emphasis added)

Staff member Marie (who was a white, cisgender, bisexual woman in her late 30s with

disabilities) similarly noted, "We're trying to be everything to everybody. The mission is the

words, they're the technical terms of like, 'Yeah, we give you resources.' Also, to have a one-stop shop, and to know what's good and who's safe in the community."

Like staff, guests understood TGRC as holistically serving all facets of their transgender living. Patrick said that, "TGRC has a specific focus… [for guests] to live productive and meaningful and fulfilling lives and that keeps people on track…It's hard to live your life when legally things might not match…Getting those documents or clothes or confidence, or you know just having the space where you can come to be comfortable for a moment." As a cisgender guest and former partner of a transgender woman who visited drop-in for regular outreach, Patrick witnessed how TGRC improved guests' quality of transgender living, providing help to legalize their names and identities. As I detailed in Chapter Four, not having gender-affirming IDs significantly impacted the experience of many transpeople, particularly homeless trans guests using shelters, and here, Patrick expanded the importance of IDs for *all facets* of transgender living. Similarly, in one of my Transfeminine creative focus group sessions, Cara returned to Ayumi's aforementioned "storm" image by drawing "the trans symbol surrounded by blackness, because the center has been kind of a light in the dark for me."
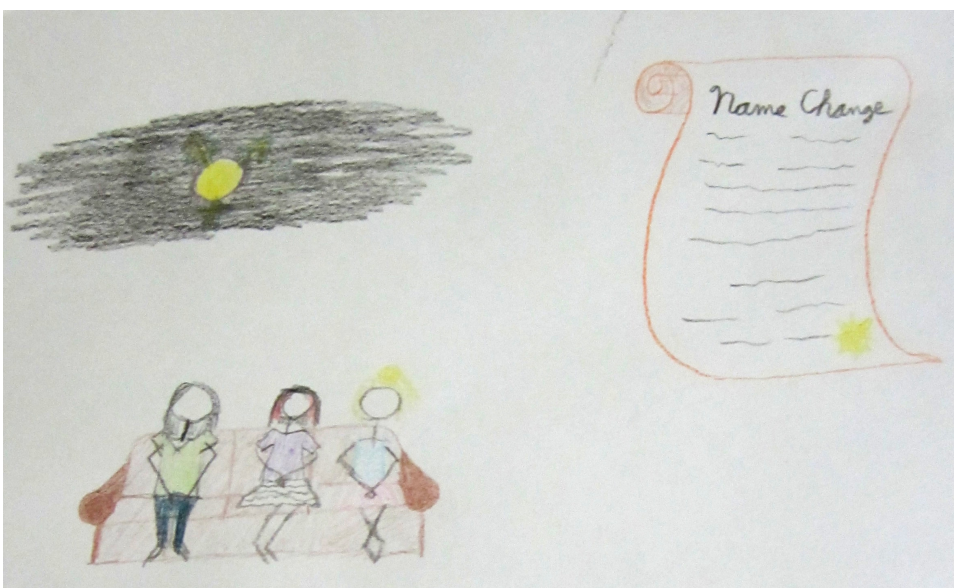
Figure 5.6: Cara's TGRC sketches

In narrating her drawing (see Figure 5.6, above), Cara also pointed to the brown couch she sat on with other transwomen and said, "I put *this* couch with a bunch of people sitting on it, and that's the focal point for me. It's coming to support groups and meeting people and just not feeling alone. Another sketch is sort of the official looking scroll that says 'Name Change' on it, and that's one of the *big things* the center helped me get my name legally changed *finally*."

In comparison, King Joffery detailed in the Transmasculine focus group how he valued support groups to sustain all components of his gender identity. He identified as a gender fluid transman in his early 50s, with disabilities. One section of King Joffery's collage (see Figure 5.7) depicted TGRC as providing "nutrients" for transgender people. He said, "The center is the meat…It has nutrients. It has protein, what we all need to survive." This association was only partly metaphorical: TGRC literally provided guests with food, but its services also established for King Joffery a kind of symbolic, nurturing "protein" for transgender living.

Figure 5.7: King Joffery's TGRC as meat to survive

In summary, many participants viewed TGRC's "all facets" identity as distinctive, due to its qualities of *exclusiveness* (i.e., in centering transgender needs) and *comprehensiveness*. I argue that participants thus related to TGRC through two sets of *anti-identities* (Alvesson et al., 2008) and antithetical identifications (Cheney, 1983b). First, LGBTQ organizing that marginalized the "T," and second, partial trans-issue organizing that disaggregated the totality of trans needs. These anti-identities subsequently served to position "all facets" as a central, enduring, and distinctive organizational identity. I return to this in my conclusion chapter as a theory of what I call "contrasting communication." Importantly, TGRC's "all facets" approach also produced particular tensions, which I address Chapter Six's discussion of "the nonprofit industrial complex" (NPIC). Now, however, I address how participants viewed TGRC's all facets identity as not only a response to their singular *transgender* identities, but also serving *in relationship to* their other salient identities.

"Support for All Facets" and *Intersecting* Identities

In this section, I examine how TGRC's identity of "all facets" not only affected its support of guests' *transgender* identities, but also how that identity depicted guests as whole people that included *other* salient identities. This effect arose from the Directors' understanding that transgender living meant more than just transgender identities. Director Brooks, for example, recounted that:

> Trans is *only one aspect* of people's lives. It's an aspect…that *can affect every aspect of your life*, whether you want it to or not. You can't just send someone off to a therapist, and off to an endocrinologist to get hormones—if that's part of their story and their journey—and think that that's all fine then. Because *it's not*. They may have problems with employment. They may have more problems because of [unemployment], not

having enough money, not having food, not having transportation, not having social

support from family members…You have to look at the *whole person*. You have to look

at *all the things*, not just the things about someone's gender identity. (emphasis added)

For Brooks, TGRC could not simply provide resources for medical transitioning, and assume

that it had met the needs of its guests. Instead, he viewed trans as an identity that resonated

with—and affected—all other parts of their lives. TGRC thus developed "all facets" as a

discourse for addressing the most urgent of these connections. Brooks also believed that

acquiring a secure physical space enabled TGRC to provide expanded services, in contrast to

operating as an online-only clearinghouse, and running support groups out of people's homes.

He said, "I think just having a brick and mortar space gave us some more credibility and made us

legitimate." Here, Brooks referenced an ideal described by Gill and Wells (2014) as nonprofit

legitimacy. He further described how TGRC's development of a drop-in space communicated

that legitimacy to new guests and even to potential funders. This exemplar thus also depicts the

influence of what Gill and Wells (2014) label the "donor gaze" as target of organizational

identification.

Both Brooks and Henry noted that their understandings of "support for all facets"

changed throughout their organizational tenure. As previewed in Chapter Three's vignette,

initially, they conceptualized the "all facets" identity from their own perspectives as white

transmen who had not experienced homelessness. However, the more they learned about guests'

complex needs, the more they recognized the need for providing additional services. For

example, Henry and Brooks had always wanted develop a drop-in center in order to serve "the

most impacted" guests – including those in need of securing medical treatment. But when I asked

them what "the most impacted meant," Henry explained:

It really came into the clearest focus when we opened the first center, because the most

impacted were…overwhelmingly people of color, transwomen or on the transfeminine

spectrum. I think either not housed or very insecurely housed, not employed or vastly

under-employed, limited support from the family of origin for most people, not always,

but for most. Substance use often veering into chaotic use, like people who just have a lot

of stuff stacked up there now to, that blocks them from getting a foothold.

In other words, the meaning of "all facets" evolved as the Directors came to understand the

complex intersections and contingencies that shaped the needs of TGRC guests. Thus, while

some scholars depict desirable organizational identities as enduring "without change" (Corley et

al., 2006), the case of TGRC demonstrates how such identities may display both persistence and

"malleability" (see Gioia et al., 2013).

Beyond TGRC's Directors, its Board Members and staff also mirrored this

understanding. For example, staff member Anna said that TGRC's "central core value" was that

the organization "really strives for acceptance [of guests] regardless of [their] identity or a

substance problem or whatever the case could be." Cassandra was another volunteer who

provided guests with legal support. She described that service as "the most interesting legal work

I've done. Because I've always been an activist, and for me to really be in the middle of where

intersectionality truly exists has been super important, enlightening, and exciting…Our clients,

you know, that touches everything: classism, racism, gender issues, sexuality. It covers

everything." Cassandra thus explicitly named intersectionality as a reason she chose to volunteer

at TGRC. Finally, Board Member Polly viewed the "all facets" approach as crucial to serving

transgender New Mexicans living in a "minority majority state," in which their needs were tied

to identities of class, education, employment, family support, and race/ethnicity:

A lot of the population that we work with is in *great need*. There are [some] trans folks

that have wonderful supportive families and incredibly productive jobs, but they're also

higher middle class and [have] access to education and things like that. I think it's that

feeling of societal rejection that can just start that downward spiral and that intersection

of oppression starts to happen. We live in a state that's 46% Hispanic and 10% Native

American…a minority majority state…There's historical trauma, and there's the

intersection of those two communities. We have this very unique cultural balance and

ecosystem happening in Albuquerque, in New Mexico in general…It can be challenging

when you're trying to figure out what people need.

For Polly, then, TGRC's "all facets" was required to address a variety of historical and cultural

intersections, including those between conditions of relative privilege and oppression.

Additionally, Polly's reference to the "intersection of those two communities" supports my

previous analysis in Chapter Four of indigenous transgender identities as potentially created what

Aron termed as "two worlds" for some participants.

In this way, TGRC staff and Board Members would sometimes note particular common

"intersections" among guest identities. Others, however, preferred to serve guests as "whole

people"—a strategy that often created a space for those guests to share and construct their

multiple, overlapping identities. Bailey, for example, preferred to engage guests "in a way that's

like sorta beyond treating them like a client or a patient. Like, 'Hey, how are you? I care about

you as a person, so let's just talk.'" Bailey also saw TGRC as an antithesis to nonprofits that

rigidly followed strict protocols in serving their "clients" or "patients." Instead, he saw TGRC as

beneficially discovering guests' holistic needs through the informal but evocative medium of

"just talk."

In this way, staff collaborated to communicatively surface facets of guests' salient identities. For example, one afternoon during drop-in hours, I observed an older indigenous transwoman named Ola, who identified as "homeless and tired." Ola came in with a visibly swollen knee that she "got from walking the streets." She began complaining to staff members Erin and Ben-Ben about the lack of available medical care in Albuquerque for Native transwomen. Switching between Navajo and English, Ola criticized the lack of care she received at "so-called TGRC-approved health organizations"—specifically, her inability to get a drop-in appointment that day for treatment of her knee. Ola was angry and in pain, and said directly to me in English, "I thought this was the Transgender Resource Center, but even here, no one gives a shit." Ben-Ben, Erin, and I tried to address her needs by communicating empathy and brainstorming about alternate resources. Ben-Ben told Ola about one provider, Healthcare on the Move, who regularly offered medical care on-site at TGRC, but unfortunately she had missed that window earlier in the week. We were stymied in this process because it was after 5:00 PM, when most medical offices were closed.

Meanwhile, Ola went to disparage TGRC for "always running out of bus passes," and she complained that she could not receive regular hormone therapy because her endocrinologist was located beyond walking distance from her home. I consulted with Director Brooks, who said he had one buss pass saved for the month for emergencies. I brought Ola to Brooks' office, and after he handed her the bus pass, she let out a heavy sigh. She started to smile and laugh, and I returned to a staff office where I was waiting for another guest to arrive for job search support. Five minutes later, Ben-Ben knocked at the door to tell me Ola wanted to talk to me, and she invited me to watch videos of indigenous dances with her on YouTube to share "their traditions of celebration." This example was one of countless experiences where staff communicated with

participants based on their specific needs, and in turn, guests responded by communicating a broader range of identities.

In a related example, Josh was a guest who both visited TGRC during drop-in hours and participated in multiple support groups. She said that TGRC:

> can understand you in whatever you're doing…They absolutely do not judge anyone on *anything*. That's why I say they *literally won't turn anyone* away, even if they're homeless or drug community or anything… I definitely like and respect it a lot (emphasis added)

And Josh was not the only support group member who valued the "all facets" identity. In the Transmasculine creative focus group, two participants—King Joffery and Jeremy—discussed this organizational identity. Jeremy identified as a white, trans male in his late teens, who lived from paycheck to paycheck and was homoflexible (mainly attracted to men). He said:

> **Jeremy:** This is like the only place that *actually understands* [that]…we have *all those trans things going on plus some*. It's like we have career problems, family problems, love problems, sexual problems, housing problems, personal problems. Plus stuff that nobody else has.
>
> **King Joffery:** What's the plus stuff?
>
> **Jeremy:** *Trans stuff*. Like if you're trying to find a doctor…if you're trying to ask about a question about this going on with your body that you don't wanna talk to a regular doctor about. (emphasis added).

Other support group guests expressed appreciation for how their communication in TGRC engaged their lives as "more than just trans." Many guests, thus, identified with the "all facets" organizational identity, partly because TGRC served guests' identities without judgment, and accommodated their complex needs like homelessness and addiction.

TGRC's all facets identity endured, partly because returning guests socialized new guests concerning its existence and implications. For example, communication among support group members often connected the all facets organizational identity to their salient intersecting identities. We may see this process by considering an annual ritual, in which TGRC's Directors sought feedback from guests about the effectiveness of the support groups it provided. Following a feedback session in a Rainbow Friends group, participants went around its circle and re-introduced themselves and their gender pronouns before social time began. I noticed an eighteen-year-old guest who was visiting TGRC for the first time with her mother. In this moment, she shifted from her previous introduction using a male name and pronoun to use a female name and pronoun, telling other guests and staff what "I actually liked to be called." She said she viewed her new transition process as, "I can't deny who I am, and I am coming to peace with that." Other guests began to ask her what questions and needs she had as someone new to transitioning. She responded by expressing the desire for connection with both younger and older transpeople, and for information about medical providers and counselors. *Every* person in the group then offered her and her mother specific support and resources framed according to her salient identities. They specified support groups she could attend because of her identities (e.g., Youth Group, Rainbow Friends, Transfeminine), and two transwomen who regularly attended Transfeminine said they would return with her tomorrow night if she desired. Others told her mother about family member support, provided both at TGRC and partner organizations in Albuquerque. Other guests described how drop-in services could support her legal needs and help her locate therapists, endocrinologists, and additional service providers. A final chorus endorsed Albuquerque as a relatively inclusive place for trans youth, especially given "how TGRC undertook ongoing advocacy in Albuquerque Public Schools for transgender inclusion."

The members of this group thus organized around this high school senior to communicate TGRC's support for the complex challenges of being a transgender youth in high school.

In addition to support group members, *drop-in guests* also valued how TGRC accommodated salient intersections with their transgender identities. Importantly, many new drop-in guests found out about TGRC from other drop-in guests by word of mouth, especially those who identified as homeless and/or sex workers. And as I described above in an earlier section, drop-in guests viewed "the family" identity as something they co-created by providing emotional support for one another. Many also noted that, from their very first experiences hearing about and/or visiting TGRC, they learned how TGRC would address more than their transgender identities.

For example, guest Theresa described how she was working on the streets in Albuquerque as a sex worker, and that "a couple of friends, they were talking about how to prevent HIV or getting HIV back when the center was in the first building off of Silver. And I've seen all my family members that are there that are like me [*points to herself*]. They had food; they had condoms. They had everything you needed to [protect] yourself from sex." For Theresa, TGRC's drop-in center displayed its knowledge—and accommodation—of her complex needs. Like Theresa, Alyce was directed to TGRC after having nowhere to sleep, and not having "eaten in a couple of days." Alyce's first experience was, "for me, they were really welcoming, openly, like, 'What do you need?' or 'What resources are you trying to look for your life?'" And in a separate instance, Robert and Kylo Ren (a couple I have described both in Chapter Four and in the above family section) discussed the importance of transpeople with addiction being welcomed to TGRC:

Robert: Kylo Ren and I are both alcoholics. We can't say: Look at that drunk girl! We can't say that because we are in those shoes.

Kylo Ren: Because we are in that same place. Because the majority of the people that come here of the sisters, we all drink…If it wasn't for the center to be here, we wouldn't even know where to go or what to do.

Director Henry confirmed that TGRC's accommodation of those who used drugs or alcohol was another distinct aspect of its "all facets" identity. He said, "most organizations like ours require people to be sober to be within the space," but for TGRC, requiring guests to be sober would exclude an aspect of some guests' identities that made them most *need* TGRC in the first place.

One focus group participant named Pizza perhaps best depicted how TGRC's all facets identity served her salient intersecting identities. Pizza described herself as a transwoman, Native, sex worker, alcoholic, and homeless in her early 20s. Pizza created and discussed her collage in the presence of other focus group members, including one who was *not* an indigenous transwoman, named Dahha. Dahha was a former TGRC volunteer and identified as a mixed race, gender fluid person in his early 20s who worked fulltime. The participants interpreted Pizza's collage with her (see Figure 5.8, below):

Pizza: I put Patron right here [*points to the tequila bottles*] because we all drink [*shrugs*].

Dahha: Um, that's not true [laughs].

Aron: No [*shakes her finger*], I don't think so [*laughs*].

Pizza: Well, not *all* of us. But then I put "Mood" because some of us are, sometimes we are all moody.

Aron: Hormone imbalanced [*smiles*].

Pizza: And I put a condom for safety. So we can all have safe sex…And then I put

"Cultural Clash" because we're not all Native Americans [*points to other Native*

girls]. We are all different tribes. And then there is like what Shade said earlier

for her collage. There are Hispanics out there [*points to living room space*], then

there's Blacks [*points to Dahha*].

Dahha: Uh! [*Rolls eyes, pretends to rip Pizza's collage*]…

Pizza: And then I put "Versus the World" because we are doing this, and like we are

facing the world with who we are and who we are trying to be…And I put

"Banish" just because…some parts of the world don't accept our kind [*gestures in*

a circle to include everyone in the room]. And then I drew the triangle because

we're transgenders. And then we are proud and everything.

Aron: And we're queer.

Pizza: Right! We're sexy, and we are queer.

Figure 5.8: Pizza's collage of TGRC as support for all facets

This exemplar indicates how focus group participants were actively involved both in expressing their relationship with TGRC and in interpreting the creative expressions of others. Here, their interaction creates both an inventory of salient identities shaping that relationship, and also banter that alternately asserts, affirms, and challenges the validity and distribution of those attributions. Dahha and Aaron, for example, reject Pizza's initial assertion that "we all drink," but Aron reconnects with Pizza by affirming (albeit after a modification of) her characterization of TGRC's guests as "moody." We can only speculate concerning Dahha's motivations in playfully simulating the destruction of the collage as a depiction of "Blacks," but that response maintains his previous rejection of Pizza's attributions. Similarly, Aron maintains her relative accommodation of Pizza's attributions by extending (without contradicting) Pizza's characterization of "our kind." What is significant here is how this interaction works to simultaneously acknowledge both a totality of salient identities addressed by TGRC, and also a range of ambivalent responses among guests as that totality is invoked to characterize *their* specific experiences.

To summarize this section, then, most if not all guests participating in TGRC's drop-in and focus group services valued the organization's *all facets* identity. This was partly because TGRC acknowledged and validated guests' identities without judgment, and accommodated their complex needs like homelessness and addiction. I will return to the challenges created by this unconditional acceptance in Chapter Six.

Before concluding, however, I must briefly explore how, despite the significance of "all facets" as one of its central, distinct, and enduring identities, TGRC rarely *explicitly* labeled that identity as *intersectional*. That is, the term "intersectionality" was never included in the organization's website, nor did it list other salient identities in online materials or pamphlets.

This pattern contrasted with communication practiced by some of TGRC's partner organizations in Albuquerque, who named specific identity intersections in their missions, or adopted—as in one case—"an intersectional vision of reproductive health." This explicit use of "intersectionality" is also documented in DeTurk's (2015) ethnography of the Esperanza Peace and Justice Center, which sought to "address the inherent interconnections of issues and oppression across racial, class, sexual orientation, gender, age, health, physical and cultural boundaries" (p. 3).

In contrast, TGRC's depiction of salient identities and/or intersectionality was more subtle, implicit, and ambiguous. This depiction occurred in: (1) the language of TGRC's mission statement, which hailed "transgender communi*ties*," (2) its formation of multiple support groups targeting specific intersections (trans *x* feminine, trans *x* youth, trans *x* masculine, etc.), and (3) Trans 101 training sessions, where speakers explicitly referred to their own transgender and salient identities—as well as those of TGRC guests. For example, in a Trans 101 training for Albuquerque Public School teachers, Director Henry projected a slide that listed his own identities, his privilege, and interrogated the intersections where he differed from guests:

> All transgender people *are more than being transgender*…When I think of *my identities*, I am trans, and white, a born US citizen, I have a BA, I have disabilities, I'm a parent…I have all these things about me that is *more than* transgender. When I look at my list, most of *my identities are privileged* like whiteness, maleness.…When I come into the room…I have *the protected factors* to not be visually identified as trans or disabled…I have friends who are transmen who *are brown and black*, and they are increasingly afraid of police interactions. So all these pieces of us *intersect* to help us to define how we move in the world and how we navigate in the world. The folks who access our drop-in center

tend to be *young, transgender women of color* who may not have been able to complete

high school, who may have been rejected of families of origin, who are homeless, and

they have really different experiences of someone like me. (emphasis added)

Despite such mentions in Trans 101 panels, it is possible that TGRC did not explicitly or

primarily identify with intersectionality because of potential pushback generated by that naming.

For example, one guest named Rose who helped with Trans 101 panels identified as bigender,

heterosexual, upper middle class, underemployed, white, in her 60s, and politically conservative.

She said that TGRC's commitment to publically addressing racism and sexism deterred her

future participation in Trans 101 panels. She said that Trans 101s had become, "a political,

liberal thing, but they were so negative about males and white people, very racist and bigoted

that it upset me very deeply." Another guest named Aleon who participated in Trans 101 noted

that the politics of TGRC's discourse risked violating the organization's legal status: "TGRC

can't do real serious advocacy because we're a not for profit." I return to how TGRC navigated

these tensions presented by Aleon and Rose in Chapters Six under the NPIC section.

I argue, then, that instead of formally or explicitly adopting an intersectional mission,

TGRC may have enacted a *practical* (i.e., informal, indirect, and perhaps even covert)

intersectionality (see Collins & Bilge, 2016; Luft & Ward, 2009). Intersectionality as critical

praxis may use "strategic ambiguity" (Eisenberg, 1984) and create what I described in Chapter

Seven as "ambiguous intersectionality." The ambiguity of all facets may actually have opened

TGRC to serve more guests by avoiding opportunities for those guests to feel excluded or

undermined. As Albert and Whetten (1985) have suggested, communicating distinctive

organizational identities while using ambiguity enables organizations to communicate "to

different audiences for different purposes" (p. 268). TGRC's "all facets" discourse thus also

facilitated the organization's nonprofit legitimacy (Gill & Wells, 2014) to funders. In the next chapter, I will address the inevitable limitations and dilemmas created by this strategy.

In closing, this section has revealed how TGRC's organizational identity to "support all facets of transgender living" distinctively served staff and guests' transgender living and salient intersecting identities. TGRC's Directors, staff, and guests understood this robust central and enduring organizational identity to include the prioritizing of transgender identities *outside of* conventional LGBQ configurations (i.e., exclusivity), *all* facets of their transgender identities (i.e., categorical comprehensiveness), and/or *all* salient identities that overlapped with their transgender identities (i.e., expanded comprehensiveness). As a result, TGRC's "all facets" identity offers important implications for how we understand the organizational identities of identity-based organizations (see Reid, 1999). As I will explore in the conclusion to this study, TGRC's "all facets" identity represents a strategic *detypification* (Jenness, 1992) of potentially exclusive, identity-based organizing. Through detypifing "transgender living," TGRC may have created more "personal applicability" to the widest variety of guests (p. 67). Simultaneously, the strategic ambiguity of "all facets" may have facilitated TGRC's development of a "crystallized approach" (Trethewey, Tracy, & Alberts, 2006) to serving its guests' identity "facets." In the next chapter, however, I first examine dilemmas and constraints faced by TGRC participants as they constructed these family and all facets organizational identity ideals.

CHAPTER SIX: EXAMINING TGRC'S ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTITY CONSTRAINTS

In Chapter Five, I examined two central, distinctive, and enduring TGRC organizational identities: (1) TGRC as "family" and (2) TGRC as "support for all facets of transgender living." Participants communicated these organizational identity ideals throughout my research. However, sustaining these identity ideals created ongoing communication complexities for TGRC staff and guests. This chapter explores four central communication tensions that constrained the durability of TGRC's organizational identities, including: (1) *sustaining the TGRC family*, (2) *questioning non-binary inclusion*, (3) *contesting the Harm Reduction Program*, and (4) *resisting the Nonprofit Industrial Complex*.

Tensions Sustaining the TGRC Family Identity

In Chapter Five, I detailed how Directors and staff cultivated guest attachments to sustain a TGRC family organizational identity, and how guests subsequently identified with TGRC as family. In this section, I explore three tensions created in these efforts to sustain TGRC as "family": (1) staff turnover and absence, which was depicted as family member loss, (2) guest resistance to staff treatment of them as "children," versus staff perceiving the family as lenient, and (3) the Directors and staff's controversial consideration of "disowning" a guest.

Staff Turnover and Absence as Family Member Loss

First, guests repeatedly reported that staff turnover led them to experience "loss." The high turnover among TGRC's staff, which was composed entirely of interns and volunteers, created repercussions that undermined the family attachments TGRC tried to build. As Navajo partners Robert and Kylo Ren explained:

> **Robert:** The staff are really wonderful…We get to meet [and know] them very well. And
>
> then they leave. Then other staff comes again, and we start to get to know them again.

Then, they leave again. Like that…Like you. You are going to leave us after these years. It's gonna be difficult *[starts to cry]*.

Kylo Ren: You are leaving us too. It hurts. Because we get attached to them [*starts to cry]*…It *is* hard because we don't meet a lot of people. And then the staff just leave.

Kylo Ren and Robert's comments depict conditions of loneliness among homeless people, as many are estranged from meaningful human interaction and stigmatized. Relationships built with staff became a form of attachment for them that they otherwise lacked as often-dehumanized homeless people. As a result, they requested that TGRC create paid permanent staff positions to stop this cycle, and that if staff were leaving the organization, guests should be told in advance to prepare for the loss. In this way, guests identified with the chosen family identity TGRC cultivated, but this caused unanticipated pain when attachments were broken.

TGRC staff departures were common, as most worked for a period between six months and one year. While some interns chose to remain on staff for additional semesters, keeping staff "within the family" became largely impossible without paid employment opportunities. In fact, Henry, Brooks, and I were the only consistent staff throughout my three-year ethnography. Guest Alyce, who was a Diné transwomen in her 30s, described the loss of staff as losing her family:

I've seen so many volunteers come and go. I get attached to *all of them*. Since the time from the oldest center to this center…they're *so much family* to me because they cared a lot [*she begins crying*]…They get to see us, see what we went through…They just don't see us a drunk, a prostitute, or a drug user. They *see me without that*…They see how we hurt from or how our families push us away when we need them. (emphasis added)

In her description of staff looking beyond her stigmatized identities, Alyce presented an example of TGRC's family and all facets identities working together. She valued TGRC as family *because* staff saw her beyond her stigmatized identities and as a whole person.

The Directors recognized how volunteer turnover constrained guests' attachment. However, without a paid staffing budget, Director Henry believed that as long as he and Brooks acted as consistent family members, guests could remain identified with TGRC. He rationalized:

> If staff show real caring and real love and real concern for our *family* here, people do come and go *even in the family*…That's all part of learning about attachment…that the attachment is *bigger than the location*. And there is also the consistent continual presence of me and Brooks…I've had times that I'm here more and times that I'm here less, but… I'm *always going to come back here*. (emphasis added)

Here, Henry advocated for a particular version of the family: Those who love you remain your family despite their location or even their departure. However, given the acute rejection many guests experienced from their biological families, and their identification with TGRC as chosen family (see Weston, 1997; Oswald, 2002), relying upon Henry and Brooks as consistent patriarchs may not have been enough to mend felt loss from staff's permanent departures.

Additionally, some guests questioned the Directors' own availability to sustain the family, especially as they became increasingly overextended. Guest Aron, for example, was a Diné, housed and college-educated transwoman in her 30s. She bemoaned:

> I rarely ever see Brooks or Henry…I think as the organization is growing from the Silver location to now, they've become a lot less *available*. They become *an illusion* sometimes because you just see them and then the next thing they're gone…It makes me feel like they don't care [*voice cracks, begins to cry*]. (emphasis added)

For Aron and other guests, the Directors' declining availability for providing emotional support weakened the "enduring" aspect of the organization's family identity. Rationally understanding the Director's busyness did not assuage Aron's own pain in losing people who had now become illusions in her life. Managing the loss of staff members via turnover and the Directors' own strained availability thus became a direct constraint on TGRC as a family.

Guests Resisting Being "Children" Versus Staff Leniency

Second, in creating a family identity, some guests believed that staff placed them into childlike roles. In contrast, some staff believed the family identity actually created excessive organizational leniency, especially in conflict communication. First, some drop-in guests criticized the communication from staff members – particularly newer staff— as patronizing. Many guests, for example, disliked new rules requiring them to lock up their belongings upon entering the center and perceived staff as "watching" them.

Aron, for example, described TGRC—somewhat paradoxically—as being *both* free of judgment *and* infantilizing. She first described TGRC as a "home" for "a lot of transgender women who live on the streets, or who are homeless or not even homeless at all, that come to the center to really be who they are, and not have to be judged." However, Aron also believed that the newest staff at TGRC patronized guests, which she addressed during my drop-in creative focus group, "Staff treat the girls as *children*…because *the way* they talk to them…How they speak to them is really, like, *childlike*, like *taking care of the kids*…[Those] who have been on the street for so long, and that they are *adults* now. They don't know *how to be a kid*" (emphasis added). In response to Aron's comment, Alyce chimed in: "I get annoyed when people do that to me. Like, why do you treat me like that?" Other indigenous transwomen nodded in unison as Aron and Alyce raised this critique. Here, despite their identification with TGRC's emotional

support (described in Chapter Four), they reported an unfortunate potential side effect of a family organizational identity: the demeaning experience surveillance and discipline. For Aron, positioning guests as children contradicted their lived, intersectional experiences, including the street survival skills that had *made them into* adults.

Notably, past research on organizational communication and family from Smith and Eisenberg found that Disneyland employees also lamented being treated "like kids," but also simultaneously longed for "the paternalistic care of earlier years" in the organization (1987, p. 376). TGRC guests also appreciated viewing the Directors as "Dads," putting themselves into a potential child role. In this way, framing organizational identity as family scripts related "roles" and positions organizational members in ways they do not appreciate or intend.

Additionally, some guests questioned if TGRC's "family" really helped empower them, or just provided a space for them to gather without caregiving. Bridget, for example, was an older, white, homeless trans guest. She dismissed the expanded living room in TGRC's Jackson location (see my discussion of that expansion in Chapter Five), saying, "You look around the room, and you see who is sitting there watching that TV in the new living room? They are the *same people* that were there two years ago. Still with nothing, till struggling, and still not helped by the center." For Bridget, TGRC provided only a space of refuge without empowering guests to become more independent. Aron also critiqued the center for treating guests as children, citing how they were "being separated" by staff for engaging in disagreements, and encouraged to just "watch TV." She instead called for TGRC to give guests "*tools*, in case they want to stop with all the bullshit of addiction and what not in their lives." Employing another metaphor, she recommended to, "constantly. . . feeding them with something every time they come here would be a great way to empower them…*Feed, feed, feed them*" (emphasis added). For Aron, to "feed"

guests was also to include more transwomen of color as volunteers and paid staff members to create positive role models for drop-in guests. TGRC could thus, in this view, go beyond literally feeding guests experiencing hunger to figuratively feeding their development through education, training, and other forms of assistance. And guests were not alone in this sentiment: Director Brooks sometimes disabled the TV in the living room, and he instead encouraged guests to engage in art projects. He also planned for future, "programmatic stuff, more activities, more involvement…that might impact their lives in a way that we're not currently." Brooks wanted to better "nourish" TGRC's guests (like King Joffery depicted with TGRC as "the meat" in Chapter Five), but limited staffing undermined the consistency of these program opportunities.

In contrast to these guests' critiques, however, some staff considered TGRC's approach as potentially *too lenient*. In Chapter Five, for example, I discussed how staff member Bailey valued TGRC as laidback family. Bailey identified as a mixed race transman in his 20s. He also lamented, however, how laidback communication did not discourage conflict among the guests. He valued how "we give people a lotta chances," but he also believed that "part of being a good parent, you've gotta do some things that they may not agree with, but you're wanting to see them grow." In this view, sustaining a family organizational identity required the parental enforcement of consequences in order to ensure growth and learning.

Another staff member named Adam (a white, cisgender gay male volunteer) also critiqued organizational leniency. He described TGRC ambivalently as a "grandmother":

Adam: [TGRC is] a *grandmother with the grandchildren*, always loves the grandchildren no matter what. A lotta leeway, the grandchildren can fight, but overall, it's still you know *grandmother's house*. You know you can get food there, you can play, you can do whatever you want. And you know grandma isn't gonna kick you out.

> **Elizabeth:** Why pick grandmother over like grandfather? Because TGRC is run by men?
>
> **Adam:** No it's because the grandmother is more loving, like a grandfather would be more like stern. Like a grandfather would be somebody that would teach you how to fish, and teach you how to like make stuff out of wood…and how the world works. Versus a grandmother who is going to feed you cookies…*All that she wants is love*…Otherwise, if you're trying the grandfather approach of, "Don't do that, or this is how it's done"…it's *not a drop-in center*. It would be like a job program then. (emphasis added)

Adam's response personified a feminine organizational identity that was all-loving, playful, and supportive (but, interestingly, did not map to the Directors' gender identities as transmen). Depicting TGRC as a grandmother demonstrated how the "family" identity was not monolithic and presented opportunities for stakeholders to strategically select and configure its gender and age components. Interestingly, guest Rose also described TGRC as a grandmother engaged in "helping with the food, helping emotionally…mak[ing] guests be cheery and . . . feel good…When everyone says, 'Oh yeah, this is home,' I think that says it all." For Rose, TGRC as a grandmother communicated family identity. For Adam, however, this alternate invocation signified TGRC's refusal to properly "parent" guests.

Adam also believed TGRC's grandmotherly leniency created organizational conflict. Adam was an outlier among staff because he did not identify with staff or guests' construction of TGRC as family. He criticized TGRC for "babying" daily drop-in users, and compared them negatively to what he termed "intermediate users": those who occasionally visited TGRC for specific and immediate help (i.e., surgery information, name changes, or job resources). In a staff meeting, Adam said that intermediate users fit TGRC's identity better because, "Those are the people that are going to be the most rewarding to help and do the most with our help. They are

coming with a specific idea and need…That is what the center is here for. It is the Transgender *Resource* Center. The daily drop-in has become, excuse me, but more like *babysitting*." For Adam, caretaking of drop-in guests undermined TGRC's mission as a clearinghouse for transgender resources. Adam advocated for TGRC to directly provide intermediate users over coddling daily users.

After a prolonged silence in the meeting, other staff members responded to Adam's comment by defending the legitimacy and effectiveness of TGRC's family identity:

> **Bailey:** The people who are accessing everyday have *nowhere* else to go. They go everyday because TGRC is *their only place*.

> **Liz** (a cisgender woman in her 20s): Many guests haven't had *homes* to clean or carpets to vacuum…A guest said something yesterday to me, "I hate when we fight because you girls are all we have." Is it super frustrating to break up fights everyday, or catch people drinking in the bathroom or pick up needles like we did today? Yes. But then I remember, these resources are *all people have*…TGRC *means and is everything* for many of them…

> **Henry:** We are not babysitting, but *we are trying to make a family for people who have never had it*…We focus here on a radical acceptance of people…No matter what you do, we are going to *LOVE YOU*. (emphasis added)

Here, Henry, Bailey, and Liz all detailed elements of TGRC's family identity to try to persuade Adam to join in their identification. They tried to build common ground with Adam around their shared frustrations and attempted a discursive reframing of Adam's "babysitting." Some staff, then, reframed grandmotherly leniency as a central—and perhaps necessary—component of the chosen family identity. The staff were unsuccessful in persuading Adam to rethink his beliefs.

However, other staff also reported that this leniency Adam surfaced created and fueled a sustained case of family conflict.

Confronting the Potential of Disowning a Guest

Over the course of my study, the most enduring family identity challenge I witnessed involved escalating conflict with a guest named Rowan. Rowan was a feminine-identified person who used "he/him/his" pronouns, who also identified as Black and homeless, and who experienced drug addiction. At the Morningside House, Rowan often supported other guests by listening about their transitioning and homelessness challenges, cleaned the casita, and sorted donations to do his own street outreach with other homeless people. Over time, Rowan's addictions worsened, particularly to meth. At the Jackson Location, staff identified his "escalating" behaviors, including shouting, pushing, and throwing a can of soda at a staff member while under the influence of meth. After a six-week ban from TGRC, Rowan was allowed to return to TGRC with the warning that a future incident would result in a six-month or longer ban. When I saw Rowan after this incident, he was cleaning TGRC's kitchen as "our home" and told me, "We need to help clean and give to the center that gives to us." Rowan attempted to give back to TGRC, even in the throes of his addiction. Unfortunately, a new incident occurred soon after: Rowan was asked to leave TGRC for his disruptive communication with another guest, and he responded by both attempting to physically assault a staff member and actually punching one of the Directors.

Unsurprisingly, staff members' expression of safety concerns escalated after this incident, and many reported feeling vulnerable or disrespected. They believed this incident indicated that

the Directors prioritized TGRC's Guiding Principle[11] of welcoming guests back after a conflict

over the need for staff safety. In this view, the Directors' laidback, grandmotherly leniency had

gone "too far," and staff questioned the status of their own inclusion and roles within the TGRC

family. Bailey, for example, considered leaving TGRC because, "The Directors say, 'Oh we love

you to the staff,' but when staff tried to tell them Rowan was escalating, they ignored us, and we

feel like they would rather [have] staff move on to new roles [than commit to] kicking someone

out. And that shows *who* matters." In this view, the Directors support of Rowan had served to

negate the purported "love" that staff had felt in the TGRC family.

In response to these concerns, the Directors ultimately convened a rare meeting where

staff called for Rowan to be permanently banned from TGRC. Nancy, for example, was a white

transwoman in her 50s. She reported feeling that when she addressed conflicts with Rowan to the

Directors, she was devalued and dismissed: "How it came across to me is that *I* would have to

leave before Rowan did." Lisa, who was a white, transwoman staff member in her 20s, agreed.

She described how other "clients" responded to Rowan: by leaving TGRC. Lisa believed that

Rowan violated TGRC's responsibility to provide "home," because guests also no longer feel

safe when he arrived. She recounted working at the front desk on a bustling day when all the

available lockers had been filled with guests' belongings. Rowan's arrival created an "effect that

Rowan came in and clients leave: The lockers emptied." Marie (a white cisgender woman)

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[11] As described in Chapter Three, TGRC's Guiding Principles were their three guest rules, including "respect for each other, respect for the staff, and respect for the space." Guests were prohibited from using drugs or alcohol on site, although they could use prior to entering TGRC. A posted sign at the entrance read, "If these guiding principles are not followed, staff may ask you to leave for the day. If this happens it is important to realize that we care about you and that you are welcome to return to TGRC the next day." Despite any conflict, TGRC welcomed guests back to try again. This was in accordance with the Directors' focus on developing attachment, especially for guests experiencing addiction following Maté's (2010) approach.

echoed Lisa's claims, reporting that, "We would literally watch people walk out and leave, get in their cars, or come and sit in the Harm Reduction Program room just to get away from Rowan."

After the staff shared their distress, the Directors reflected their understanding that the staff did not feel heard, valued, or listened to in prior conversations. They also described their own extensive discussions alone about how to respond to Rowan's challenges. Brooks explained, "In the three years plus that we have been open as a physical center, Henry and I have never had to ban someone ever. Nor have we ever had an altercation like what happened with Rowan in our building *ever. Ever!*" They recognized the Rowan conflicts as a departure from prior experiences, as a strain on their Guiding Principles, and a violation of staff expectations.

Henry and Brooks then introduced their plan for Rowan's future role at TGRC. They suggested that Rowan not be allowed to return to TGRC until he had a note from a medical provider proving that he had been sober for two months. Henry explained, "That is the way of keeping our door open for Rowan and not locking, dead-bolting, and bricking the door frame on somebody who does need some place to go." Henry then gave a passionate speech where he dismissed the language of "clients" that many staff members (particularly social work interns) used at TGRC to describe people who visited the center:

> I am very reluctant to just banning Rowan like *every other* fucking service agency in this
>
> town…Of course, it is not okay what happened…But also, I get nervous when we call
>
> our folks, "clients, clients, clients." *Who is the client*? I'm a client. You are a client. *We*
>
> *are the clients*! *We are the clients*. We *are trans*…[Instead] the way I do think of it is as a
>
> *family*. And in family, I'm not saying there are no security issues…But you don't just ban
>
> somebody because they are the difficult person in the family.…I have to figure this out so

it is not just saying, "Fuck you! You are a piece of trash. You can't ever *belong* here. You

can never find your way back into the *family*." (emphasis added)

Henry's speech of "We're the clients!" remains one of the most profound observations from my

research with TGRC. He not only critiqued the medicalizing language used by staff, but also

positioned them as *recipients* of TGRC's services—implicitly challenging them to inhabit their

objectification of guest identities. He also depicted his preference to keep Rowan in the family as

a symbol of how TGRC differed from other local nonprofits and re-centered TGRC's family

identity as distinctive. This performance was persuasive: After Henry's speech, the staff shifted

from wanting to ban Rowan to thanking the Directors for creating a path for his future reentry.

The family identity endured because Rowan was not disowned. Staff continued to identify with

TGRC, following research from Myers et al. (2016) and Ploeger and Bisel (2013) about how

members' organizational identification may persists during crises.

The Rowan incidents built to what Albert and Whetten (1985) referred to as a

"prototypical sequence" of questioning through misunderstandings and conflict that required

future decision-making about their organizational identities (p. 264). This reveals that while

communicative construction of organizational identities is always ongoing, organizational

members may experience critical moments (see Alvesson et al., 2008) as poignant junctures to

reframe organizational identity together. In fact, I argue that staff's starkly shifting beliefs about

Rowan's future role at TGRC from the beginning of the staff meeting to the end occurred

through what Gioia et al. (2013) describe as *self-referential* communication about organizational

identity. In this view, Henry used reflexive communication to position *both* TGRC's guests *and*

staff as "clients" to negate an undesirable characterization. This invocation of family was tactical

in preventing TGRC staff from objectifying clients as a stigmatized Other, instead requiring

them to choose whether they would also view themselves in those terms. Notably, after this speech, staff's future communication about "clients" shifted at TGRC to largely using "guests" as a preferred term.

As the staff meeting closed, Brooks leavened confessed that he was "sort of flabbergasted because I was not hearing you," and reiterated the importance of "family members" hearing one another. He called for improved organizational communication, framing it as a form of *family* communication. Director Henry also urged staff "to all recommit to the effort to communicate. *It's a family. Families are fucked up. We get mad in families. We get frustrated in families*. We get hurt, we get disappointed. And then we deal with it" (emphasis added). Again, this strategy proved successful, suggesting that they were not yet ready to abandon that organizational identity. Staff thanked the Directors for hearing and valuing them, and they closed the meeting telling one another they loved each other. Henry cheered, "FAM-ILY!" to end the meeting.

To summarize claims developed in this section, participants a negotiated a conflict that led them to ultimately sustain a shared and valued—but also layered and contestable—identity. TGRC guests questioned their potential "child" roles, just as staff wondered if TGRC should rethink its grandmotherly leniency. Guests questioned how a family could be sustained when core staff members regularly exited the organization, and when the Directors sometimes appeared unavailable and neglectful. Staff similarly questioned whether their safety was truly valued. In turn, the Directors confronted their own shortcomings, and averted a discursive move they felt was both inaccurate as well as unethical. Subsequently, staff moved away from disowning Rowan and from using "clients" as a medicalizing discourse. Few questioned what role "guests" might play within a home. I now turn to discuss my second found tension.

Non-Binary and/or Gender Nonconforming Guests Questioning Their Inclusion

TGRC guests reported a second common organizational identity tension: TGRC's uncertain inclusion of non-binary and/or gender nonconforming guests. Typically, TGRC's staff and Directors rationalized their service to gender nonconforming (GNC) and non-binary (NB) identities as consistent with their "support for all facets of transgender living" and "family" organizational identities. In this view, GNC and NB identities were logically associated with the larger transgender community. As staff member Bailey described, GNC and trans are "pretty much intermeshed." Another staff member named Jessie credited their work at TGRC's drop-in center for inspiring their dissociation from gender binary categories. Jessie first identified as a transboy, but through volunteering at TGRC, came to also identify as genderqueer. Jessie said, "Just being exposed to a new community, it gave me kind of a freedom to start like dressing ways that I felt more comfortable…When I first got here, it was mostly just t-shirts, and since then it's evolved. Like yesterday I wore…little velvet shorts."

Nonetheless, my research revealed a disconnect between the Directors' and staff's perceptions of GNC and NB *inclusion*, and what some NB guests described as *exclusion*. Specifically, findings from my interviews with the members of TGRC's newly formed Non-Binary Support Group specifically displayed their doubt and distrust. Here, it is important to note that it was community members – not TGRC staff—who had requested that the bimonthly NB Support Group be added to TGRC offerings. While Brooks and Henry had frequently discussed doing so, they lacked committed volunteer facilitators and refused to start a support group that might disband without a leader. In this way, TGRC added new services, access hours, or groups only when the Directors believed they could be sustained. Nonetheless, Brooks and Henry granted space to the NB group, and welcomed them to TGRC's support group line-up.

Things grew complicated, however, as guests reported that the NB group drew larger numbers of participants, including potentially more people of color, that other groups. Guest Josh, for example, was a non-binary, transfeminine person who identified as Hispanic, White, and lesbian in her mid 20s. She reported that the NB group had, "so many faces that I've never, *ever* seen before…There's not as big of representation of that group in *anything* else [at TGRC]." Josh regularly attended other support groups and drop-in sessions, and her comment suggested that NB guests might not be accessing other TGRC services. My own researcher experience was consistent: When I attended two NB support groups, I only recognized three people from the approximately twenty-five new NB guests I had never met. I also talked with one participant who I met before at a local Trans March named Beelzebub. They identified as a queer, non-binary, activist, anti-assimilationist, and older. Beelzebub said, "This NB group attracts people across racial lines. Whereas a lot of the center groups, you just don't see it as much…So apparently we must be doing something right if people of color feel comfortable in here." People of color in the group nodded in affirmation. Some NB guests thus believed the NB group accommodated more intersections of race and gender identity than other support groups. However, because I rarely accessed support groups due to their confidentiality rules, I could not verify Beelzebub's assertion.[12]

Importantly, the NB Support Group guests reported similar aspects of identification with their group that most guests communicated about TGRC as a *whole*. They believed the NB group

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[12] In my own role as a Rainbow Friends facilitator, I noticed many race, housing, class, and employment distinctions among support group guests and drop-in guests, which also matched staff's and guests' claims that drop-in served the most marginalized guests. One participant, Susie, also discussed the whiteness and class privilege of the Partner's Support Group that ultimately influenced her to stop attending as a Latina who was raised poor. However, no other participants addressed race intersections *among* support groups besides Beezlebub. Notably, all the creative focus groups I held during support groups included people of color.

addressed all facets of their NB identities as whole people, such as communication "beyond gender" and about other intersections of gender with their salient identities. They also valued resources they received in attending NB groups, like name change packets prepared by TGRC staff. NB group members valued the emotional support (e.g., camaraderie, home, belonging, love) that TGRC provided as an expression of its family organizational identity. However, many NB guests viewed this support as coming from their fellow *group members*, and not from TGRC.

Whereas most guests identified with TGRC *through* their support groups (i.e., as congruent), most of the NB participants identified with their support groups as *separate* from— and explicitly *not*—TGRC. For example, Basil identified as white, bisexual and poly, in their early 20s, and as aporagender and genderfluid. Basil had recently learned and self-identified with the term aporagender because it's "a non-binary gender that is neither male or female, but you do have a *very distinct* gendered feel." Basil specifically never visited TGRC outside of the NB group, "Because I feel like those are all spaces that I don't identify with really. And because I don't *identify with* them, I don't *belong*." In contrast, Basil's collage focused on the support they experienced within the NB group (see Figure 6.1).

Figure 6.1: Basil's comfort and safety collage

They chose to depict people "behind closed doors" whispering in order to highlight the felt significance of "safety," and "secretive" communication. Also, Basil specifically picked magazine images that illustrated comfort (as symbolized by baby animals, cookies, and nature photos) because, "I just want this place to be a place where I can find comfort, and I can find support. And it can be a safe space." This selectivity and fragmentation contrasted with other support group guests, who appeared to experience increased identification with TGRC's family and all facets identities (see Chapter Five).

Like Basil, other guests that identified with the NB group reported that TGRC failed to serve GNC and NB identities in both its *name* and its *approach*. First, many NB guests did not feel they could legitimately access TGRC because they did not identify as transgender. These guests cited their struggle to find language to adequately describe their gender as part of the reason they could not identify with TGRC. Falena, for example, identified as in her late 30s, with a mental illness, in debt for life, and as "transfemme/ agender/ androgynous/ ???/ genderfluid." Falena struggled to identify herself, but felt confident she did *not* identify as transgender and was not "actively transitioning." She did not see her identities reflected in TGRC's name or mission, and she never entered TGRC without a trans-identified friend.

Two other NB guests discussed how their struggles with gender identity had led them to disconnect from TGRC. Regina, for example, identified as genderfluid, Black, lower class, lesbian-queer, in her early 20s. Regina answered my question about how she would describe her gender identity, with "Ummm [*long pause*]. I don't know. That's basically *it. I. don't. know*. I *never* know." Dipper was in their early 20s and identified as a mixed raced person with mental health disabilities. Dipper identified their gender as both trans and non-binary, and they also defined their gender identity as the "shrug emoji" to signify uncertainty. Regina and Dipper's

uncertain gender identities created discomfort for them when they accessed TGRC drop-in and other support groups. Regina only entered TGRC if accompanied by Dipper (who identified as *trans* too) because, "I don't really belong cuz I'm not trans…I'm with my trans friend, so I should be safe for at least a little while, but at the same time, I feel like I'm not. I feel like I just don't belong here." She and Dipper claimed that TGRC signage cultivated their experiences of exclusion:

> **Regina:** Like *Transgender* Resource Center, they are basically just saying at the door, you must be transgender to enter. That's what it *feels like*.
>
> **Dipper**:   Like Trans *and Binary*.
>
> **Regina**:   Thank you!

Dipper and Regina read the center's name as publically centering transgender binary people. In contrast, guest Josh believed that transgender *could* be an inclusive umbrella term but only if TGRC continued, "trying to include the non-binary community into it as well." For Josh, then, TGRC had to *show* its NB guests how its use of the term "transgender" communicated more than binary support.

Yet many NB guests believed that beyond its name, TGRC also did not enact *gender nonconforming* support, or serve NB needs via drop-in, other support groups, or in public advocacy and education. Some viewed TGRC's umbrella-like use of "transgender" as advancing a predominant medical transitioning model that upheld a gender binary (i.e., one was MtF or FtM). For example, Dipper had challenges with other support groups because the groups "just were *too binary*…And everyone just kinda like disregarded their former gender identity." Additionally, Dipper was the only NB group participant in my focus group that also identified as transgender. Dipper explained, "It's hard to identify as *just* non-binary. I kinda also just identify

as trans. I'm somewhere like a mix between the two. So I'm like the one that is *still the outlier*. Like *always*." While Dipper felt they remained an outlier even within the NB group, many NB guests felt excluded in TGRC support group communication that minimized guests' former identities and valued their learning to "pass" as a new gender.

Beelzebub further explained how the NB identification complicated TGRC's commitment to serving "all facets" of guests whose lived identities oriented to the "trans" category. Beelzebub reported that they had "bugged the Directors *for years* that we needed an alternative [framing], because I just didn't feel comfortable in any of the other groups…The other groups…are looking for [binary] avenues to fit in. And we *know* we don't fit in." Here Beelzebub emphasized their belief that TGRC primarily desired its guests to "fit in" the conventional gender binary, versus challenging that norm. Importantly, Beelzebub's statement did not entertain the notion that transpeople might also want to challenge the binary, or that NB guests might want to blend in—even if only as a fleeting, situational tactic.

In some senses, this complaint was valid. "Fitting in" *was* implicated as part of TGRC's "all facets" mission—specifically, in its call for practice of "mutual understanding, *acceptance*, and equality to achieve a more positive and healthy society" (emphasis added). However, some NB members interpreted "acceptance" as requiring their submission to binary normativity through inauthentic assimilation. To that end, Beelzebub suggested two separate identities that TGRC should address: serving transgender identities and serving non-conforming gender identities. Since some NB and GNC identified guests did not want to conform to (and thus directly challenged) the gender binary, they questioned how TGRC's acceptance focus potentially negated their non-binary genders. Beelzebub stressed, "We're not really coming to *transition*. That's not why we come. We come because we are experiencing *who we are*."

Notably, TGRC cultivating a space for guests to be "who we are" was something multiple

transgender guests reported as successful in its organizational outreach, like Aron (see Chapter

Four) and Theresa (see Chapter Five), and also guest Demitri, who was gender non-conforming

(see their collage in Chapter Five).

For TGRC to support NB guests, then, they needed to reframe their services for "all

facets" of transgender-oriented guests to better include gender identity diversity. Beelzebub also

likened TGRC's use of transgender as an umbrella term to gay men forcing LBQ people to

subsume their distinctiveness under a generic "gay label." They said, "When you take a group of

people that describe ourselves in a certain way, and then you put them under [an] umbrella [that]

is [not] *their name*, it kind of forces us into a space that is not necessarily what we wanna be in."

In other words, some NB guests not only refused to *detypify* (Jenness, 1992) transgender to

include them, but they also sought release from coverage by the trans umbrella altogether.

In contrast, TGRC Directors, Board Members, and 101 speakers viewed their Trans-101

education and advocacy as *challenging* the gender binary to create societal change. Indeed,

educating audiences to increase their acceptance of alternate gender formulations was crucial to

TGRC's commitment to combatting violence against transpeople (especially transwomen of

color). Nonetheless, participants such as Evee called for Trans-101s to more directly address NB

identities. Evee was in her late 20s and identified as a queer, chronic pain warrior. She attended a

TGRC Trans-101 talk in Las Cruces during related Pride events, and she reported that the

presentation failed to address the complexities of gender non-conforming identities. She wanted

TGRC "to figure out how to put into a non-binary segment or create a whole non-binary talk on

its own." Importantly, early iterations of Trans-101 slides in the first year of my research

featured a "Trans umbrella" that covered many GNC and NB identities. However, the current

Trans-101 slide addressed gender diversity differently: "Being transgender does not mean that you are assigned a label or category or that you wish to conform to the gender binary. Many people, especially younger urban transgender people, are embracing identity terms like non-binary (also NB or Enby), genderqueer, agender, genderfluid, bi-gender, gender non-conforming, and more." Regardless of the presentation content Evee observed, she still felt unrepresented.

Additionally, NB guests also wanted TGRC to create *new organizational language*. In this view, TGRC's revision of its inclusive language could enable more NB guests to identify with the family identity. The NB guests even brainstormed this new language in our focus group. For example, multiple participants believed LGBTQ organizations across the United States needed to add a new letter, such as "NB" or even "X." They wanted TGRC to help advocate for the "X" letter to symbolize their identities. Additionally, one participant named Biscuit attended my focus group as her very first experience with TGRC. She identified as bigender, bisexual, and bipolar in her early 20s. Biscuit told the NB group she was confused about why the other guests were questioning how they fit into TGRC because, "I thought the T stood for 'The,' like '*The* Gender Resource Center' [*laughs*]." Biscuit's confusion sparked a provocative conversation about the potential benefits of that change, and some NB guests subsequently advocated for it in earnest.

Lastly, while some guests believed that GNC and NB identities should be featured more clearly in TGRC's name and programs, they also realized that this would require TGRC to accommodate increasing complexity as an organization. For example, Josh believed the seeming ambiguity and fluidity of NB identities could be part of the reason TGRC did not—and could not—more directly communicate its support to NB and GNC people. Josh said, "As far as transgender, it's mainly just you either going on the male or the female side or somewhere in

between, but even then it's just two or three options. Whereas in the non-binary focus it's like, 'Well, there's 20, 30, 40.' How do you *really* gather all those people?" Josh posed a provocative question that pushed against TGRC's all facets identity. She showcased the limitations of providing services for the extensive, varied gender identities of NB and GNC people, in addition to transgender guests. Josh implied that TGRC was not equipped to handle such intricacies, or create the capacity to respond to even more identities.

After the NB group, I told Director Henry about this issue among the NB Support Group members. His response suggested frustration:

> You have to have *a name*. And even then, look! I go to all of this length to make sure that for as many people as possible, that we're here for them, and *still* there's people who don't think were *for them*. It doesn't say the *Transitioning* Resource Center. It doesn't say the *Male-to-Female* or *Female-to-Male Resource Center*. To me, the word *transgender* means any kind of *gender transgressing* that people do…You can't be *specific enough* to make sure everybody knows you're for them, so we do the best we can to do that, you know? (emphasis added)

This lament indicated how Henry and Brooks had selected transgender as TGRC's central identity in order to hail its intended audience—although they may not have registered its inevitable exclusions. They chose to strategically essentialize TGRC in its name to gather gender transgressors in New Mexico (see Spivak, 1988; Feinberg, 1992/2006). Henry marked a distinction between TGRC's adopted language and identity, and other non-preferred categories (e.g., transitioning, MtoF, FtoM). Yet for some NB guests, that use of transgender still connoted a binary paradigm for gender transitioning. We can understand this tension as a debate over the *distinctiveness* of TGRC's organizational identity. TGRC used transgender and all facets

language to be open and ambiguous whereas some NB guests viewed this as a critical identity distinction: for them, *not* for us.

When I shared the NB guests' idea of changing TGRC to "The" Gender Resource Center, Henry liked and appreciated the name and mentioned a colleague's organization in another state that used "The" instead of "Transgender." Henry conceded "the wisdom in that" choice, but he saw at least two barriers to TGRC's following suit. In his words: "(a) now, I don't think we can change our name. That would be a thousand-tentacle octopus to try to do it, and then (b) for me in a state like ours, I did want to be clear we're talking about *transgender*. We're talking about people whose gender identity is part of the *issue*." For Henry, to cease using the term "transgender" would remove the core of TGRC's focus on justice and acceptance that—at least for him—*did* include (at least in theory) NB and GNC people.

In summary, some NB guests directly questioned if TGRC's support for all facets transgender identities served NB and GNC identities. Most did not identify with TGRC or view it as a family or home. Instead, some NB guests felt discomfort even entering TGRC. The NB Support Group subsequently became a source of their identification, and a place where all facets of their identities were supported. Yet, paradoxically, even though they recognized this program was *offered* by TGRC, they nonetheless saw it as *removed* from TGRC as a whole. I now turn to a related identity tension involving TGRC's development of a Harm Reduction Program (HRP).

Contesting the Harm Reduction Program

Over the course of my research, TGRC's Harm Reduction Program (HRP) for safe needle exchange created increasing communication tensions between TGRC and its transgender guests. Some staff and guests questioned how TGRC's growing harm reduction services contrasted with their commitment to support *transgender* living. Because the HRP predominantly served

cisgender people, its growth created a unique organizational identity challenge: Why was TGRC,

a *transgender* outreach organization, choosing to grow its program to serve the needs of

cisgender people using and exchanging syringes?

"Harm Reduction" is a controversial paradigm in public health administration that differs

from traditional drug prevention programs by attempting to support drug users in practicing

relatively safe, clean, and controlled usage. Historically, the Directors had started TGRC's HRP

to offer harm reduction support for their transgender guests. They first learned about

transpeople's needs for safe needle exchange when TGRC existed only as a website. As a part of

broader advocacy for transpeople's health, the Directors worked to change statewide HRP

requirements to eliminate the identification of transpeople as "T" on their enrollment cards—a

designation they perceived as stigmatizing, particularly in encounters with police officers.

Additionally, both Directors volunteered on a mobile community health van with a partner

organization, Healthcare on the Move. Healthcare on the Move provided homeless healthcare in

Albuquerque, including street-based healthcare and syringe exchange. The Directors used their

knowledge from Healthcare on the Move to learn the harm reduction model, and to meet

transpeople that they hoped to serve in the future when they opened their own drop-in center.

Later when the Directors planned to expand TGRC from their website presence to a drop-

in center, Brooks told me that the New Mexico Department of Health (DOH) approached them

about "being a contractor to do HIV work and syringe exchange work." TGRC's contract with

the DOH partially funded TGRC's opening their original Silver location. DOH harm reduction

funding for HIV testing and education and safe syringe exchanges subsequently sustained

TGRC's drop-in center. Director Brooks supported a harm reduction model for TGRC overall

because, "It really is about just treating people like people, not like their behaviors or their

struggles…Maybe they're using substances or maybe they don't have a place to live…But If we could build relationships with people and not let that stuff get in the way, then maybe we could really make a difference." For Brooks, learning more about harm reduction organizing from Healthcare on the Move provided a model for TGRC's early organizational identity ideals presented in Chapter Five: to build relationships, create familial attachments, and understand "all facets" of the lives TGRC hoped to change.

The Directors also viewed their HRP as facilitating interaction among cisgender guests and transpeople to learn more about transgender identities. They also hoped that trans guests who did not need safe needle exchange would see intravenous drug users differently after regular interactions with them through TGRC's HRP. In other words, the HRP could help to simultaneously change stigma attributed to multiple communities through its related communication. HRP subsequently became a financial and cultural pillar of TGRC's mission of developing "mutual understanding, acceptance, and equality to achieve a more positive and healthy society." Cassandra, for example, was a staff member who identified as a cisgender, not-heterosexual woman, who was white, and in her 50s. She said that the HRP program allowed cisgender and trans guests, "to *actually see* each other and have interactions that were good so that they didn't demonize each other."

In the first year of my study at the Silver and Morningside locations, I observed how trained TGRC staff created space to provide clean needles to HRP guests during busy trans-based drop-in services. The Morningside House had one multi-purpose room for counseling, HIV testing, peer support, and the HRP. Sometimes cisgender guests waited thirty minutes for a trans counseling session to finish before a private space would open for needle exchange. However, once TGRC moved to the Jackson location, the Directors granted HRP its own office.

The new office space and the growing reputation of the program resulted in exponential growth in demand. Staff member Marie, for example, told me that since moving to Jackson, "We've had 10 times the HRP volume." That increase in space, and the decision to offer coffee and snacks, attracted HRP guests—particularly those experiencing food insecurity.

Nonetheless, most staff attributed the growth of the HRP *directly to* TGRC's "support for all facets" and "family" organizational identities. In other words, they depicted their creation of a welcoming space for cisgender HRP guests as an expression of their ideals for serving trans guests. And this move was not illogical as some of the HRP guests *were* also trans. Staff member Anna, for example, identified as a Native American, Hispanic, able-bodied, cisgender heterosexual woman in her 30s. Anna believed that "the harm reduction program was so successful here because it just accepted them for who they are at this moment in time. It never really judged them for any of their choices or identities, anything that has ever happened in their life." Embracing trans guests as *whole people* thus contextualized the HRP's service for cisgender guests. Marie explained how they viewed TGRC differently than other HRPs:

> We ended up building the HRP so significantly…because what we discovered quite by accident is that the *atmosphere* that was created for the center to allow trans folks and any people who were gender nonconforming to feel okay…and *take you as you are*. All of that *transferred over* very beautifully into harm reduction to the point where people didn't want to go other places, they wanted *to come here*…They would just spontaneously say, "You guys are so nice here…Like, you *don't judge* us." (emphasis added)

The support for all facets identity thus became a symbolic umbrella that opened to cover cisgender guests, who were not otherwise among TGRC's targeted identities. However, Marie and Anna's framing of this relationship evoked a chicken-egg dilemma: Was it TGRC's whole

person approach for transpeople that attracted cisgender HRP guests in droves? Or was it the

HRP philosophy the Directors mimicked that *created* TGRC's all facets and family identities?

My own conclusion is that, in either case, TGRC's use of Harm Reduction principles in their

organizational communication encouraged identification from *both* cisgender HRP and trans

guests. The HRP principles specifically facilitated family attachment and support for guests as

whole people with diverse salient identities. Henry agreed with this conclusion: "I think it really

is the simple thing that people want to be treated like human beings…Our hope is that it's our

philosophy and the way that we set out to make people feel and treat people that is causing our

site to explode."

In fact, while many guests viewed the HRP as only including needle exchange, other staff

understood the significance of the larger harm reduction philosophy for TGRC's support for

transgender living. For example, TGRC interns helped with a specific program to decrease health

risks for trans guests called Comprehensive Risk Counseling Services (CRCS). Anna explained

how she helped with CRCS in individual counseling sessions to set small, achievable goals for

trans guests' reduction of health risk. Rather than ask guests to go from zero percent condom

usage to one hundred percent, Anna asked transwomen who engaged in unprotected sex work to

"reduce risk" by "try wearing condoms 25% of the time when you're engaging in activities." Her

primary volunteer role was to help trans guests "to reduce their harm…like providing them

condoms, providing them access to the needle exchange, and connecting them with other

resources that might help." Despite Anna's support for TGRC's larger harm reduction approach,

however, she also noted rising tensions between cisgender needle exchange users and

transgender non-needle users as, "bringing two different types of clients together for two

different reasons." These tensions manifested as trans guests expressed a competitive sense of

territoriality regarding TGRC space, including statements such as "This is *our* center. You just come here for this service."

Importantly, many staff understood and tried to convey to guests that HRP served *transpeople* for needle exchange. Staff member Ben-Ben, for example, identified as Navajo, gay, cisgender, and in his mid-30s. Ben-Ben said, "both communities have certainly unique risks, so the Center…[is] not ashamed to talk about these risks like hepatitis and HIV…[We] see trans folks who are part of the Harm Reduction Program as well too." Indeed, some transpeople came to TGRC *only* to access the HRP. To illustrate, one afternoon at the Morningside House, I observed Camila talking with three transwomen of color who came in just before closing. The transwomen first sat on the couch and talked alone. Camila identified as Latina transwomen in her mid-30s and was a former sex worker and heroin user. She came over and hugged the women. They complimented Camila on how, "It's so good to see another girl doing so good," and Camila replied, "I'm clean and sober and working." She encouraged them to remember they could get clean too and leave sex work. After this conversation, the women whispered to Camila that they needed to do needle exchanges. For the transwomen, Camila symbolized the possibility of overcoming drug use and sex work as transwomen of color. That mutual identification opened a conversation for exchange that they may not have pursued with another staff member.

Similarly, staff member Cassandra also noted that the growing HRP at the Jackson Location included more transpeople. She said, "I've had more transwomen come in as clients in harm reduction in the last month than I have had the whole time." Over time, the persistence and growth of the program encouraged *all* guests to make use of the HRP. TGRC was also the only HRP site in Albuquerque that provided needles for hormone injection—a crucial need among trans guests. Marie told me, with satisfaction, "We're able to get the DOH to pony up for money

for hormone syringes!" Trans guests thus accessed the HRP for hormone needle exchange, but they could also use the auspice of hormone needle exchange to switch out intravenous drug syringes. The HRP therefore provided them with privacy for multiple entry points.

While TGRC staff, Directors, and Board Members valued the Harm Reduction Program, some guests still longed for more services for treating their addiction. Aron said, "One of the biggest things that really just plagues transwomen is addiction…and you don't see any kind of help for that [at TGRC]…I think really, really honing on that issue and really providing services for that issue would be a really great thing to have." While TGRC provided harm reduction and AccuDetox (a weekly program that used acupuncture to help guests cope with the effects of detoxifying from drug or alcohol use), Aron and other guests wanted increased services for transpeople experiencing addiction, including the offering of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), Narcotics Anonymous (NA), and inpatient recovery programs trained for trans inclusion.

Most participants also understood the importance of the HRP to TGRC because the Directors trained staff to speak openly about how state funding for HRP financially supported the center. The Board Members I interviewed mentioned harm reduction as an important revenue source. Board Member Fred even used the HRP in funding pitches. Fred identified as a white, housed, queer transman in his 50s with a Master's Degree. When meeting with a potential funder, Fred reported making the following pitch:

> TGRC doesn't discriminate against *those of us* in most need, so the harm reduction [is]
> connected to *trans identities* with the focus on *anti-racism* and a welcoming space for
> *transpeople of color*. Nobody is doing that…and that's what this city needs *for all kinds*
> *of people, not just transpeople*… We really need some support because we are seeing

tons of *people*. We are doing *public health services*, harm reduction services. Now would

you consider writing us a check? (emphasis added).

Fred's funding pitch offered multiple entry points for identifying with the HRP: as someone who

identifies with the interests of public health generally (and harm reduction, specifically), with the

dire needs of Albuquerque's transpeople, with anti-racism and people of color initiatives, and

with a successful program serving high volume clients. Fred thus appeared to understand the

intersection of the donor gaze (Gill & Wells, 2014) and nonprofit funding constraints (see Kivel,

2007), and his approach challenged fundraising communication used by some identity-based

organizations that positions guests as homogeneous (see Chen & Collier, 2012). He instead

strategically sold harm reduction as something not "just" for transpeople, but also for other

Albuquerque citizens—a pitch that may have been more palatable to cisgender funders who did

not identify with transgender justice.

Like Fred, TGRC's guests also understood that HRP funded their trans-based services. At

first, guests were unaware that the HRP funded TGRC. Over time, however, Directors and staff

began to more strategically respond to critiques of the HRP by informing and/or reminding trans

guests that the HRP partially funded TGRC's drop-in center. In other words, ending the HRP

could also end TGRC. In response, trans guests continued to complain openly about harm

reduction guests, but increasingly conceded that HRP "kept the lights on" or "gave us money to

run TGRC." For example, Robert explained, "To this day, we don't like those needle

exchangers. But I guess they fund the space."

Still, many trans guests continued to believe that the HRP's growth had changed TGRC's

former trans-centered identity and disrupted its functioning as a safe home for conversations

about transgender living. Guest and volunteer Michelle, for example, was a white, Christian,

transwoman in her 20s that experienced homelessness. Michelle told me that while the HRP funded TGRC, it came at a cost for transpeople. She said, "The center used to feel like *my place* and *home*, but is growing to not really feel like my place…A lot of people coming now, especially to the new location, aren't trans and [are] using *resources for transpeople*…They have their places too, and we can't always go there. This is the only *trans* place in the city where a lot of us are safe" (emphasis added). The HRP thus undermined Michelle's experience of TGRC as home that distinctively *included* trans guests by *excluding* cisgender clients. She preferred that those clients visit other organizations dedicated to serving them—a luxury homeless transwomen did not otherwise have (as described in Chapter Four). Soon after our exchange, Michelle stopped volunteering at TGRC and went from being a daily guest to an infrequent visitor.

Many trans guests also complained about sharing TGRC resources with the HRP's cisgender guests, a problem that TGRC staff tried to mitigate by providing space and snacks for all. However, trans guests complained about experiencing expressions of transphobia from the cisgender guests. For example, guest Theresa was a Black, homeless, transwoman in early 40s who worked in sex work and experienced addiction. Theresa noted how some cisgender HRP guests, "don't too much care for us, and they still come and get the help anyway." She described transphobic comments made by cisgender guests waiting to exchange needles, including a cisgender man recently calling a transwoman "nasty" because of her attire and exposed body. Theresa told me some transwomen sex workers she knew rarely visited TGRC now because of the growing HRP program. Nonetheless, she valued that TGRC was "not only helping transgender, but it helps other straight people…I like that. I really do."

Interestingly, Theresa called cisgender guests "straight people," the common vernacular used by transwomen at the center to refer to cisgender HRP guests. For example, in one of my

focus group sessions with mostly indigenous transwomen, those guests questioned the role of

"straight people" at TGRC and disagreed over what language they should use to designate the

HRP guests:

> **Alyce:** I don't like the fact that we have *needle exchangers*. Sometime, they are bound to
>
> wander off to our space…It makes me uncomfortable.
>
> **Dahha**: I like it…It's another branch into the *community*. I really do feel like TGRC
>
> needs to be recognized for the hard work that they do *throughout the community*…
>
> **Shade:** Like the *straight people* will play the part, just for the moment to get the services.
>
> **Aron:** That's why the services are here.
>
> **Pizza:** It's *TG*RC! It don't say nothing about *straight*.
>
> **Maria**: It's like me saying I'm straight for one minute.
>
> **Aron:** But I identify as *straight*.
>
> **Pizza and Maria:** Oooh!!!
>
> **Pizza:** It's just for us…This is the only TGRC community place that we can go to. But
>
> people out there, *those addicts* come here—
>
> **Girls:** Wow! Geeze, Pizza!
>
> **Maria:** *You* are an addict too.
>
> **Alyce:** They take advantage of it.
>
> **Pizza:** Yeah, but, like…just for us [*motions around the room*]. For *trans*…Because they
>
> have all the resources out there.
>
> **Alyce:** When we go to their resources, we get rejected… and turned away. (emphasis
>
> added)

This exchange illustrated how TGRC's guests contend with their experience of multiple, partial, simultaneous—and sometimes conflicting—identities, both individual and organizational. Alyce, Maria, and Pizza, for example, resented cisgender guests for accessing TGRC because they had other organizations where they are welcomed (see Chapter Four). They viewed TGRC's *transgender living* organizational identity as specifically serving them. Dahha and Aron, however, valued that people of all genders in Albuquerque were using HRP through TGRC—a stance that mirrored the Directors' values. Meanwhile, Shade and Maria questioned how cisgender guests attempted to "play the part" of pretending to be trans to access services. They identified examples of oppressive discourse depicting transpeople as merely "pretending" to be a different gender—discourse that is frequently used to justify the commission of violence against them. Maria and Shade's critique dismissed the accusation that transpeople were merely "acting" in order to secure resources, and instead showed the complexities of living at the intersections of discriminated identities. For example, while Alyce started the conversation calling HRP guests "needle exchangers," Shade switched to the more commonly used "straight people." Aron challenged that language by saying that she identified as straight. Similarly, Pizza called HRP guests "those addicts," and Maria invoked Pizza's own alcohol addiction to reinforce how TGRC also served their addictions as transwomen. Here, at one level, the girls disagreed about whether and how TGRC's trans guests should identify with its offering of HRP services. More significantly, however, their exchange exposed different views concerning which types of bodies were legitimately able to claim particular identity labels (e.g., straight, addict, needle exchanger, trans, etc.).

Later, Aron endorsed Pizza's earlier critique by suggesting that, "The whole name, the whole label of transgender gets diluted because you also have the harm reduction, and so it

serves…broad community members. That transgender identity and label gets diluted with the mix of our resource center. So really, I think it's *just* a center now." To Aron, HRP potentially compromised TGRC's central identities and risked creating a disconnected, generalist organization without a clear identity. In response to these concerns, the Directors selectively (and strategically) invoked the use of "Transgender" in the organization's name to emphasize TGRC's exclusive provision of services for trans guests. As Brooks explained:

> A harm reduction guest might come in and say, "Well, why can't I get a bus pass," or…"Why can't we have this?" I'm like, "Well, I'm really sorry. We're the *Trans Resource Center*, and our primary mission is *trans folks*. I'm sorry that you don't fit into that category, but here's some other resources that I can give you."

Subsequently, TGRC's staff and the Directors worked to address rising critiques about the growth of the HRP. Beyond complaints from trans guests over resource sharing, they recognized that changes to the space could interrupt TGRC's transgender living and family home identities. Staff and Directors thus sought to clearly communicate to trans guests that transgender living was central to their organizational identity. Potentially, this framing could symbolically resolve (or at least minimize) the potential contradiction of TGRC's serving multiple groups by emphasizing the logical consistency of providing the HRP that happened, incidentally, to also serve cisgender guests.

The Directors first responded by using their acquisition of expanded space in the Jackson location to create a "trans-only" side of the building. As Henry explained, "I'm hearing and caring about the fact that transpeople are saying we need our space. 'This is supposed to be *our space*.'" This comment indicated how the design and use of physical space in TGRC served to strategically communicate its preferred organizational identities (Alvesson et al., 2008; see

Chapter Five). Here, staff and guests appreciated the Directors' responsiveness. Ben-Ben said

that this change created transpeople's "own intimate space where they're free to be themselves,

not be ridiculed. There's not that commotion that happens out in HRP, so it's a really nice space

I think to have the two communities separated." He specifically saw the shift as restoring

TGRC's service to transgender identities as "the bigger responsibility…That's the main

objective here at the center. And so the harm reduction program is just a sub piece of that

mission." In other words, even though the HRP occupied the larger side of the building, the

segregation of TGRC's space communicated for many staff and trans guests the subordination of

the HRP to the priority to trans outreach.

Nonetheless, many guests complained that they disliked being forced to enter the

building through the HRP side. For example, Aleon identified as a white elder transman with

disabilities. In addition to regularly attending support groups, Aleon had often come to the

original Morningside House for conversations with drop-in guests. At the new Jackson Location,

he no longer saw drop-in as "for me." He acknowledged that his discomfort arose from the

presence of largely homeless HRP cisgender guests in that entryway. This response, he

conceded, could have been "prejudice on my part. I'm a middle class dude." Still, he stopped

visiting drop-in because "When I come in, everybody's a stranger." Importantly, however, he did

not believe that all TGRC services *should be* for him, and that its drop-in programs *should* serve

homeless guests experiencing addiction—including those who were not also trans. Such was the

texture of ambivalence among TGRC guests.

TGRC staff and Directors did notice these shifts, and they worried about the loss of trans

guests' identification with TGRC. In response, TGRC regulated the HRP even further. First, they

limited HRP hours. At the start of my study, TGRC required staff to provide HRP guests with

needle exchange up to five minutes before "closing time." But this deadline proved flexible. Anna described how sometimes, "there's a harm reduction client coming in five minutes after close, and we're taking them because, again, it's a money maker generation." She said that while staff made similar exceptions for trans guests, the Directors specifically wanted staff to offer HRP until closing time to increase exchange numbers—and thus funding. As the program grew, they cut off the provision of exchange after 5:30 PM. Similarly, the Directors created policies for handling the growing HRP clients. A new TGRC training manual said, "At 4:30, the list should be reviewed and the list may need to be stopped to ensure we can see everyone. If we must turn folks away, please offer [them] a schedule [for other] metro area exchanges." Thus, TGRC began to plan for closing HRP when demand was too high.

Second, TGRC also created new rules to address transphobia, space constraints, and restrict any potential injection usage on site. Also, after a cisgender guest directed derogatory terms like "tranny" and "hermaphrodite" toward other guests and staff, the staff asked the Directors if they could refuse services to HRP guests who used transphobic communication.

> **Michelle:** If harm reduction people are really, really unpleasant and—
>
> **Bailey**: Hateful! He just kept being hateful.
>
> **Brooks**: If you are asking, can our HRP refuse service to someone who is being hateful toward transpeople? Then the answer is yes! We are the *Transgender* Resource Center. We are not the "Everyone gets to be buttholes" center!

Staff were thus authorized to refuse HRP services to guests engaging in transphobic language. What is significant for our purposes is how the Director's communication of that decision both invoked and affirmed TGRC's transgender living organizational identity.

The Directors also further regulated the drop-in space by adding new rules. After staff found a few syringes in their trashcans (signifying potential forbidden drug use on site), TGRC implemented a required locker check-in for all guests. This enabled staff not only to decrease potential theft by safely locking up guest belongings, but it also limited their possible drug or alcohol use on site. The Directors also decided to restrict HRP guest usage of the facility's bathrooms (which were technically located on its trans-only side). This was partly to eliminate opportunities for any drug use, but also to restrict their unauthorized movement within that trans-only region. Staff and the Directors struggled with making this decision, which they discussed in a staff meeting. As participants in this exchange, Hunter was a white transman volunteer in his 20s, and Debbie was a white, cisgender woman in her 40s:

> **Hunter**: I'm having a hard time with bathrooms. We have long-term harm reduction clients who are homeless. And with the new locked door, they are doing the dance—
>
> **Debbie:** The potty dance—
>
> **Hunter:** Yeah, they need to go clearly, and I let them in back there to use the restroom. And I make sure they come back out…
>
> **Marie:** See this is a challenge because some folks say no to them. Like I might say, "It's closed now." And we are inconsistent…
>
> **Brooks:** As a trans person, I fundamentally do not like limiting access to the bathroom. That was the hardest part of the decision to shut off the new side for trans-only. I have been taking people back or saying a staff person will take you back to the bathroom.

Here, the staff struggled to consistently communicate a bathroom-access policy to HRP guests. This struggle arose in part because restricting bathrooms undesirably evoked the larger political and cultural discourse informing proposed anti-trans bathroom-usage legislation. Even Director

Brooks was motivated to make exceptions to his new rule because he recognized that HRP's homeless cisgender guests did not have safe bathroom access. Thus, even as TGRC tried to restrict cisgender guests' bathroom usage, they immediately created a loophole in their new policy. This was in part because TGRC staff treated all guests as whole people with multiple "facets" to their identities as the very foundation of harm reduction.

However, nine months after creating the trans-only side, the Directors decided to again restrict both HRP client's bathroom use, and also their eligibility stay at TGRC's drop-in center all day. Because the Directors heard continued guest critiques of HRP clients "taking over" TGRC space, they decided to create even more trans-only spaces. They allocated only two spaces for use by HRP clients (one waiting room with a TV and snacks, and one actual office), and restricted use of a previously-open community "crash" room to trans-only guests. Brooks described the change:

> The trans folks, especially our *transwomen of color* who come in on a regular basis, start to feel like *their space* is being over taken by, what I hear many of them call, like "the *straight people*" (laughs). We don't know that those people are straight, but that's the way *they're perceived* by some of our folks so that's why I say it that way…It's time for me to make changes in the building so that our participants who are *the most important to us* know that I heard them…We're not going to stop the HRP, but we're going to *limit access* to the spaces further…and to the bathroom again, if not eliminate it…It's not what I want to do…[But] our primary mission is *transpeople*. (emphasis added)

Again, Brooks invoked the priority of TGRC's transgender living identity to assuage his own discomfort with restricting spatial access for HRP clients. He told me that while he had initially attempted to "manage perceptions" in this controversy, he ultimately felt obligated to honor the

discomfort of TGRC's trans guests. Although Brooks and Henry were disappointed that TGRC's trans and HRP guests were unable to develop a "mutual understanding," this decision reinforced their "trans"-first depiction of TGRC's mission.

Henry similarly described this decision as TGRC's adjusting to "mission creep…[where] you need to re-center on your mission, that you need to make sure that everything you do is in service of your mission." He believed that harm reduction was at least *part* of TGRC's mission because if TGRC "served 97% cispeople to increase the access for transpeople, is that not worth it? Plus…we get paid well to do that." However, Henry *also* listened to trans guest concerns that HRP growth had "the literal effect of making the transpeople feel encroached on, and like, is this our center or not? Who is this center for?" He also said that, despite HRP cisgender guests' growing identification with TGRC, he agreed with trans guests who claimed that HRP cisgender guests had co-opted the facility's community rooms as a crash space. He felt remorse for how the HRP mission creep had undermined the experience of trans guests. Henry said, "Why *would* we let that big community room …[become] a day center just for generally folks experiencing homelessness, right? That is definitely *not our mission* …[We should be] centering on our *mission*, which is *transpeople*."

TGRC rolled out their newest HRP restrictions during the last week of my fieldwork. Brooks described this decision as "fresh and painful." He also reported that he was already making exceptions for cisgender people needing to use the restroom—particularly those "who are regulars, who have never caused issues. He did so because bottom line: Being trans and saying no bathrooms hurts me." In this way, given the larger controversy surrounding transphobic bathroom legislation, restricting bathroom usage *at all* created an identity conflict for Brooks.

In sum, these incidents illustrate the complex and unpredictable configurations that shaped TGRC's ongoing negotiation of its identity. The thriving HRP created organizational identity tensions for TGRC. Trans guests questioned *who exactly* TGRC valued (and how), given its expressed commitment to serving transgender living—specifically, whether TGRC still served as their preferred version of a "home" space. Some staff and guests accepted that the HRP served trans guests too, and even viewed the HRP as a logical expression *of* TGRC's family and all facets identities. Others, however, critiqued the HRP heavily, so much so that TGRC restricted the role of the HRP further and further. TGRC ultimately implemented decision-making to center TGRC's *transgender living* organizational identity. Through the HRP critiques, trans guests facilitated critical communication moments (Alvesson et al., 2008) among ongoing organizational identity construction that shifted the future of the HRP.

Resisting the Nonprofit Industrial Complex

The fourth and final organizational identity tension I will now address did not come from staff or guests. Rather, both the Directors and Board Members addressed their own tension: How could TGRC create "support all facets of transgender living," given constraints that pushed them toward common nonprofit norms? Participants named these constraints as conditions of the "NPIC"—the Nonprofit Industrial Complex.

To provide background, early in my research, the Directors introduced me to an edited volume by INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence called *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex* (2007). They invited me to read this collection to teach me about constraints they experienced related to their 501(c)(3) status. In the collection, Rodríguez defines the NPIC as, "the set of symbolic relationships that link together political and financial technologies of state and owning-class proctorship and surveillance over

public political intercourse, including and especially emergent progressive and leftist social movements, since about the mid-1970s" (2007, pp. 21-22). Henry told me, "It becomes almost this just self-perpetuating thing where a lot of funders won't look at you unless you're 501(c)(3)…[But] then you're an agent of the government…that's how they tie your hands around things like political activity." Therefore, any "advocacy" from TGRC's three-pronged approach was restricted under regulations of not being a "political" organization.

INCITE! (2007) depicted four main NPIC challenges faced by organizations like TGRC in their efforts to address complex, overlapping identities and injustices. First, the NPIC silences "radical" politics through IRS anti-action rules (i.e., restricting their performance of protest), and normalizing better, higher levels of funding for "well-behaved," non-controversial nonprofits (see Kivel, 2007). In this view, funders and regulators deem serving single-issue causes (e.g., transgender HIV prevention) as more intelligible, "acceptable," and "fundable" missions for nonprofits than multi-issue approaches. Second, the NPIC creates competition among nonprofit organizations instead of potential interorganizational collaborations (i.e., as political coalitions and solidarity). Smith (2007) writes, "the NPIC promotes a social movement culture that is non-collaborative, narrowly focused, and competitive" (2007, p. 10). Third, the NPIC normalizes expectations that social justice organizing requires external funding and 501(c)(3) status to successfully function. It thus encourages activists to create nonprofit organizations to engage their communities instead of practicing direct community engagement. For example, Thunder Hawk (2007) critiques how "schmoozing with funders" and administrative tasks replace putting "effort into organizing and activism" (p. 102). A part of the NPIC critique, then, is that nonprofits became big businesses. The National Center for Charitable Statistics, for example, reported 1.57 million 501(c)(3) organizations in the United States, which created 9.2% of all

U.S. wages and salaries. Additionally, nonprofits reported 1.74 trillion dollars in revenue, 1.63 trillion dollars in expenses, and 3 trillion in total assets (NCCS, 2017). Fourth, the big business of the NPIC presents a final constraint: Nonprofit organizing "may be intentionally or inadvertently working to maintain the status quo. After all, the non-profit industrial complex (NPIC) wouldn't exit without a lot of people in desperate straits" (Kivel, 2007, p. 130). For example, Kivel argues that the NPIC separates social service work and social change work, effectively perpetuating structural inequalities. Thus, when my participants hailed the term "NPIC," they detailed similar constraints as these INCITE! authors.

Overall, the Directors and Board Members believed the NPIC specifically constrained TGRC's "all facets" identity. For example, Board Member Fred positioned TGRC as an alternate to the NPIC. He said, "Henry and Brooks are doing it the right way… It builds real power. Getting that power funded is another thing…It's not a way that is supported usually. The nonprofit establishment likes to see non-grassroots organizations fly." For Fred, while a grassroots approach was admirable, it was not commonly elevated as more established nonprofits. Given these constraints, Fred worked with Henry and Brooks to write larger public health grants to create funded staff positions. He admired TGRC as an "organization developed in the correct way…from the grassroots up and actually doing something in order to get the funding rather than starting out chasing money and then figuring out what we are going to do to appease the funders." He believed TGRC could operate *within* the NPIC and even shift fundability discourse to recognize value in grassroots, action-based organizing.

In contrast, other Board Members and the Directors hoped to operate TGRC *outside* of the NPIC, but faced constraints, including resolving expectations for Board Members' professionalism. For example, in meetings, Board Members often struggled with question of how

to move forward with fundraising. They resented other nonprofit fundraising protocols that

appeared to perpetuate capitalism over outreach, and that advanced fundraising potential (i.e.,

expressed in the conventional wisdom, "Get, Give, or Get Out") as the means by which someone

would be selected to join a Board. During a group planning retreat, Board Members worked with

a partner LGBTQ organization to rework their roles and responsibilities, including fundraising.

They disagreed about how much (if any) donations should be required from each Board Member.

The Directors wanted to tell potential funders that all Board Members financially supported

TGRC to show "buy in." This was a common nonprofit practice to show how Boards "give" and

"get" money called a "give-get."

After the retreat, some Board Members questioned whether TGRC could later include

their own trans guests—who frequently experienced poverty—on the Board if they advanced this

give-get standard. Polly said that since TGRC wanted some members of the Board "to *be* the

people we serve, we need to think about if they could donate to TGRC." Polly, for example,

identified as a white, queer, cisgender, middle class woman. She explained, "I saw a lot of

discomfort in this room when [fundraising] came up at the retreat. I want people to feel valued if

they can give to TGRC. And we also want to attract diversity to the board." To implement a get-

give policy, then, was to potentially exclude trans guests unable to generate revenue.

Board Member Luz critiqued TGRC's new focus on defining Board policies and funding

expectations. Luz identified as queer, indigenous, and Latinx. They said, "I hate to use the word

but it is coming out of me…what Boards *corporately expect* for a Board 'get-give' is to ensure

the tax donations are coming in. This is really the Nonprofit Industrial Complex!" TGRC

attempts to create a clearer get-give policy, for Luz, evoked an image of the NPIC speaking

through them and shaping their decisions. Luz thus pushed against recommendations by the

LGBTQ partner organization that tried to help TGRC rewrite policies at their Board retreat. Luz argued, "Let's transform what a board looks like in the context of Nonprofit Industrial Complex! I love our partner organization, but they *cookie-cuttered* us. And this is jacket fitting too tightly." Mariah echoed Luz, "Yes! I need a 3X, not a 1X!" Other Board Members nodded in agreement. The NPIC began to feel like a straightjacket constricting TGRC's organizing. The Board wanted the Directors to continue to break the get-give funding model and avoid restrictive corporate frames (see Thunder Hawk, 2007).

Instead, the Board Members called for a *collaborative* fundraising model, something they had discussed in multiple meetings during my research. They believed that collaborative fundraising could resist the NPIC's imperatives, while funding TGRC's outreach. However, the Directors were frustrated by how fundraising often got dropped entirely or pushed onto the same Board Members. When the Directors asked how they could ensure fundraising follow-through, Luz reminded Henry, "So far, we didn't have structure, and we just had passion. The *fucking heart*!" Henry smiled and agreed, "The heart is everything. So, how can we be *effective*? How can we link arms…so it's not a capitalist bullshitty thing to raise money but to *sustain* TGRC's outreach?" In other words, the Board Members and Directors both sought to frame their fundraising as falling *outside* of the NPIC hegemony. As the Directors reacted to pressure from other nonprofits' funding practices, the Board Members symbolically tethered them to TGRC's grassroots, heart-centered identities.

Importantly, the Directors also consistently challenged and refuted their "nonprofit" label when others used it to describe TGRC. Despite recognizing the importance of their 501(c)(3) classification for funding and tax exemption, Brooks depicted TGRC's grassroots, trans-centered approach as superseding their nonprofit identity. Henry particularly resented the nonprofit label

and often mimicked a whiny, high-pitched voice when he even uttered the word nonprofit. He

also drew out the "i" as "nonprofiiiit." In a staff meeting, Henry said TGRC was:

> devoutly committed to not just being a "nonprofiiiit." All the things that people come and
>
> wanna tell me and Brooks: "You need to do this…This is what nonprofits do." No! We
>
> are not here to just be part of the Nonprofit Industrial Complex and model ourselves after
>
> for profit businesses and figure out how to just grow with "unrestricted growth."

His refusal mirrored the INCITE! critiques of the NPIC for-profit success models (see Kivel,

2007; Thunder Hawk, 2007). Henry also detailed TGRC's advocacy with national and state

funders to advance the importance of TGRC's all facets approach, which was contra typical

funding norms for single-issues (see Smith, 2007). During a staff meeting, he talked about,

"teaching the largest domestic trans funder that our model has to be funded…When they fund

advocacy work, they will not fund organizations that deliver direct services of any kind. They

consider it to be fundamentally incompatible." Staff gasped and laughed, seeing direct services

and advocacy as what Bailey called "inherently linked." In this view, TGRC's connection of

direct services with advocacy mirrored historical transgender activists for whom "providing

services is viewed as the first step toward building power; it is part of keeping people alive,

thriving, and pushing forward" (Shepard, 2013, p. 97). Henry thus believed that any transgender

outreach should "have more of our people in mind than any other movement in the country.

TGRC is looking at racism and poverty and disability and all the things that are affecting

transpeople in an intersectional way." Thus, the Directors refused to let funding norms derail

their attempts to address transpeople's intersectional identities. They therefore tried to change

funding structures of the NPIC rather than alter their own organizational identities.

Additionally, both Directors never wanted TGRC's outreach to begin to feel burdensome

for them or staff. Henry said, "One of the things I hate about being a 'nonprofiiiit' and why I

don't wanna be one is because I over and over see people who work in those jobs start to be very

cynical about the people who come to the places for services… [as] beyond help, and that they're

kinda vile and lying manipulators." His fears of cynical detachment from the TGRC family

reinforced his avoidance of labeling TGRC as a nonprofit, even as a nonprofit co-Director.

Henry and I also discussed his distrust of the NPIC as driving his aversion for

"marketing" TGRC's identities to the multiple, varied audiences he hoped to address. Henry

confessed that, "One of my shortcomings as a leader is that I detest anything that's billed as

marketing or trying to 'build a brand' [*mimics an annoying voice*]…I immediately just go like

this [*puts his fingers in his ears*]." He recognized that he was losing potential opportunities to

strategically engage Trans 101 audiences, future trans and GNC guests, community members,

and funders through his aversion to marketing as "just becoming another nonprofit." This, in

turn, created a communication gap in TGRC's advocacy and education prongs where, "There are

lots of people who don't know exactly what we do, who don't know that they're part of the

demographic, who don't get it." He cited an example of some guests even viewing TGRC as only

the "homeless people drop-in center" (what Aleon described above), whereas he wanted "to

make sure that our community understands that TGRC is here to try to help all of *them*." He

realized, "The truth is if you avoid that stuff long enough, it gets decided *for you*." Henry thus

believed TGRC could better "highlight facets of our identity that are the most relevant and most

desirable in any given interaction." Instead of crafting strategic marketing messaging, the

Directors largely focused on creating and sustaining TGRC's organizational identities

collectively with guests and staff. Importantly, this distinction mirrored one that I noted in

Chapter Three between top-down approaches to managing organizational identity (e.g., Huang-Horowitz, 2015; Ozdora-Aksak & Atakan-Duman, 2015) and social constructionist approaches (Hatch & Schultz, 2002) emphasizing the creation of identities with multiple audiences.

The final tension to consider with the NPIC and the all facets identity was perhaps the most daunting: Could any single nonprofit sustainably really serve all of the salient identities and needs of New Mexican transgender or non-conforming persons? Throughout my research, the Board Members and Directors valued TGRC's all facets identity as central and distinctive, yet they questioned if it could endure, at least in its current iteration. Board Member Fred described two potential TGRC futures. One was:

> an easier way…to slow down, tighten up, and tell 30% of the people to go away, maybe not in those words. But let's all pull in. But the other part of me who came out of this space and benefits from this community center as my community…[believes] we have to do it all because no one else is doing it quite like we are doing it…Let's not fix it if we are not broken, and we're not broken yet…That's the courageous part of me.

The Directors thus struggled with Fred's two approaches: to tighten their focus *or* to continue endeavoring for all facets.

When the Directors considered narrowing TGRC's services, they believed it risked negating their all facets identities. Initially Brooks believed TGRC could better serve its guests by tightening its focus due to their overextension. He cited unreturned emails, unfinished projects, and stalled ideas as symbolizing excessive organizational demands. Brooks wanted TGRC to be more "sustainable" and to enrich their programming. Henry questioned Brooks, "But if we got rid of these services, *who* would do them?" Brooks always ultimately agreed that

he, too, could not choose to relinquish their current services. Yet Brooks continued to wonder how narrowing their mission could potentially strengthen their central identities.

Over time, the Directors continued to wrestle with common NPIC challenges like funding constraints, "sustainability," and "capacity" pushing them to narrow. Yet, they both remained steadfast to their all facets approach. Fred's "courageous part" of TGRC ultimately endured. To address the incredible demands of their "all facets" identity, the Directors instead worked diligently to harness more interorganizational collaborations. They thus leveraged a common constraint of the NPIC—funding competition disrupting potential collaboration (Smith, 2007)— to instead advance TGRC and their partner organizations. Henry always believed TGRC did not, "need to narrow what we're doing or how we talk about it… What I think is smart is strengthening and utilizing our partnerships…We just need to figure out how to more intelligently have pipelines for people to services they trust that come from us, but internally, infrastructure wise are not really coming from us."

Brooks still thought the current iteration of all facets was "unsustainable long-term…with the structure as it looks today. There's not enough capacity, and Henry and I can't do it all. Even with all of our awesome volunteers, we just *can't do everything*." Yet throughout my three years of research, Brooks' views shifted from wanting to TGRC to serve only a few core areas (e.g., health and work) to instead claiming, "I don't think we have to stop doing anything, I think we have to do a few things a little *smarter*." One way to work "smarter" was a new interorganizational collaboration with Healthcare on the Move, the organization that taught them how to develop their HRP. Brooks coordinated a partnership with Healthcare on the Move to bring medical providers for weekly medical office hours at TGRC. This enabled both nonprofit organizations to further their missions. TGRC could address all facets of transgender living

including health and harm reduction and Healthcare on the Move could further their community health outreach). This showcased their mutual NPIC resistance through an interorganizational collaboration.

Lastly, the Directors also sought to develop a social entrepreneurship model that could provide ultimate respite from the NPIC. I travelled with Brooks and Henry to a southeastern organization called Outreach for Good(s) to consider at an example of this model. Outreach for Good(s) began as a nonprofit housing program for homeless cisgender women experiencing addiction, incarceration, violence, and/or sex work. The leaders then created a secondary for-profit, social entrepreneurship organization where the women they served created goods and learned trades. This new for-profit organization then sustained their nonprofit. TGRC Directors and Board Members believed social entrepreneurship like Outreach for Good(s) could sever the NPIC's grip. They planned to create a nail salon, coffee shop, and call center that would not only employ trans guests but also help train them for other local organizations. This could "really feed them" as Aron had called for. Henry said, "My dream is that we would have *thriving* transitional living program from our *thriving* social entrepreneur enterprises." Brooks also cited a transitional living program funded by the social entrepreneurial model as assuaging the systemic homelessness for transpeople in Albuquerque described in Chapter Four.

Ultimately, both Brooks and Henry hoped that through cultivating social entrepreneurial TGRC guest-run initiatives, TGRC would one day close its doors entirely. Brooks said that his future hopes, "Like pie in the sky, I don't want the center to have to exist." Henry agreed that what he wanted for the ideal future for TGRC was it to be, "*Gone*. No longer needed. The trans advocacy wouldn't be one of the *best* employment opportunities for transpeople. That transpeople would do all the jobs when you get hired just like everybody else." The TGRC

Directors, ultimately, planned to resist the NPIC norm of nonprofits furthering the status quo that

Kivel (2007) cautioned against. They wanted TGRC to shift the conditions for transpeople in

New Mexico so dramatically that their nonprofit would be rendered obsolete. This would be their

ultimate defiant resistance to the NPIC.

In conclusion, this chapter has examined four key tensions surrounding TGRC's

organizational identity ideals. All four tensions (family constraints, non-binary inclusion, harm

reduction, and the NPIC) importantly illustrated complexities of *organizational identity*. These

tensions included both participants' identities being served (e.g., HRP cisgender guests, non-

binary guests) and TGRC's own collective identity construction (e.g., family and NPIC). I now

turn to conclude this study by addressing its overall implications, including practical

recommendations for TGRC to mitigate the constraints detailed in this chapter.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

This dissertation has showcased the importance of understanding how organizational members create, sustain, and critique organizational identities through communication. It offers a unique examination of the complexities of constructing organizational identities – particularly for an *identity-based organization* advancing outreach and justice for guests sharing one or more social identities. I also argued that *transgender outreach and identity* formed valuable, neglected opportunities for understanding these processes. I subsequently examined how organizational members of the Transgender Resource Center of New Mexico (TGRC) constructed organizational identities in relationship to their own individual multiple, salient, and competing identities.

To briefly recap the study's empirical chapters, Chapter Four examined the two most salient identity intersections for TGRC's drop-in guests: (1) homeless and transgender identities and (2) indigenous and transgender identities. It also explored some of the guests' other salient identities and needs, including sexuality, age, race, class, employment, addiction, and disability. Chapter Five considered two of TGRC's organizational identities: (1) as *family* and (2) as *support for all facets of transgender living*. I discussed these identities as TGRC "ideals," and as such, their enactment was not without its constraints and challenges. Chapter Six examined four communication constraints experienced by TGRC members in sustaining those ideals: *family tensions*, *non-binary critiques*, *Harm Reduction Program competition*, and *Nonprofit Industrial Complex hegemony*. In this conclusion, I discuss three distinctive contributions of this research: (1) theoretical implications and calls for future study, (2) practical recommendations for TGRC, and (3) a reflection on the study's limitations.

Theoretical Implications

Here, I discuss two sets of implications from this study and associate them with calls for future research. I first examine contributions to theorizing communication and organizational identities, and then I review contributions to transgender communication studies.

Implications for Organizational Identity Theories

My dissertation presents three sets of implications for studying the relationship between communication and organizational identity. First, it enriches the use in past research of common criteria to assess organizational identity. Second, it explores the importance of theorizing organizational identities among *identity-based* organizations. Third, it presents the importance of *methodological flexibility* for communication studies of organizational identity.

Extending the CED criteria. Famously, Albert and Whetten (1985) proposed three necessary criteria for assessing the significance of organizational identity. These criteria are commonly referred to as CED: *central, enduring*, and *distinctive.* Past research has surfaced multiple issues concerning these criteria, including their relevance and validity in explaining organizational change (Whetten, 2006) and the contingency of related findings as artifacts of diverse methodology (Albert et al., 2000). Concerning the latter, Corley et al. (2006) view emic approaches (like the one taken in this project) as valuable because they examine how organizational members actually understand and co-construct identity.

My analysis of participants' communication in this study indicated that the CED criteria were indeed relevant to their creation and maintenance of organizational identities. Recently, researchers have used the CED criteria to assess the durability of organizational identity in light of ongoing organizational change (see Corley et al., 2006; Gioia et al., 2013). My research here, subsequently, supports Gioia et al.'s claim (2013) that organizational identity often changes in

subtle ways (p. 126). That is, TGRC's members often perceived its organizational identity as stable, and used consistent labels for naming identities, even though the meanings of those labels were malleable. Two examples of related shifts in their communicative negotiation of enduring identity included: (1) the fluctuation of meanings and practices associated with the design, administration, and use of physical space across TGRC's moves and expansions (see Chapter Five) and (2) changes in the administration of the Harm Reduction Program, made in order to align it with preferred interpretations of TGRC's transgender living identity (see Chapter Six). My research also illustrated the significance of the distinctiveness criterion (Corley et al., 2006) for analyzing organizational identities. For example, TGRC Directors and Board Members marked themselves as distinct from nonprofits' structure and culture that appeared to be influenced by norms of the NPIC (see Chapter Six).

Notably, my analysis of participants' communication reveals that the CED criteria were interconnected and sometimes even indistinguishable. In such cases, participants' understandings of organizational identity that illustrated the CED criteria could not be parsed. In other words, what made an organizational identity distinctive made it central, which also enabled it to endure. This finding mirrors both Gioia et al.'s (2013) claim that organizational members often "deliberately preserve" central identities (p. 134), and Corley et al.'s (2006) claim that organizational members compare their central identities to those of other organizations in order to communicate distinction. For TGRC, many guests confirmed the centrality of its organizational identity as serving transgender people, which was distinctive among other nonprofit LGBTQ organizations, and which also endured through its mission of supporting all facets of transgender living. I subsequently recommend future research to examine how identity-based organizations configure the qualities of CED, and how their strategic essentializing of

intersectional identity may impact members' ongoing construction of their organizational identities. Finally, exploring how members invoke CED criteria through fundraising communication, and the relationship between organizational negotiation of CED identity and NPIC norms offers another area for future inquiry (see Gill & Wells, 2014; INCITE!, 2007; Chen & Collier, 2012). I now offer further examination of identity-based organizations' organizational identities.

   Theorizing organizational identities of identity-based organizations. In Chapter Two, I argued that organizational identity research offers many interdisciplinary connections. Nonetheless, there remains a continued separation of *organizational identity theories* from theories of *identity, difference,* and/or *intersectionality* in organizational communication. My study uniquely demonstrates the complexities of theorizing *both* participants' identities *and* organizational identities, as well as the nature of their relationship. One potential connection of these disparate literatures is through theorizing identity-based organizations (see Reid, 1999). Past intercultural communication research by Chen and Collier (2012) revealed the importance of communication theorizing of identity-based organizations via their comparison of two nonprofits in order to advance Collier's cultural identity theory and to understand cross-status relationships between members. Here I extend their intercultural research by focusing on how identity-based organizations may face unique challenges in constructing *organizational* identities. A focus on organizational identities of identity-based organizations, I believe, merits our sustained, critical consideration. Specifically, we need to develop increased understanding of how organizational members account for their complex (and even intersectional) identities as they simultaneously organize around a strategic, focused identity category.

Understanding how participants' identities impact organizational identities goes beyond viewing organizational identity as only a top-down, managerial construct authored by elite insiders. This study thus follows Cheney et al.'s (2014) call for going beyond conventional member/non-member distinctions to theorize the multiple audiences and authors of organizational identity and treating organizational identity construction as a circular process. Alvesson (2011) also described the importance of theorizing how organizational members' identities shape collective organizational identities and vice versa. My study depicted, for example, how the communication of TGRC's guests with staff profoundly influenced its organizational identity construction. In this way, we also need to recognize that participants' own identity construction may shape and even shift organizational identities in identity-based organizations.

For example, TGRC Directors Brooks and Henry implemented an "all facets" mission in its initial 501(c)(3) application to open the organization's first Silver location. However, what "all facets" signified for TGRC's staff and guests evolved over time. The Directors noted how they first viewed "all facets" in relationship to their own experiences transitioning as housed, white, transmen. As they came to recognize the complex intersections of guests' identities, the meanings of "all facets" and the offering of related services expanded. Ongoing communication between TGRC staff and guests affected how they collaboratively enacted the organization's "all facets" identity through the use of space, policies, and outreach, thus enabling that ideal to endure. Similarly, following staff and guest critiques of TGRC's the Harm Reduction Program, the Directors created changes in its operations, and revised their interpretation of "transgender living." I thus call for further future research to investigate how other identity-based organizations co-construct organizational identities with those they seek to serve. For example, a

study could investigate the communicative differences between organizations that invite clients to collaborate in shaping relevant organizational identities, and those that impose fixed and rigid identities on clients.

My analysis of communication among TGRC participants subsequently offers three implications for the study of identity-based organizations: (1) *contrasting communication*, (2) *detypification*, and (3) *crystallized organizational identity using ambiguous intersectionality*. First, TGRC members constructed a *distinctive* organizational identity through the use of anti-identities (Alvesson et al., 2008) and strongly identified with TGRC via antithesis (Cheney, 1983b). I name this practice *contrasting communication*. For example, participants described TGRC as *contrasting* with other LGBTQ organizations because it uniquely centered trans identities. Participants also viewed TGRC as *contrasting* with NPIC-driven nonprofits because it resisted fundraising norms that would undermine its grassroots, trans-centered approach. TGRC members also positioned its family identity as *contrasting* with other organizations that punished and/or banned members who "broke rules." Thus, *contrasting communication* encouraged guests' and staff's continued identification with TGRC through symbolic opposition, and sustained its organizational identity ideals.

Despite generating clear benefits, contrasting communication also created challenges. The "Rowan conflict" discussed in Chapter Six illustrated the difficulties for TGRC's staff and Directors of sustaining its family identity amidst escalating conflict with guests. Still, the Directors harnessed *contrasting communication* to reinforce why Rowan should return to TGRC after getting sober. Director Henry's decision to not ban Rowan "like *every other* fucking service agency in this town" thus sustained TGRC's family identity. We need further research to examine how organizational members use contrasting communication to create organizational

identity distinctions, and how those distinctions change and/or persist during conflict. Also, further research should examine whether contrasting communication might deter interorganizational collaborations—for example, when collectives position potential partner organizations through anti-identities.

Second, my findings extend theories of *detypification*. Jenness' (1992) theory of detypification focused on how women who were attracted to other women "detypified" the category of lesbian. Her analysis revealed how the women began to identify with the lesbian category by "doing it" via lived personal connections that constructed it as increasingly positive and more congruent with their experiences (p. 70). Halverson (2010) also extended Jenness to show how LGBTQ youth used detypification to empower and identify with one another.

Here, I extend Jenness and Halverson's research by exploring how TGRC implemented detypification at an *organizational level*. Importantly, TGRC chose to center transgender identities, which was part of its contrasting communication among other LGBTQ organizations. To do so, members' organizational communication frequently positioned transgender as the central identity category being served and used strategic essentialism (Spivak, 1988). In selecting their name as the "Transgender Resource Center," they temporarily essentialized transgender identity in order to gather community members and work for change on behalf of gender transgressors. Past organizational communication research has reviewed the possibilities of this "temporary bracketing of difference-as-accomplishment" (Parker, 2014, p. 625). TGRC's bracketing allowed members to delimit an organizational identity in order to serve transgender and gender nonconforming people. In so doing, TGRC simultaneously recognized transgender as a socially constructed category with variant meanings, yet they also used "transgender" to gather all those who identified outside of a cisgender identity. Because transgender as an identity

category frequently encompasses a vast array of gender identities (see Feinberg, 1992/2006), its umbrella status is both embraced and scorned by gender transgressors. For example, my study revealed tensions created for the Non-Binary Support Group when TGRC strategically essentialized transgender, symbolically (and inadvertently) positioning NB members as outsiders.

However, I argue that the TGRC Directors also attempted to disrupt the strategic essentializing of transgender via their cultivation of the "all facets of transgender living" identity. Specifically, members sought to detypify "transgender" at an organizational level to make it accessible to all non-cisgender people. They created services that would respond to varied, divergent, and overlapping identities and needs. In other words, the "all facets" approach created what Jenness (1992) termed as more "personal applicability" to all gender transgressors in New Mexico. Detypifying transgender outreach through the invocation of "all facets" communicated to guests that their own salient identities and experiences were, indeed, welcomed. This ultimately included more guests than presumed the exclusivity of a single identity and related service need. Communication around TGRC's all facets identity also served to detypify transgender because it offered guests and staff more than a single-issue approach (e.g., trans health)—an approach that (as discussed above) was not preferred. I thus call for future research on how identity-based organizations attempt to detypify the very identities they serve. We need more inquiry into the simultaneous strategic essentializing of identities *for* creating a group to serve while also detypifying that very category.

The third and final contribution my analysis of TGRC's identity-based organizing involved how their detypification of transgender both *centered* transgender identities, while simultaneously addressing guests' *multiple,* salient identities. This strategic interpretation created

the potential for communicating a *"crystallized" organizational identity*. Tracy and Trethewey (2005) first presented the crystallization metaphor to critique simplistic opposition between the categorization of "real" or "fake" selves in work-life research and practice. By building off Richardson's (2000) imagery of crystals as multi-faceted, they described crystallized selves as having "different shapes depending on the various discourses through which they are constructed and constrained" (p. 186). While Tracy and Trethewey described individuals' navigation of a crystallized self, they also revealed the potential for important future research on organizations. In Trethewey et al. (2006), they advanced how "a crystallized approach suggests that challenges in managing multiple identities are diverse and not all-of-a-kind" (p. 4).

I subsequently argue that, by serving transgender living through an "all facets" approach, TGRC created a *crystallized organizational identity*. That is, TGRC invited its guests to communicate their needs as tied to their multiple, overlapping, complex identities. For example, Chapter Four described how guests' homeless and indigenous identities intersected with their transgender identities. Whereas other organizations may have treated addiction, homelessness, indigeneity, sexuality, age, and disability as "outside" of their "transgender identity-only" purview, TGRC's support for all facets of transgender living evoked its obligation to address interconnected facets of transpeople's identities. I argue, then, that TGRC's "all facets" language maps onto what Tracy and Trethewey (2005) and Trethewey et al. (2006) have theorized as a crystallized self. We can thus examine how a collective may *also* attempt to create a crystallized *organizational* identity, in order to treat those served as whole people with multiple, overlapping, and even conflicting facets requiring complex responses that exceed narrow, single-issue organizing.

Nonetheless, even as these crystallized organizational identities responded to guests' intersectional identities, they *also* strategically essentialized transgender identity. I thus argue that TGRC's use of "all facets" created the possibility of an intersectional organizational identity because they consistently communicated that transgender living was not flattened but variegated. Embracing an "all facets" identity thus sustained TGRC's value of treating guests as whole people and offering outreach that centered the identities that guests communicated as salient. As Director Brooks said in Chapter Five, "You have to look at the whole person…not just the things about someone's gender identity."

As a result, I argue that TGRC's construction of the "all facets" identity provides an exemplar of understudied, grassroots critical intersectional praxis (Collins & Bilge, 2016). Importantly, TGRC's construction of a crystallized organizational identity was not explicitly named as intersectional. This contrasts with research where intersectional goals and direct critiques of power may be explicitly included in an organization's mission (see DeTurk, 2015). The crystallized organizational identity reveals, instead, an approach I name *ambiguous intersectionality*. Albert and Whetten (1985) theorized the importance of ambiguity for creating organizational identities that are "minimally sufficient" to attract multiple audiences. In part, they explained that organizations may use ambiguity to avoid unproductive typecasting and only mark distinctions when needed through what Brewer (1991) termed "optimal distinctiveness." Eric Eisenberg (1984) similarly theorized the value and complexities of what he called "strategic ambiguity" in organizational communication—when organizational members design their communication so that "different constituent groups may apply different interpretations to the symbol" (p. 233). This practice, potentially, creates what he terms "unified diversity," where communication can attract multiple, divergent audiences.

TGRC used ambiguous intersectionality by positioning "all facets" and "transgender" as open *to all* potential guests. Rather than merely list the common salient intersections that TGRC believed impacted transgender New Mexicans, its use of ambiguity permitted each guest to envision *their own specific intersectional identities* within all facets. In other words, TGRC enacted ambiguous intersectionality as critical praxis (Collins & Bilge, 2016) that "promotes more just alternatives" (Luft & Ward, 2009, p. 10) for transpeople's daily lives. TGRC privileged localized knowledge (Chávez, 2012) and participants' salient identities over the use of presumed, predetermined intersections.

TGRC also never explicitly named its commitments to challenging intersectional injustice in written communication, such as calling TGRC "anti-racist" or operating "in solidarity with Native organizing." Choosing to not name specific coalitional justice work allowed TGRC be perceived as more "acceptable" "fundable" (see Kivel, 2007), and not as "radical" or "political" (see Rodríguez, 2007) according to NPIC norms. Depictions of TGRC as serving all facets of transgender living remained innocuous enough for funders who might resist the "radical" or intersectional missions of nonprofit organizations (see Gill & Wells, 2014). This ambiguously intersectional communication could also invite *guests* who would be wary of "political" or "radical" commitments. For example, when TGRC speakers informally discussed potential intersections and the importance of working in solidarity against other oppressions in Trans-101s training sessions, some trans guests disliked overt critiques of power and privilege (see Chapter Five). Thus, not describing TGRC's work as intersectional assuaged potential critiques from funders, community members, and even guests.

However, TGRC's deployment of ambiguous intersectionality was not without its limitations. Some guests directly questioned how or if their identities were included in TGRC's

mission without being directly named, such as the non-binary guests discussed in Chapter Six. Others wondered that if TGRC supported intersectional critiques and coalitions, why did it not explicitly name common intersectional injustices? Instead, the Directors and staff presumed that TGRC's all facets identity could "speak for itself" instead of naming its work as intersectional. This ambiguity created potential challenges for new guests who did not know TGRC's histories of interorganizational partnerships, did not understand the Directors' mission for all facets sought to include intersectional identities, and questioned how and if the center valued their intersectional experiences. In other words, as TGRC grew and moved across locations, fewer guests necessarily knew what "all facets" meant or TGRC's histories of a "whole person" approach. Additionally, some new staff lacked the institutional history to understand this organizational identity, and the Directors had to develop strategies to socialize staff into their family and all facets identities. I return to these complexities below under practical recommendations. Future research might further explore how organizations communicate ambiguous intersectionality and perceptions of such approaches. Additionally, conducting a comparative analysis between an organization that names intersectionality (and/or addresses specific identity intersections) and one that uses ambiguous intersectionality would allow us to learn more about potential benefits and tensions of ambiguous intersectional praxis. Past research from Chen and Collier (2012) reveal the productive analysis of a comparative analysis of two identity-based organizations within the same study.

Encouraging methodological flexibility. Finally, my dissertation also revealed the importance of methodological flexibility for researching organizational identities. I specifically added ethnographic interviews and creative focus groups based on research exigencies. Ethnographic interviews became important because of some guests and staff's irregular

involvement with TGRC. For example, some guests moved frequently, such as traveling back and forth to a reservation or pueblo, moving for survival sex work, or visiting TGRC erratically from a surrounding New Mexico city where they still lived as stealth.

I also designed my creative focus group method as an arts-based inquiry to include more support group and drop-in guests who seemed uncomfortable with and/or were unavailable for semi-structured interviews. Prior research illustrated art-based methods to theorize organizational communication concepts (Tracy, Lutgen-Sandvik, & Alberts, 2006; Tracy & Malvini Redden, 2016). My creative focus groups mimicked TGRC's own local use of arts-based community building and group facilitation. Participants' collages and drawings and focus group communication uniquely showcased the construction of TGRC's organizational identities.

My creative focus groups and ethnographic interviews therefore provided findings that I would not have captured otherwise. While we may often turn to our familiar, favorite methods as researchers, attempting methodological flexibility through learning or even designing new methods offers fruitful theoretical contributions. A creative focus group will not work for every project, but embracing methodological flexibility in relationship to local communication norms is important for future studies of organizational identities of identity-based organizations. I also recommend this practice for organizational identity research of corporations and other for-profit organizations to enliven ongoing research.

Theorizing Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Identities

I now turn to my second area of theoretical contributions: that of transgender communication studies. In Chapter Two, I explored the current "tipping point" (Steinmetz, 2014) of popular media coverage and academic research on transpeople, despite important historical research and trans activism preceded this tipping point (Stryker, 2008b; Shepard, 2013). While

transgender people and their needs have been understudied in LGBTQ communication studies (see Gross, 2005), current communication research examines transpeople in interpersonal, intercultural, organizational, rhetorical, media, and health areas (see Spencer & Capuzza, 2015).

This dissertation is the first study to investigate organizational communication that centers transgender identities. Few interdisciplinary scholars have investigated transgender outreach organizing (for two exceptions see Valentine, 2007; Shepard, 2013). Only Dixon (2015; Dixon & Dougherty, 2014) in organizational communication has previously researched transgender work experiences. My study is therefore not only the first research of a transgender-based organization in our discipline but is also the first of its kind to examine the relationships of transgender identities to organizational identities. Importantly, the findings herein extend transgender communication studies by showcasing the unique complexities of how organizations interpret and express transgender identities.

This project thus extends Valentine's (2007) examination of how intersections of other salient identities may impact participants' identification with the term "transgender." Many of Valentine's participants identified with the word "gay" instead of transgender because of the saliency of their sexuality and race, and he thus named his research of "transgender" an "anthropological imaginary." In contrast, many of my participants *did* identify with transgender as an identity category. I argue that this was due to their detypification of the category (Jenness, 1992) in order to facilitate identification with it. Many participants may also have identified with "transgender" because TGRC used detypification at an organizational level, engaging guests' intersectional identities through its crystallized, all facets approach. Participants who detypified transgender personally and used it as a label for themselves and others were more likely to identify with TGRC and value its organizational identities. These participants viewed

transgender as the best overarching category for what Directors Henry called "gender transgressing."

In contrast, some non-binary and gender nonconforming participants who did not identify with transgender as a term also subsequently did not identify with TGRC. Many saw transgender as a category that signified medical transition and adherence to a gender binary they hoped to shatter. Some, like Beelzebub, even cautioned that transgender became a master term trying to subsume other gender nonconforming identities (see Chapter Six). My study thus reveals the need for further communication research in order to understand the complexities of transgender, non-binary, and/or gender non-conforming naming and identities.

Research may also explore the importance of pronouns, bodies, and language for communicating gender transgression. For TGRC, centering and strategically essentializing "transgender" resulted in felt exclusion by some non-binary guests. Additionally, some indigenous guests also did not identify as transgender and viewed related communication as enforcing a Western, colonial category with which they did not identify. In order to attract and serve the widest breadth of people who do not identify as cisgender, we need clearer research on gender nonconforming and indigenous people, as their gender identities may demand unique organizational responses.

To that end, first, I recommend further research with indigenous gender non-conforming people. Their intersectional experiences of extensive systemic discrimination as described in Chapter Four and their critiques of "transgender" as a category merit further communication inquiry and critical social justice interventions. Working with varied tribes and indigenous communities to examine the diversity among their identities and subsequent needs merits future

research best undertaken with indigenous co-researchers, as I describe below under my own limitations.

Additionally, we need to conduct increased, specific research on transgender and gender nonconforming organizations and identities. As I have argued, few organizations center transgender identities, much less gender nonconforming identities. First, we should not only pursue other trans and GNC-serving nonprofits but also organizing that is communicatively accomplished through conferences (e.g., Gender Infinity, Philadelphia Trans Health Conference), trans and GNC school and university initiatives, and GNC/NB activism. Second, we need national interview research on people who identify as gender nonconforming and/or non-binary. Communication scholars are poised to lead this research given our focus on how communication constructs our identity—related experience through language use. Third, further, nationally representative research is needed to augment James et al.'s (2016) nationally representative *U.S. Transgender Survey* (USTS). Like TGRC, the USTS also used "transgender" as an umbrella term. They recognized the challenge that "one term cannot reflect each individual's unique identity" (p. 40). They reported over 500 gender identity terms, and 86% of respondents felt "very comfortable," "somewhat comfortable," or "neutral" to be described as transgender, including 82% of non-binary respondents (p. 40). For the participants who felt uncomfortable with transgender as a category, including NB participants, having more survey data on their experiences would better enable NB and GNC outreach.

Practical Recommendations for TGRC

To advance my commitment to this dissertation as engaged organizational identity research (Cheney et al., 2014), I will now offer practical recommendations for TGRC. Upon completion of my degree, I will be working with TGRC Directors, Board Members, staff, and

guests to share and discuss dissertation findings and possible organizational communication interventions. I will return to Albuquerque in Spring 2018 to share findings via community presentations and meetings. While some participants may read my entire dissertation, for many, sharing data and implications outside of this format will be more beneficial. I will thus create practical resources from my findings, including addressing strengths and limitations for multiple audiences. I will moderate community conversations and undertake more member reflections with enrolled participants. I also hope to work with some participants to publish applied resources, including a white paper series for trans outreach organizing, trans workplace experiences, and trans-inclusive pedagogy in K-12 schools, colleges, and universities.

Here I present some initial recommendations. First, above I detailed the potential value of embracing ambiguous intersectionality in organizational communication. I argued how "all facets" created a crystallized organizational identity by TGRC in not pre-determining the intersections it would address. This allowed guests with diverse, salient identities to be served by TGRC. At the same time, many new guests did not fully understand TGRC's all facets approach and even directly questioned whether or not their specific needs fit within its scope. Some guests directly questioned intersections, such as how or if TGRC sought to serve people of color (see Susie and Beelzebub's discussion of whiteness in most support groups in Chapter Six) or needs for housing or addiction services (see Chapters Four-Six). Others wanted TGRC to communicate more explicit commitments to intersectionality, such as describing how they serve and empower indigenous transwomen.

In part, Director Henry's aversion to "marketing" TGRC as a "brand" created a potential void in how TGRC communicated their crystallized organizational identity with future guests. TGRC should therefore consider how resistance to the NPIC may create communication

challenges. For example, through strategic communication about the role of the Harm Reduction

Program reviewed in Chapter Six, TGRC Directors and staff attempted to construct the HRP as

supporting their transgender living identity instead of in contrast to it. As such, explicitly

addressing how the HRP funded TGRC and created their "whole person" organizing approach

created meaningful organizational changes that allowed "all facets" to endure.

Here, TGRC may also consider holding community conversations (a practice they

already undertake annually for feedback) about its use of ambiguous intersectionality versus

naming intersectionality and/or more explicit commitments to diverse, salient identities for its

future. I argued that support for "all facets" created a potential crystallized organizational

identity that also served guests' intersectional identities, but not all guests understood these

complexities or possibilities. TGRC might consider how, when, and if to frame its work as

intersectional and/or address salient identity intersections explicitly.

A second recommendation is to address how the name the Transgender Resource Center

of New Mexico and "transgender living" identity has created a perceived exclusion by some non-

binary guests (see Chapter Six). First, non-binary and gender nonconforming guests importantly

question: How does a *transgender* resource center serve our gender identities? While the

Directors and staff viewed transgender as an umbrella term including all gender transgressors,

some NB and GNC guests disagreed and felt unsafe, uncomfortable, and unwelcomed at TGRC

and recommend immediate changes. The Trans-101 education trainings should better describe

gender transgressing and going beyond the gender binary. NB guest Evee recommended a

separate Non-Binary-101 talk that would provide richer NB education and advocacy. NB guests

overall believed that Trans-101s did not adequately educate attendees about gender

nonconforming identities, which could risk essentializing and medicalizing transgender identity

as only transitioning between binary genders. While medical interventions and transitioning are part of some trans guests' stories, there are many guests who disrupt the gender binary and resist "assimilation" as Beelzebub called it. For TGRC to be a continued leading expert for trans and GNC education, the NB guests called for comprehensive education on GNC and NB identities.

NB guests also recommend renaming Transgender Resource Center of New Mexico to *The* Gender Center of New Mexico. While Director Henry considered a name change "a thousand-tentacle octopus," opening a community conversation over TGRC's name and/or its own organizational meaning of transgender would be beneficial next step. This would build rapport and identification with non-binary guests and some trans guests. Currently, NB guests were more likely to feel excluded than included at TGRC, and the name was cited as a primary reason for this experience of marginalization. Should TGRC still resist changing its name after community conversations, staff and Directors could more explicitly communicate transgender as an umbrella term on the website. No web materials name NB or GNC identities besides the support group description. A first step, then, could be to define TGRC's use of transgender to encompass all gender transgressing online, in social media, Trans-101s, and on posters at the center. The Directors could train staff to say "transgender and gender nonconforming" more in their daily drop-in communication to mark GNC as tied to transgender. Importantly, though, for some guests simply naming the umbrella-term will not detypify transgender or encourage them to identify with TGRC. Importantly, other LGBTQ organizations have successfully renamed themselves, like the University of Colorado Boulder's renamed "Gender and Sexuality Center." Despite potential logistical challenges with renaming, such efforts may enable organizations to undertake both continued and new outreach through implementing new language.

My third recommendation is for TGRC to use guests and staff's stories to showcase its ongoing organizational identity construction. TGRC offers important critiques of marketing as potentially tied to NPIC profiteering and as privileging a donor gaze (Gill & Wells, 2014). Given its crystallized approach of outreach for participants' multi-faceted, salient identities, TGRC might solicit short stories to feature unique organizational identities. By sharing participants' stories on their website, social media accounts, or posters at drop-in, TGRC members could illustrate how they address the complexities of transgender living. By choosing a breadth of stories, TGRC could also feature its family organizational identity and salient intersections of participants' identities. Participants' stories could help new guests connect to services and also to identify with one another. Stories could also give potential funders "faces" with whom to connect and to see TGRC's enactment of serving guests as whole people. This shifts from NPIC single-issue fundability to instead valuing TGRC's holistic, direct services approaches.

Fourth and finally, while many guests and staff value TGRC's identity ideals, others called for an invigorated commitment to improving guests' transgender living (see Chapter Six). Guests and staff wanted more programs to, as Aron said, "really feed" and empower them. Creating new programming would also address Bridget's critique that the same guests still sat around the TV without notable life improvements. While Bridget did not actually ask these guests how or if TGRC enhanced their lives even as they remained homeless, what she and others hoped for was more stimulation and fulfillment for guests during drop-in hours. Aron also described concerns that with the growing HRP, TGRC risked becoming "just a center" rather than an organization advancing transgender living. Aron and other guests specifically called for more transwomen of color volunteers to help in programming in addition to some transwomen of

color as paid interns and volunteers. TGRC mentoring diverse trans and NB guests, especially

transwomen of color, would help create programs for which guests longed.

Importantly, both Directors valued increasing enriching programming that included more

trans volunteers, including planned online education trainings, meditation groups, and public

health community conversations. Yet, without any paid staff, supporting programming fell lower

on the overflowing list of to-dos behind drop-in and support group offerings. While I recognize

TGRC's constraints without current funding for developing programs with reliable permanent

staff, the Directors also needed to prioritize how to communicate drop-in as more than a space to

guests and to "feed" guests as family members. TGRC's future funding applications should

prioritize hiring a staff member as a Programmatic Coordinator first, as creating this paid

position could help implement programs that would enrich regular drop-in guests and new

guests' experiences of TGRC. Having a paid, consistent Program Coordinator would also

assuage guests' critiques of volunteer and intern staff "leaving" the family.

Until TGRC can procure this funding, I also suggest that in the interim the Directors,

staff, and Board members should directly recruit volunteers for supporting new programs. TGRC

should move beyond seeking volunteers and interns to only keep the drop-in center open to

recruiting those who would commit to creating and leading enriching programs that would make

a difference for many guests' lived experiences. New interns could co-create and run new

programs, such as an arts-and-craft group or a workplace skills program.

In order to also support Aron's call for "feeding" guests, the TGRC's Director's long-

term plans for social entrepreneurship will also directly enrich guests' lives through paid

employment. Additionally, TGRC's future social entrepreneurship plans will respond to guests'

calls for extending drop-in hours for more time for shelter, safety, and community outside of 1-6

PM Monday-Saturday so "closing time" does not come so quickly. TGRC's efforts to move toward a social entrepreneurship model would also create transitional housing possibilities in their future. Creating TGRC for-profit programs that will sustain their nonprofit offer fruitful future possibilities to enable their "all facets" approach to flourish.

In closing, many guests and staff who offered critiques importantly still identified with TGRC's organizational identity ideals of family and all facets. In other words, the majority of participants' critiques still enforced TGRC's identities. This mirrors how even during conflict, identification guides members' commitments to organizations (see Myers et al., 2016; Ploeger & Bisel, 2013) and its collective identities (Cheney et al., 2014). For TGRC, guests and staff continued to value its organizational identity ideals even while expressing their own doubts and concerns. As TGRC considers its future directions, I recommend staff, Directors, and Board Members receive these critiques while recognizing the value and ongoing identification that they have created with many guests' lives through TGRC's current outreach. To build upon their work, refine, and rethink potential language and services are tangible recommendations within their reach to support TGRC's identity ideals. I now turn to my own limitations in this project.

Dissertation Limitations

Because ethnographic research is rarely a perfect, friction-free endeavor, this study is not without limitations. Those limitations involve issues arising from: (1) participant access, (2) writing choices, (3) my own identification with TGRC, and (4) my researcher identities.

Participant Access

During data collection, I experienced difficulties accessing some participants due to the complexities of their experiences. One of my biggest challenges was when and how to ethically include participants experiencing addiction. I had to cancel a few interviews with some regular

drop-in guests who were under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol. While I rescheduled some, I lost the opportunity to interview others all together. While some guests experiencing addiction participated through participant observation, there were other guests I could not enroll because I questioned if they could currently consent to participate. I also made decisions to exclude potential data from guests who had previously consented to my study because of current drug and/or alcohol use. This usage was often communicated verbally and nonverbally (e.g., slurred speech, nodding off, alcohol smells, racing speech, or direct disclosure like "I'm so drunk right now"). I also could not include participants who became incarcerated during my research per IRB protocol. If guests were released during my study, I could then re-enroll them for semi-structured interviews.

Also, I hoped to interview cisgender guests from the Harm Reduction Program, but I did not enroll any in my research. Because I was not a trained HRP provider, I did not have rapport or direct connections to the HRP cisgender guests. Because of the anonymity of the HRP, many guests who used it were also "in and out" of TGRC without wanting to engage others. Those that did stay to "crash" were often those that were most under the influence of drugs and nodded off for the rest of the day until closing time. Director Brooks hoped to connect me with two "HRP regulars," but those guests did not visit the HRP during my interview times. A limitation, then, is not having perspectives of any cisgender HRP guests to better understand why they chose TGRC's HRP, their potential identification with TGRC, and/or their perceptions of the ongoing HRP policy changes. Lastly, although TGRC opened support groups in Santa Fe and Las Cruces during my research, I did not attend either support group and focused on Albuquerque.

Writing Choices

A second limitation of my study was my selection of participants, exemplars, and themes in my writing that included some findings and excluded others. Because of the immensity of my data over three years, I had to make choices to include some examples and participants over others. Elsewhere I have published on how choosing exemplars is the most difficult part of qualitative research for me; I compared "letting go of all the details and nuances" to being "a polar bear separating from my 'little cub'" (Tracy, Eger, Huffman, Malvini Redden, & Scarduzio, 2014, p. 2). While in the past I have struggled with bonding to exemplars and deciding among them, in this study, I grieved the process of letting go of participants' lived experiences. I did not want my choices to inadvertently silence trans participants who have already been suppressed, ignored, or refuted in their daily lives. Ultimately, to make peace with the necessary narrowing, I recognize that this dissertation is only piece of my future writing.

There are also specific data that I hoped to include and could not because of space limitations. For example, Chapter Four could have included other intersections of identities that were salient for my participants. Some participants wanted TGRC to better address the intersections of trans identities and age to provide more services for Trans elders; others discussed their experiences with disability and sexuality as especially impactful to their transgender identities and needs from TGRC. I ultimately chose the two most repeated intersections of homeless and indigenous identities, which was driven by my focus on the drop-in center data. This writing decision ultimately may have reinforced Henry's concerns that people began to see TGRC as "the homeless drop-in center." TGRC's three-pronged approach certainly went above and beyond homelessness and indigeneity for supporting all facets of transgender living, and other identity intersections may have been more salient for guests served

in education and advocacy contexts. Lastly, because support groups were closed and confidential, I could only research how those guests constructed their identities, their identification with TGRC, and their understanding of TGRC's organizational identities through creative focus groups or semi-structured interviews. I thus chose to privilege the identities most salient for drop-in guests as the area where I conducted the most research.

My Identification with TGRC

The third limitation was my relationships to TGRC, the Directors, staff, and guests. Throughout my three-years of research and volunteering, I cultivated friendships with participants and respect for TGRC. I subsequently identify with TGRC's all facets and family identities. Dempsey and Barge (2014) referred to this common tension of engaged organizational communication as distance/empathy. At times, I struggled to create distance amidst my empathy and identification with TGRC. Through writing, I followed what Lindlof and Taylor (2011) described as researchers uncomfortably rediscovering "accumulated commitments to their participants and also to the scholarly communities, clients, and other stakeholders who will evaluate their research" (p. 284). I worked to therefore both recognize and manage my affection for TGRC so that it did not cover my analysis with a rose-colored lens. I created distance through writing memos about my own identification, designing Chapter Six as critiques of TGRC's identities, and inviting all participants to specifically offer recommendations for and critiques of TGRC. While my study responded to Cheney et al.'s (2014) call for future engaged organizational identity communication research, I issue a further call herein for scholars to explore the potential of researcher identification with organizations and participants with whom we conduct engaged projects. For example, does research with identity-based organizations create specific distance/empathy (Dempsey & Barge, 2014) tensions, and/or do engaged projects

with other collectives (e.g., corporate social responsibility programs in a corporation) create similar researcher dilemmas? In other words, does engaged communication research always already hail us to identify with the organizations we study? I look forward to exploring these questions with other scholars engaging these pressing tensions.

Researcher Identities, Reflexivity, and Research in Solidarity with Transpeople

My final limitation is the one that I will spend the most time addressing. I recognize how my own identities impacted my data collection and participants' perceptions of the rigor and reliability of my project. Because ethnographers are commonly described as *the* research instrument, we inevitably shape our findings based on our identities and experiences. While all ethnographers must engage ongoing self-reflexivity to advance ethical research, I believe self-reflexivity and even self-critique become imperatives when studying participants who are facing social injustice as "an ethical responsibility to address processes of unfairness or injustice within a particular *lived* domain" (Madison, 2012, p. 5). In this project, I explored the experiences and justice needs of my transgender participants by conducting a long-term ethnography.

Because I identify as cisgender, I began this project thinking of myself as "ally researcher." Eichler (2010) reviews LGBTQ ally research as requiring cisgender and/or heterosexual allies to first understand their privilege, which is "tantamount to the propensity to become an ally" (p. 98). He then issues a subsequent "a call to action" (p. 99) for projects that advance justice. I sought to be a cisgender researcher ally who enacted justice through my research and volunteering until I read an essay from Mia McKenzie (2014) called "No More 'Allies.'" McKenzie critiques ally as an identity we use without enacting subsequent commitments to creating justice. It is akin to wearing a button or pin that self-labels oneself as a supporter without actually sustaining that support. McKenzie instead advances the frame of

"currently operating in solidarity with" a community to show solidarity as an *action* instead of ally as a noun. It describes, "what a person is *doing* in the moment. It does not give credit for past acts of solidarity without regard for current behavior. It does not assume future acts of solidarity. It speaks only to the actions of the present." Following McKenzie, then, I sought to be an ethnographer "in solidarity with" my participants. To be an ethnographer in solidarity centers advancing justice in research and calls for both examining and undoing researcher privilege.

In this dissertation, despite being a cisgender researcher enacting my solidarity with transgender people, I recognize my privilege in relationship to many of my participants' intersectional identities, including my cisgender identity, whiteness, class privilege, and that that I am housed, employed, and completing a doctoral degree. While some participants shared privilege with me (e.g., white and/or class privilege), others experienced oppression tied to all of their identities. In order to build rapport and solidarity with my participants given my intersectional privilege, I spent the first year of my fieldwork developing extensive relationships and trust. Informally, participants almost universally welcomed my research project and me with open arms over my three years at TGRC. Most came to trust my research, and many explicitly told me that they believed that my privilege did not impede my understanding their experiences as transgender people providing and/or receiving outreach. Participants often introduced me to new guests as someone to trust, praised my weekly volunteering, and advocated for my project. Examples of their comments included, "She really gets it," "She cares about us and TGRC," and "She is here volunteering every week helping us find work." Participants also told me how they valued my participation in public events to enact my solidarity, like marching in the Trans March, engaging in street education through a Black Trans Lives Matter event, or speaking on behalf of trans K-12 students in Albuquerque Public School meetings.

Despite this warm reception, I sought to explicitly understand how participants understood my intersectional researcher privilege in my semi-structured interviews. I asked all interview participants, "Because of some of the differences in our experiences, it is possible I may overlook or misunderstand things about this interview that are important to you. Can you offer any suggestions that might help me to address the limitations of those differences?" Many participants made a distinction that they only welcomed my research and viewed it as without limitations because they saw me enact solidarity. These participants lauded the rigor of my extensive, three-year ethnography to assuage their concerns about my intersectional researcher privilege. For example, Michelle, a 23-year-old, white, formerly homeless transwoman said that my different identities would not constrain my project, "because you've been here and talked with people. If you were just some outsider who'd been here for like a week it might come off really bad, but …you know a lot of different issues that we face and everything. Not all the same issues, but a lot of the *different* ones. I don't think your identity would be an issue." For Michelle, my ethnographic approach and the time commitment allowed me to see the complex issues guests faced. I worked to understand them beyond an essentialized view of "transgender" and instead as people with different challenges and privileges. Another participant named Theresa was a Black, transwoman in her early 40s who survived through sex work and experienced homelessness and addiction. She told me that my interview questions, "covered everything in my expectations. You asked *every* question. I don't think there's nothing better you could do. I think you *really* know what you're doing. You're doing a good job, Elizabeth!"

Director Brooks (a white transman in his early 40s who was housed and employed) also explained why my approach enabled a respectful and ethical project. He said, "Your education and your critical eye and your ability to acknowledge privilege and really look through a social

justice kind of lens makes it possible for you to do that in a way that may not be true for someone else. Some other cisgender white woman might not be able to do that, but I think *you can*." For Brooks, my practices of self-reflexivity enabled me to ethically research TGRC as a white, cisgender person.

Despite these examples of participants' confidence in my approach, others questioned the intent of my research and viewed it critically. The first direct critique of my project came during the first months of my research over an informal lunch with: (1) Barbara, a white, veteran transwomen in her 70s, (2) Penny, a Caucasian, transwoman, veteran, LGBTQ leader in her 50s, and (3) Juliet, a white transwomen in her 40s. After lunch, I told the women I had to leave the restaurant because I had a research Skype call starting in 30 minutes. Juliet joked they could all join my Skype call and wave from the background. Penny replied, "Well, that might be weird since it's *on us*." Juliet placed her napkin down on the table and said to me, "So, *wait* you are *studying us*?" I explained that this Skype call was for an unrelated research project, but that I was, indeed, researching TGRC and transgender people's experiences.

Juliet quipped back to me, "So, you're profiting off transgender people, then?" This began a poignant conversation with Juliet, Barbara, and Penny about the relationships of research to profit. We discussed the possibilities of my benefits for this research, and Barbara told Juliet that she believed my research as a cisgender person could educate other cisgender people. Juliet questioned if my ethnography was solely for my benefit and wondered how I would give back. She grilled me in a sort of Trans-101 speed test and wanted to know more about my research goals. I told her that I believed unfortunately all research creates profit in that research propels scholars' careers. As I described how I was currently enacting my solidarity with volunteering and activism, Juliet ended the conversation by saying, "I guess I see *why* you are doing this

research then." She reminded me that I should continuously think about the intent behind my research and agreed to participate in an interview with me. Juliet's questioning haunted me as a fear personified: How *was* I profiting off transpeople I hoped to serve? How would I challenge my intersectional privilege in my research and writing about TGRC? Could I really research in solidarity with transpeople? I hoped to talk to Juliet more, but she soon moved away from Albuquerque. I never saw her again.

However in my semi-structured interview with Penny, I asked her about Juliet's critique of my profiting off transpeople. Penny replied:

> I don't share that view with Juliet…I doubt you're profiting. Maybe later, you'll land a job that may have a little involvement with the work you're doing now and may not…There's nobody telling you that you have to do your research in transgender issues. You're doing this because of your own compassion or passion, your own sense of what's important to you. Your own value system is taking you down this road.

Penny respected my values as enacting solidarity. To her this challenged Juliet's critique of my researcher identity as a relationship of profit.

Instead, Penny interrogated Juliet's "profiting" statement and described how most gender identity service providers (both cisgender and/or LGBTQ people) sought to profit off transpeople. Penny explained, "As far as profiting off of the hardships of transpeople, I've seen people that are actually in the LGBT community who do profiteering from transpeople…who are basically slumlords, who rent to transpeople some really run down apartment buildings." She addressed club owners, health insurance companies, social workers, plastic surgeons, and others who profited off transgender people's gender identities and subsequent needs. Penny explained, "There's no shortage of people out there, Elizabeth, that are willing to take our money… But I

think Juliet is looking at the wrong person." In spite of Penny's confidence, Juliet's critique propelled my self-reflexivity.

Additionally, explicit critique and rejection of my study was uncommon in my three-year ethnography. This could be because participants may have hidden their critiques from me or only shared them with other transpeople, people of color, and/or unhoused people because they felt uncomfortable engaging with me directly. Still, two participants critiqued my project and rejected its efforts, even as they agreed to participate in interviews. My very first semi-structured interview for this project was with Jessie, who was a white, transgender, genderqueer college student in their late teens that worked at TGRC as an intern. Jessie believed that:

> It's possible for you to hear and absorb and listen and understand, but…it's like people going out in head coverings and white people who are not Muslim, saying I experienced being Muslim for a day, and that's like: "No, you didn't!" No offense to you, but that's what it feels like when cispeople are trying to do [with research]…I'm really glad that there's cispeople actively trying to understand and gather information. But there are very specific experiences that only transpeople have and can understand.

Here, Jessie compared my cisgender identity as akin to a white person pretending to be Muslim by wearing a hijab, illustrating intersections of ethnicity, race, nation, and religion. Notably Jessie positioned my approach as colonization and appropriation, which is something that ethnography has been criticized for historically (see Lindlof & Taylor, 2011).

I asked Jessie how or if I could account for my privilege, and they said, "I feel like you interact enough with the trans community to understand what hurts us and what doesn't. I think just not treating us like some sort of science experiment, and keeping the human portion of it very alive." Jessie drew on another critique of research: how transpeople have been treated as

gender science experiments (see Butler, 2001; Martin & Meezan, 2003). In closing, Jessie recognized some value in, "having a cisperson have very detailed trans experiences documented is really, really important, and a really big, hard part of being a cis ally." Ultimately, though, for Jessie, my research perpetuated norms of ethnographic colonization and trans objectification.

Another participant, Mariah, was even more critical than Jessie and less confident in my project overall. Mariah was a TGRC Board Member and a Diné transwoman in her 40s who identified as heterosexual. When I asked Mariah if I could address any limitations from my differing experiences, she said bluntly:

> Honestly no. …The biggest thing is that you're not trans…Somebody may tell you their experience…but [you are not] actually living as a trans person…We get tired of describing it. We get tired of saying, "This is me, this is who I am, this is who we are, this is what we need. Blah, blah, blah!" Just *give it to us* and let *us* worry about it (laughs). I know there are strong allies within our communities, and I'm thankful for that. But sometimes because they're not identified as that, some of them can be the biggest challenge. Sometimes they may not have those answers to make it better.

Mariah described the fatigue she and other indigenous transpeople experienced describing their identities to cisgender and/or white researchers and that allies who should step aside and "give it to us" to conduct the research. She also cautioned that allies could actually create larger challenges without local, applied knowledge. Without a shared trans and/or indigenous identity, for Mariah, I risked getting it wrong and actually causing harm.

Mariah also specifically called out my gender, whiteness, and colonial identities as a cisgender settler living and volunteering with many indigenous transwomen in New Mexico. She said that I needed to be, "stepping outside of the box of Western views. Really looking at

transwomen of color, people of color and including those…Native populations that have a whole different concept of who we are and our identities on where we come from." She demanded that I be accountable to unique indigenous perspectives of gender identity in my dissertation. Mariah also believed the only way I could address my limitations as a white, cisgender settler woman was to find a "gatekeeper" peer-researcher "who is of a population who can actually be a testimonial to the work that you're doing." She wanted me to find transgender co-researchers who were White, people of color, indigenous, and shared other identities with participants. For Mariah, the co-researchers should share direct intersecting identities for ethnographic research.

Mariah believed that when there are researchers who share intersectional identities with participants, they may be better suited to understand these perspectives and conduct this research due to their shared identities and embodied expertise. Similarly, Maracle (1989) wrote about her experiences as a Native Canadian who asked a white researcher studying Native Canadian women to "move over" during a conference presentation and step aside to let Native women present tell their own stories. This mirrors Mariah's call for researchers of indigenous transwomen to instead "give it to us." As DeFrancisco and Palczewski caution, "People with privilege whether race, class, sex, nationality, or religion, may need to step aside, move over, and make space when others wish to speak" (2014, p. 125). For Mariah, moving over and giving it to transwomen indigenous women was the preferred option over any research I produced.

A secondary possibility Mariah suggested for my future research with transgender and/or indigenous people would be to include community members as co-researchers. Following Mariah's demands, I do plan to specifically invite participants to be co-researchers and help to design future studies I conduct in research when I experience intersectional researcher privilege. I especially hope to partner with indigenous transgender and gender non-conforming participants

to examine their identities, increase national education with them, and help assuage and end their persistent, systemic experience of violence at the intersections of transgender and indigenous identities. In so doing, I would invite my co-researchers to take the lead and offer my expertise in ethnography to support their own local goals.

Like Jessie and Mariah, I also recognize the limitations of my identities and privilege on this study. I chose to conduct this study as a researcher working in solidarity with transpeople and worked to enact my commitments to trans justice daily in my project. However, I still cannot fully understand perspectives and identities that I do not experience. In publishing, I will address these limitations further through member reflection with my participants. I already enacted this practice in my first publication from this research by inviting an indigenous transwoman participant to provide feedback for my essay on transgender people's experiences with job-seeking (Eger, 2018). I also plan to co-author practical resources with TGRC trans participants to help mitigate the limitations of my own identities. I will also commit to moving over and "giving it to us" when asked to do so by my participants.

While my dissertation could not fully account for all my participants' perspectives and was limited from my own intersectional identities as the research instrument, this project revealed the importance of an extensive inquiry into one organization's efforts for justice and outreach for transgender people. It showcased the value and tensions of a crystallized, "all facets" approach to transgender outreach. I am indebted to the TGRC participants who invited me into their lives for three years to research their organizational communication and unique individual identities. Their experiences illustrate why we need further communication studies research on transgender and non-binary gender identities, systemic injustices facing transpeople in the United States, and ongoing organizational responses to transgender living. My research on

TGRC invites further inquiry into organizational identities of identity-based organizations, including some of the constructs I presented like contrasting communication, detypification of organizational identities amidst strategic essentialism, crystallized organizational identity, and ambiguous intersectionality.

Future identity-based organizational research can also engage practitioners attempting critical intersectional praxis and offer practical recommendations to enliven ongoing approaches. Given the Nonprofit Industrial Complex constraints that delimit how collectives attempt formal and informal intersectional organizing in the United States, we need further engaged research programs to work in solidarity with collectives endeavoring to change our world via thorough, messy, complex, and persistent organizing.

As a communication scholar, I value how my dissertation adds to, enlivens, and rethinks current theoretical approaches in Communication Studies and beyond. I look forward to the potential of publishing from this dissertation. Yet my utmost hope from my three years of ethnographic research is that my work raises consciousness, invites critical thinking, and creates practical change and meaningful impacts for national transgender intersectional justice. That my findings herein would help improve future organizational outreach, programs, activism, and policies for enriching, thriving, and fulfilling transgender living in the United States remains paramount.

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Appendix A: Semi-Structured Interview Guide

First experiences with and impressions of the Transgender Resource Center of New Mexico, hereafter TGRC).

- Tell me about your first experience with TGRC and/or what first connected you to TGRC.
  - When and how did you first hear about TGRC?
  - What made you feel like TGRC could offer something you wanted/needed?

- What was your initial impression of the organization?
  - How have those initial impressions changed (if any) since your time with TGRC?
  - Does it seem like TGRC has changed since your first experience? If so, how?
  - Also, has TGRC communicated with you in any way about those changes? If so, how?

- Tell me about your position or relationship to TGRC.
  - What TGRC outreach services do you use and/or provide?

The participant's beliefs about the roles, mission, and organizational identity of TGRC and their involvement or connection to those roles.

- If you had to describe TGRC to people who had never heard of it, how would you describe it?
  - The drop-in center?
  - How do TGRC staff, volunteers, and/or directors seem to get along? Have you noticed anything distinctive about how they interact inside the center?
  - How do guests seem to interact (both with each other and staff) in the center?
  - How do TGRC members seem to interact when they are out in the community?

- Describe TGRC's role in Albuquerque and the state of New Mexico.
  - What are the biggest challenges facing transgender people in New Mexico? The US? Globally?
  - How do TGRC's programs address these challenges? Are there ways they should be addressing these challenges differently?

- If TGRC were *a person*, how would you describe them?
  - What kind of "personality" would they have?
  - Do you think that most people see TGRC that way? If not, can you think of any other images or associations that people have for TGRC's identity?
  - Tell me about a memorable moment that best illustrates who TGRC is as an organization for you.
  - How would you describe the central identity of TGRC? How would you describe its distinctiveness? Have these evolved over time?
  - How do they communicate who they are (or their identity) to various audiences? Who are these audiences?

- Organizations often need to interact with other groups, organizations, and institutions. Can you think of any examples of these that are especially important for TGRC?
    - In general, how does TGRC seem to interact with these other groups?
    - Do you feel TGRC is successful in communicating with these groups? If so, why? If not, why not?

- How would you describe your relationship with TGRC? How important (or meaningful) is that relationship for you? In what ways is it important (or meaningful)?
    - Tell me about your favorite experience at/with TGRC. What makes this experience stand out for you?
    - If you feel comfortable doing so, could you tell me about your most difficult or challenging experience at TGRC?
    - What does TGRC do best in your experience?
    - What are you most of proud of in your work, volunteering, or connection to TGRC?
    - What would you like to see improved or changed at TGRC? What could your role be in such changes?

- TGRC mission statement includes: "TGRC is dedicated to serving the transgender communities in the state of New Mexico and strives to exist as a clearing house for resources which can support, assist, educate, and advocate for the transgender population of this state and their families and loved ones. We provide social, educational, emotional, and functional support for all facets of transgender living."
    - What do you think of that mission? How do you see yourself as tied to that mission?
    - What would TGRC members be required to do to fulfill the promise to support "all facets of transgender living"?

- Describe your view of transgender community outreach and your opinions on what is needed to organize the betterment of work-life for transgender people.
    - How do your views and TGRC's views match up or not? What would you do differently if you were in charge of the organization's mission and outreach?
    - What services do you *wish* TGRC provided?

The participant's identities

- How would you describe your background or identity? What aspects of your background/identity impact your life the most and are the most important for you?

- How would you describe your gender identity?
    - How do you communicate your gender identity to staff and guests at TGRC? Outside of TGRC?
    - Has your communication of/about your gender identity evolved over time? How so?
    - Are there particular pronouns you use? Do those change?

- o Are there particular terms you use to describe your gender identity? Do those change?
- o How important is identifying as _____(*term from above*) to your daily life?

- What does the term "transgender" mean to you? How would you define it?
  - o How do you feel about the word transgender?
  - o **Trans-identified only:** Does transgender describe you?

- Do you think transgender is the most appropriate term/label to describe TGRC community members?
  - o Are there other terms/labels that you prefer?
  - o Do you think transgender communities should use just one term to describe their members? Why or why not?
  - o Do you think of yourself as part of transgender communities? If so, what transgender communities are you a part of? How do these community membership impact your life?

- What other aspects of your background/identity are most strongly connected with your gender identity?
  - o Tell me a story about how your various identities impact your everyday life.
  - o Do you feel like you have a primary identity or identities that most influence your experiences? If so, which ones and how?

- *Only if these do not come up in the above questions: When I write this research up, I want to honor how you label and communicate your identities. First, I will use your chosen pseudonym. Additionally, I want to describe you using your own language so that readers understand more about who you are and how you communicate about yourself. Let's talk a bit about other aspects of your identity.
  - o How would you describe your **class, employment, and how you survive**? How do you communicate your class/employment/survival means to others, or how to others communicate with you based on your class/employment/survival means?
  - o How would you describe your **race and ethnicity**? How do you communicate your race and ethnicity to others, or how to others communicate with you based on your race and ethnicity?
  - o How would you describe your **sexual orientation**? How do you communicate your sexual orientation to others, or how to others communicate with you based on your sexual orientation?
  - o How would you describe your **ability**? How do you communicate your ability to others, or how to others communicate with you based on your ability?
  - o How would you describe your **age**? How do you communicate your age to others, or how to others communicate with you based on your age?
  - o How would you describe your **housing and/or homelessness**? How do you communicate your housing experiences to others, or how to others communicate with you based on your housing experiences?

- How would you describe your **education level**? How do you communicate your education experiences to others, or how to others communicate with you based on your education?
- How would you describe your experiences or others in your life's experiences with **addiction or substance use**?
- How would you describe your experiences or others in your life's experiences with **jail, incarceration, or police interactions**?
- How would you describe the role of **religion or spirituality** in your life and its role in your communication?
- Did I miss any other experiences that are unique to your life that impact how you communicate with others? If so, what are those and how do they impact how you understand yourself?

- Given these many possible identities, how well does TGRC take into account these differences?
  - Give me an example of a time when you felt TGRC responded to your unique needs.
  - Do you have an example of a time when you felt your own needs could **not** be addressed by TGRC? What do you wish they would do differently in the future?
  - Tell me about a time (if any) when TGRC successfully responded to yours and/or others' experiences of identities in addition to gender identity in their services or communication.
  - Tell me about a time (if any) TGRC failed to address yours and/or others' experiences of identities in addition to gender identity in their services or communication.

The participants' experiences with TGRC work outreach program (only for people who have used this service only to give applied feedback about the program to TGRC):

- Tell me what you know about work outreach at TGRC. Have you used or would you ever use the current work outreach services? If you have not, why have you not?

- What changes, if any, would you like to see in TGRC work outreach?
  - What else could TGRC offer to make meaningful changes in your life?

Closing thoughts

- What brings you back to the center and/or out in the community with TGRC members? What prevents you from doing either of these?

- Do you have any other thoughts on TGRC's efforts to provide transgender outreach?

- Where do you see TGRC in 10 years?
  - Where would you *like* to see TGRC be in 10 years a perfect world?
  - What sort of future goals should TGRC staff have in their organizing?

- Because of some of the differences in our experiences, it is possible I may overlook or misunderstand things about this interview that are important to you. Can you offer any suggestions that might help me to address the limitations of those differences?

- Can you think of any other questions I could or should have asked you?

Appendix B: Creative Focus Group Guide

Creative Session Question Prompts
In these creative focus groups, I will first prompt participants to draw and/or collage for up to one hour with the following possible prompts:
- Draw and/or collage what the Transgender Resource Center of New Mexico (TGRC) means to you.
- Draw and/or collage who TGRC is as an organization.
- Draw and/or collage how visiting TGRC makes you feel.
- Draw and/or collage the role TGRC plays in your life.

After completing the art before discussing it in a group, participants will be invited to write 5-10 words or phrases about how they feel about their art. They will do this on a blank sheet of paper I provide, and they will write their chosen pseudonym on this paper so I can match it to their art piece and their group interview comments after the completion of the focus group.

Focus Group Interview Prompts
After participants complete their art creations, we will discuss their projects and their findings in a focus group interview. I will use the following questions as our guide:
- How did you come to decide to create or draw this specific image to signify TGRC in your eyes?
- What does this image you've created illustrate about how you feel about TGRC?
- Does this image show the positive, negative, or neutral things TGRC represents in your life? Why or why not?
- (How) did you incorporate yourself and your identities into your representation of TGRC? Can you give an example?
- How did this creative process make you feel? Were you worried, excited, or something else about capturing how you feel about TGRC?
- How do you feel about your final product? How does it capture what you intended to capture about TGRC?
- Were there things you could not capture in your image with the materials I provided? Why or why not? What materials do you wish you had to make this image?
- (How) does drawing or collaging help you communicate differently about TGRC than talking about it with me in an interview? What can drawing or collage *not* capture or communicate?
- How do you think your art and our conversation today could contribute to my larger research study about TGRC and the people they serve?
- Are there other things you noticed about this process that you want to share with me that I did not ask?