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The Modern Man: A Transgender Perspective

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Bridgewater State University

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Abstract

Gender identity has often been assumed to be a simple dichotomous mechanism where an individual is labeled as either a man or a woman. However, this simple mechanism has been shown to be more complex within the transgender population. The purpose of this project was to understand how transindividuals navigate masculine norms through their gender identity development. Nine transgender (2 transwomen, 3 transmen, 2 gender fluid, 1 nonbinary male-aligned, 1 nonbinary female-aligned) college students aged 18 to 28 ($M = 20.89$, $SD = 3.33$) were recruited for a one-hour life-story interview focused on their gender development. These interviews were then transcribed verbatim and qualitatively analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The results revealed external and internalized restrictions to becoming trans, such as the restrictiveness of gender categories, transphobia, and lack of agency in gender expression, as well as various strategies participants utilized to overcome these restrictions, such as support systems, safe spaces, and cognitive remapping of gender categories. This work can provide clinicians, therapists, and other healthcare experts information on perceived impediments the transcommunity faces, as well as strategies they utilize to overcome these obstacles in their gender identity development.

The Modern Man: A Transgender Perspective

The transgender community (transcommunity) is an emerging and growing population that has challenged prior notions of what we thought gender was (Flores, Herman, Gates, & Brown, 2016). However, little research has been done to observe the specific nuances of this population's understanding of the use of current gender norms, specifically masculine norms. Instead, most research has focused on medical risks and complications associated with being transgender (De Santis, Hauglum, Deleon, Provencio-Vasquez, & Rodriguez, 2016; Taliaferro, McMorris, & Eisenberg, 2018), which can act to discourage transgender individuals from engaging with their transgender identity due to the negative outlook this research suggests for transgender individuals. Previous research has also suggested adhering to masculine norms benefits transmen's identity development by reducing external backlash (Herman-Jeglinska, Grabowska, & Dulko, 2002). However, recent research suggested transmen are no longer adhering to masculine norms (Vegter, 2013).

Therefore, this study is aimed at understanding if transindividuals are currently adhering to masculine norms, and why individuals would travel down what has been suggested to be the more difficult path of adhering to the strict gender norms of masculinity (Devor, 2004; Levitt & Ippolito, 2014). Understanding this will not only help us understand the transexperience, which in turn may help us understand gender more comprehensively, but will also provide professional clinicians a better understanding of how to help patients who identify as transgender or are questioning their gender identity.

Defining Transgender

Before one can begin to understand what being transgender means, it is important to understand the distinct differences between sex and gender. Gender specifically refers to the social construct created by society that gives the individual a certain set of rules to follow in order to be fully accepted as that gender. Sex, on the other hand, refers to the biological component where an individual is assigned male or female based on their sexual organs at birth (Devor, 2004; Diamond, Pardo, Butterworth, 2011; Rubin, 2003). While these two concepts are not explicitly linked, as sex is predominantly biological and gender is predominantly social, it is often assumed that one's sex must match their gender.

The majority of our society identifies as cisgender. This simply means that these individuals will see their assigned sex at birth and their gender identity as being congruent. Therefore, they will often develop throughout their life with little to no questioning of their gender identity, as their gender identity is considered to be the norm, or master narrative, in our society (McLean & Syed, 2015). This then perpetuates the master narrative of the gender binary, which assumes that gender identity is in congruence with assigned sex for all individuals, resulting in the belief that there are only two mutually exclusive categories of men and women.

However, for transgender individuals, there is some sort of disconnect between their assigned sex at birth and their chosen gender (Devor, 2004; Levitt & Ippolito, 2014; Rubin, 2003). Some examples of transgender identities include, but are not limited to, transwomen (individuals who were assigned a male sex at birth but identify as a woman), transmen (individuals who were assigned a female sex at birth but identify as a man), and non-binary (individuals who were assigned a male or female sex at birth but do not fully identify as a man or a woman). As one can see, there are more differences than there are similarities among individuals in the

transcommunity, as each identity is unique and understood in a different way, so no single definition is all-encompassing (Devor, 2004; Diamond, Pardo, Butterworth, 2011; Levitt & Ippolito, 2014). However, all of these individuals work to challenge the binary model of gender.

This binary model of gender, which assumes there are only two mutually exclusive genders (men and women), has been one of the most pervasive identity models in society. In everyday life we abide by this model in myriad ways, from separating restrooms into male and female rooms, to organizing stores into men's and women's sections. The fact that this identity model has influenced so much of our lives makes deconstructing it an incredibly difficult task (McLean & Syed, 2015). Due to this difficulty of separating from such a widely accepted model, many transgender individuals have struggled to explore their gender identity within the binary model.

Transgender Identity Development

While individuals who identify as transgender work to fight the binary model of gender, they do so in distinctly different ways. Some work within the binary model to make it more fluid, allowing themselves to not be defined as wholly a man or a woman, but somewhere in between. Others will work outside of the binary model of gender entirely, constructing their own gender identity based solely on their own personal beliefs. These individuals represent a non-binary model of transgender and are actively attempting to de-gender their surroundings as well as themselves. Some will often try to express their gender in the most ambiguous way they can, to achieve their goal to be identified as neither a man nor a woman (Diamond, Pardo, Butterworth, 2011).

Even within the category of non-binary transgender there are individual types of narratives. Ekins and King (1999) describe two narratives of these individuals termed negation

and transcendence narrative models. In negation, the individuals are attempting to eliminate gender entirely on a personal level. In this model, the individual will attempt to become completely ambiguous in their presentation. Similarly, in the transcendence model, the individual will again try to become as ambiguous in their gender expression as possible to eliminate it. However, the main difference between these two models is the level in which the individual engages in activism. In the transcendence model the individual will attempt to eliminate gender not just for themselves, but for their external world as well. These individuals may attempt to shock and awe society, thereby forcing society to question what gender is (Ekins & King, 1999). While an individual does have a certain amount of agency in their development, they do not create an identity in a vacuum. As such, one cannot understand an individual's identity development without considering the cultural context they exist within.

Master narratives. The concept of master narratives takes the individual's cultural context into direct consideration as being a major influential power in their identity development (McLean & Syed, 2015). When an individual follows the master narrative for their culture, they are more likely to be socially accepted in that context. These master narratives can apply to all facets of identity including race, gender, age, occupation, and sexual orientation. However, while they do provide guidelines for those who fit into the master narrative, they can create turmoil when one does not identify with the master narrative of their culture.

For transgender individuals, who do not fit into the master narrative of the gender binary, they must begin to construct or find an alternative narrative to better suit their identity. However, as master narratives are by definition compulsory, in order for an individual to create an alternative narrative they must first engage with the master narrative.

For transgender individuals, this can prove to be doubly challenging as they often must engage with not only the master narrative of their prescribed binary gender, such as norms of masculinity for males and norms of femininity for females, but that of the other binary gender as well. For example, an individual who was assigned the sex of male at birth will have to understand himself within the master narrative of masculinity. However, if he should struggle with this narrative, he can then engage in the master narrative of femininity to better understand his identity. Therefore, according to this theoretical model, all transgender identities must consider both master narratives for men and women and then either attempt to follow one of the narratives or work to construct an alternative narrative to best fit their gender identity.

This process of constructing a transgender identity is not one that is gained overnight. As gender identity itself is complex, adopting a transgender identity takes time. This process is typically achieved through the exploration of various and typically marginalized identities, and understanding which identities fit better or worse. One way in which an individual determines if a certain identity fits better than another is through processes that Devor (2004) describes as witnessing and mirroring.

Witnessing and mirroring. Witnessing provides an individual with a negative identity, or who they do not identify as. This construct requires a witness who is outside of the individual's chosen identity group that can provide validation to the individual that they are not similar to the witness. This thereby reinforces the individual's gender identity by solidifying the negative component of their identity, which will act to reinforce the positive component, or what they positively identify as. For example, an individual who is questioning their gender and trying out the label of a transman would be likely to find distinct differences between themselves and

cisgender women. By rejecting femininity early on in their transition, they are often better able to engage with their masculinity.

The positive component of Devor's (2004) model of transgender identity development is referred to as mirroring. This occurs when the individual finds a similar peer in the gender identity group with which they identify. The individual will then use this peer as a role model and attempt to mirror aspects of them, thereby fully engaging in their gender identity. This peer will hopefully then validate their identity and see the individual as a genuine member of their ingroup and not an outsider, thereby confirming the individual's identity. For example, a transman would be likely to look for another transman or cisgender man as a role model and will attempt to mirror some of his behaviors and attitudes in order to be more widely accepted as a transman within his community. While witnessing and mirroring can help one understand their gender identity, it does not protect them from backlash from unaccepting peers.

Transprejudice. This backlash has often resulted from society not accepting the transcommunity's opposition to the typical binary model of gender. Transprejudice, or prejudice that is directed towards a transgender group or individual, is often more likely to occur when the individual's gender expression does not match their externally perceived gender identity. For example, transmen who appear feminine and transwomen who appear masculine are more likely to be victims of transprejudice than masculine transmen and feminine transwomen (White & Jenkins, 2017). This acts as a roadblock for many transgender individuals, who are just trying to understand who they are, but often do not continue that path due to transprejudice attacks. The reasons for why these individuals are more often victims of transprejudice are not yet fully understood. However, this could be a result of our society not fully understanding what it means

to be transgender, even though this community is able to provide a new insight on gender that most people are not yet aware of.

Masculinity

Recently, there has been a growing interest in reviewing what it means to identify as a man in the transgender community. Vegter (2013) found that many transgender individuals, specifically transmen, do not believe that being masculine is necessary in order to identify as a transman. Her research also suggests that these individuals do not overcompensate on masculine gender roles, for they do not feel they need to be overtly masculine to be a man, as previous research had suggested (Herman-Jeglinska, Grabowska, & Dulko, 2002).

While the transcommunity seems to have changed their ideology of what it means to be a man, individuals who were assigned a male gender at birth but have transitioned to women often have more difficulty transitioning in our society than individuals who were assigned a female gender at birth but have transitioned to men (Devor, 2004; Levitt & Ippolito, 2014; Pollock & Eyre, 2012). This is due to society being more accepting of masculine women, or “tomboys,” than feminine men. Though it should be noted that being labeled a tomboy can have its own damaging implications of people disregarding the individual’s expression of their true identity (Levitt & Ippolito, 2014). But, identifying as a tomboy can act as a mediating step in the process of transitioning for some transmen, thereby making the transition smoother. This begs the question of what role masculinity plays in an individual’s gender development, and whether it is necessary for individuals who are transitioning to adopt masculine gender roles and norms. These findings challenge what we thought we knew about the role of masculinity in transgender identity development and shows there is still much more research to be done in order to fully understand not only transgender identity, but gender identity as a whole.

Our society has identified specific traits and norms that should be adhered to in order to identify as a man. These traits and norms are all agentic, meaning they focus primarily on being goal-oriented, unemotional, strong, and independent (Heilman, 2012). While adhering to these agentic traits, men must also distance themselves from communal traits, which include being emotional, kind, caring, and dependent, as these traits are often prescribed to women. In addition, one of the most important concepts that revolves around masculinity is the concept of power being designated to a hierarchy of various masculinities.

Masculinity can take multiple forms, and Hanke (1992) describes the common forms of masculinity in a tiered hierarchy. The top tier, which has the most social power, is hegemonic masculinity. This type of masculinity is seen as the alpha-male where a man is described as strong, tough, dominant, and unemotional. The second tier of masculinity is described as caring, nurturing, and emotionally aware, which is labeled conservative masculinity and adopts more communal traits. The lowest tier of the hierarchy is subordinated masculinity, which includes any type of masculinity that is viewed as not being masculine. In this sense, subordinated masculinity is often defined by what hegemonic masculinity is not.

This idea of a hierarchy of masculinities, where the top tier describes what a man is and the bottom tier describes what a man is not, may help explain how transgender individuals identify or do not identify as a man. Transmen, according to Vegter (2013), are not engaging in typical masculine norms, thereby subjugating themselves to a lower tier of masculinity. This helps them to adopt an identity as a man, but not the stereotypical type of man. Therefore, for individuals who do not want to identify with the stereotypical qualities of a man, they will often encounter more difficulties in finding an identity of a man, as other men will perceive them as less of a

man. On the other hand, when individuals do endorse hegemonic forms of masculinity, they are more likely to engage in behaviors that are detrimental to one's health.

Addis, Reigeluth, and Schwab (2016) discussed the various negative outcomes for conforming to hegemonic masculinity. Some of the most notable negative outcomes are inability to regulate emotions, endorsement of rape culture, aggressive behavior, and negative coping mechanisms. In addition to these negative outcomes, individuals who conform to hegemonic masculine norms will also be more likely to not seek professional help when needed, such as seeking mental health counseling when encountering difficulties in life. This suggests that if the transgender population is aware of these negative outcomes, they may be discouraged to endorse hegemonic masculinity and would be more likely to find alternative forms of masculinity.

However, these studies on conformity to masculine norms have been done strictly on cisgender men in our society. Therefore, it has yet to be discovered how other populations, such as the transcommunity, react to these masculine norms and whether they are likely to conform to these norms, knowing that there are negative outcomes associated with them. It is also not yet understood how individuals who do not wish to identify with a masculine gender would view these norms of masculinity. In order to fully understand how these norms and negative outcomes of masculinity function, the perspectives of all members of the society they affect must be taken into account.

Current Study

The current study is aimed at understanding if transindividuals are currently adhering to masculine norms, and why individuals would travel down what has been suggested to be the more difficult path of conforming to these strict masculine norms in their gender identity

development. Since hegemonic masculinity is the master narrative for men and master narratives are compulsory for all genders, transgender individuals must make sense of their gender in relation to the master narrative. What is yet to be understood is how they engage with this master narrative in constructing their gender identity and if they are accepting or rejecting hegemonic masculinity or a combination of both.

Additionally, the transgender population is able to provide a unique perspective on gender roles and expression, for they often have insight and personal experiences from masculine, feminine, and non-binary genders (Riggle, Rostosky, McCants, & Pascale-Hague, 2011). This therefore allows us to include all members from the transcommunity to provide insight on how they align with concepts and norms of masculinity found within our society. This is due to the fact that every individual in the community will be able to look at gender norms from an outsider's perspective, thereby allowing for an interpretation of gender that is not often heard, which will allow us to understand how these individuals are engaging with the master narrative of masculinity as well as the masculine norms within our society.

In order to understand the nuances of the transcommunity's engagement with masculine norms, a qualitative life-story interview study was utilized with transgender individuals. This allowed for a collection of data that was then analyzed to find common themes related to transgender identity development. Specifically, the participants were asked questions aimed towards understanding how they perceive and understand masculinity and the gender binary, as well as various restrictions they faced in developing a transgender identity and how they overcame those restrictions.

Method

Participants

Participants in this study included any individual who identifies as transgender. This includes transmen, transwomen, non-binary, and any other identity that may be found in the transcommunity (e.g. demi-girl, demi-boy, neutrois, gender fluid, transmasculine, transfeminine, etc.). Participants were recruited with help from students and staff of the GLBTA Pride Center at Bridgewater State University (BSU). In total, nine participants were recruited. Of these nine participants, two identified as transwomen, three as transmen, two as gender fluid, one as nonbinary male-aligned, and one as nonbinary female-aligned. Participants were between the ages of 18 and 28 ($M = 20.89$, $SD = 3.33$), with all participants identifying as White/European American. Participants' socioeconomic status was determined by the participant's mother's education level, which included three with a graduate school degree, one with some graduate school experience, two with a college degree, one with some college experience, and two with a high school degree. As for sexuality, three participants identified as queer, four as pansexual, one as lesbian, and one as polysexual. Participants also provided the pronouns they currently use which included two participants who use she/her pronouns, four who use they/them pronouns, and three who use he/him pronouns.

Recruitment strategies for this project included convenience and snowball sampling, as I went to several transgender support groups on BSU's campus, including the Transgender Identities Peer Support Group (TIG) and the Lavender Living Learning Community. TIG is an on-campus support group for transgender individuals and allies. The group was designed to encourage transindividuals to share their perspectives, opinions, and experiences related to their gender identity. The Lavender Living Learning Community, on the other hand, is a dormitory at

BSU for the LGBTQ community and allies to cohabitate and take classes related to the LGBTQ community together. While meeting with both of these groups, I introduced myself as a cisgender male ally and explained the purpose of the study, the interview process, the \$20 cash compensation they would receive for participating in the study, and the potential positive outcomes of the study. Since I do identify as an outsider, a cisgender male, to the transcommunity, it was important to work within the community to encourage individuals to participate, while showing my genuine interest in helping the community. Individuals from these two groups that showed interest in the study provided their e-mail address and were then sent a recruitment script (see Appendix A). Additionally, flyers were created with help from students and staff at the Pride Center and posted around campus (see Appendix B). Participants were also given a flyer to show to others who may qualify for the study.

Procedure

Upon recruitment, participants were asked to come to the Psychology Lab at BSU to take part in a gender-focused life-story interview that would last between one and two hours. Prior to the start of the interview, participants filled out a demographic form requesting information regarding their age, ethnic background, gender identity, and sexual identity (see Appendix C). They also signed a consent form, which was made in congruence with BSU's Institutional Review Board (see Appendix D). At the end of the interview, participants were debriefed by being reminded of the information on the consent form, which states that they can ask myself or Dr. Schwab questions regarding the study, and should they feel anxious, worried, or feel the need to talk to a professional, contact information for the Counseling Center on campus and Pride Center are provided. After debriefing, participants were given the \$20 cash compensation.

This study utilized an active interview approach to collecting data (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003). This method allows for an unbiased collection of data from participants. The active interview style of research not only allows for a wider breadth of data to be collected, but also gives the participant the ability to create new meaning from their experiences during the interview. An active interview differs from other general interviews by having a looser structure, thereby allowing freer flow within the interview. This structure should help participants feel in control and safe in the interview setting and empower them to share their story. As this method of interview requires the interviewer to be practiced in interviewing participants, I was the only one conducting the interviews, as I have had experience interviewing participants in other research projects here at BSU.

The structure of the interview was similar to a life-story interview, which is used commonly by researchers to help the participant tell their story (Atkinson, 1998). Additionally, to aid the interviewer in ascertaining the necessary information from the participant, an interview script was utilized with pre-determined questions following the structure of a life-story interview (see Appendix E). The first half of the interview was a life-story interview focused on gender in order to understand the participant's personal experiences of gender identity development. This half was split into three parts: childhood, adolescent, and present-day experiences. In the childhood experiences section, participants were asked questions such as, "What was your family life like?" "Who did you live with?" and "What was the first experience you had with gender?" In the adolescent experiences section, participants were asked questions such as, "What was adolescence like (middle school, junior high, high school)?" "How did your views/opinions of gender change or not change from childhood?" and "What were a few events in your adolescence that you feel influenced your gender identity?" In the present-day experiences

section, participants were asked questions such as, “What gender do you identify as now and why?” “How do you express your gender?” and “How do you think other perceive your gender?”

The second half of the interview was primarily focused on the participant’s alignment with masculine norms in society and how these norms may have affected their gender identity development. A few questions that were asked included, “What does it mean to be a man?” “What characteristics must a person have to be man?” “You told me earlier you identify as (participant’s gender identity), how much of your identity do you see is male and why?” and “What characteristics do you associate with masculinity?” As this was an active interview, the questions asked varied slightly between participants based on the life-story interview portion of the interview. Follow-up questions were also used to encourage participants to continue explaining their thoughts such as, “Can you explain that more?” “Do you have any moments or experiences that depict that?” and “Are there any memories that you associate with that?” In addition to follow-up questions, a common strategy utilized in this interview was summarizing what the participant said in the form of a question, which often lead to a deeper explanation of the topic.

Reflexivity

As a straight cisgender man, I was an outsider to the transcommunity and therefore decided in order to better connect with participants to take various steps in bridging the gap to allow for a more comfortable interview setting. The first step was to become safe-zone trained, which requires attending a four-week training program provided by the BSU Pride Center to educate individuals on LGBTQ matters and how to make the space they are in feel safe to individuals from the LGBTQ community. Upon completion of safe-zone training, I was officially recognized as an ally to the transcommunity, showing that I am here to help support

trans individuals. I also attended various LGBTQ social meetings including TIG and The Lavender Living Learning Community to listen to transgender individuals speak about their struggles and triumphs regarding their gender identity.

As an ally to the transcommunity, my first goal through this project was to get a clearer understanding of how transgender individuals develop their gender identity. This information can then be used not only in future research projects, but also to aid mental health counselors and physicians, who work with transgender individuals, as well as family members and friends, who know someone that identifies as transgender, better understand and support these individuals through their gender identity development.

Analysis

The audio from each interview was recorded and then transcribed verbatim. This allowed for analysis of the transcripts using a qualitative thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This method of analysis requires the researcher to group data from the transcripts into codes, or commonalities found throughout the interview as well as across multiple interviews, which are then further analyzed and put into larger groups, or themes. These themes reflect larger units of common information found within multiple interviews, suggesting a common pool of knowledge shared between participants.

In order to create these themes and subthemes, however, specific steps were taken following the structure proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). In the first stage of analysis, the transcript of the interview was simply read through by me, my research mentor, and five other undergraduate researchers as we highlighted any segments which contained information that we believed could be relevant. A code was then assigned to each segment to succinctly describe the

information contained within it. This resulted in a large list of codes, which was then revised following the second reading of the transcript. The next step was to group similar codes into more comprehensive groups of themes and subthemes. For example, if a researcher found multiple codes of the participant seeking help from friends, family, and online peers, a theme could be created for support systems with the subthemes of in-person and online support.

This method was repeated for all transcripts. However, after each subsequent transcript was coded and organized into themes, we then compared themes within the current and previous transcripts to better organize the themes, so they were reflective of data found in all transcripts. After all transcripts had been analyzed, specific quotes were collected to exemplify each theme and subtheme in the results section.

The overarching goal of this project was to begin opening a dialogue of gender identity development with the transcommunity, whose voices are often not heard, to better understand gender identity in today's society. Achieving this goal will then allow for further research to be done in this area, which will continue this dialogue and bring in more perspectives on gender identity development, thereby adding more information on gender as a whole.

Results

From the thematic analysis of transcripts of the nine participants, whose demographic information including their chosen pseudonym, gender identity, age, and pronouns can be found in Table 1, two major themes were created: "Restrictions to becoming trans" and "Overcoming restrictions." Within the theme of "Restrictions to becoming trans," a total of six subthemes were categorized into two separate groups titled "External restrictions" and "Internalized restrictions," each describing the nuances of various impediments transgender individuals face in their gender

development. Within the theme of “Overcoming restrictions”, three subthemes, “Support systems”, “Safe spaces”, and “Cognitive remapping of gender categories”, were created which describe how these participants overcame the various restrictions mentioned in the theme “Restrictions to becoming trans.” The hierarchical organization of these themes and subthemes are presented visually in Figure 1.

Restrictions to becoming Trans

The first theme describes the various impediments participants encountered, which in some way impeded their transgender development. As there were two main sources of restrictions, the analysis was separated into two subthemes to represent this difference. The first group being external restrictions, which describe restrictions that participants perceived from the external world. Whereas the second category of internalized restrictions describes the restrictions from within the participant, which in some cases were an internalized version of an external restriction as they began to adopt the beliefs that were presented to them.

External restrictions. The first group of restrictions are described as those which come from external sources. Simply put, they are forces that are not within the individual that create an impediment to identifying with any gender. Within this category, there are three subthemes: restrictiveness of gender categories, hyperrestrictiveness of masculinity, and negative exposure to transidentities.

Restrictiveness of gender categories. This first subtheme of external restrictions includes aspects of life that exemplify how each gender category has strict guidelines to follow in order to identify with that gender category. This also includes experiences in which the individual is attempting to enter a category but is unable to do so.

Many participants described experiences throughout their life in which they felt that in order to identify as a particular gender, such as a man or a woman, they had to fit into a concrete and rigid model. Jesca, a 19-year-old transwoman, describes her first understandings of gender from a young age:

If you're a boy you do x, y, z and you're not supposed to do a, b, c which girls do... like all the women are like sort of like semi-stereotypical like take care of the house, raise kids sort of stuff and like the men all sort of like they go, their like the sort of people who wear like khaki pants and button up shirts and they g- have- have a desk job like that's sort of like, like, it's not like, again it's not like, it's assumed that that's the default.

In describing these stereotypes as the default, Jesca viewed these descriptions as rigid boundaries that only people who are women can do feminine tasks, while only men can do masculine tasks. In viewing these descriptions as boundaries, Jesca formed a sort of cage around her understanding of what a man and a woman is, not allowing for alternative definitions, indicating that she may have already internalized this information. However, she notes at the end of the quote that these are assumed, indicating that this information likely did not come from just one source, but was a byproduct of her observations of social interactions from her external world. While there were clear examples of participants perceiving gender categories as highly restrictive like Jesca's, other examples describe how participants' felt their identities were judged based on a similar criterion:

You're asked to prove yourself a lot so that kinda induces a little bit of anxiety for like me and other transpeople I know umm and like I had the same problem with my therapist in high school. She asked me like how I know identify a certain way, what makes me feel that way? It's just like intrinsic feeling umm how I feel when I feel that way? I just feel

masculine, I do- I- it encourages me to perform more masculine acts and dress more masculinely and to be into one- to be accepted more masculine- as a more masculine person. (Mac, 22, gender fluid)

In this example, Mac describes how they felt their gender identity was judged based upon an understanding of gender categories having a strict criterion which must be met. In order for them to prove their masculinity, they had to adopt the qualities of a man for others to accept them as masculine. They also describe how they are asked to “prove” their identity, indicating they perceive that others are looking at them and determining which category they fit in to, so if they do not fit perfectly into that category they felt the need to prove it to others.

Hyperrestrictiveness of masculinity. The second subtheme, hyperrestrictiveness of masculinity, describes barriers that most participants believed exist for anyone to identify as a man, which participants perceived to be greater for men than other genders. Trish, a 24-year-old who identifies as neutrois/gender fluid, describes how they perceived masculinity to limit their options of expressing their gender.

Women can wear uhhh more masculine clothes and just be called a tomboy, and like that’s just like a quirky thing. And with men, if they dress up in flowery dresses and what not, it’s considered a joke or cross-dressing. Umm that’s just one of those uhh things that seems to limit uhh expression in men.

Trish describes how for women, they are allowed to express their masculinity, however, when they see a man express his femininity, it is not allowed. In fact, should a man present femininely, Trish perceives that others will see this presentation as a joke, indicating that any gender expression of a man that is not masculine must not be serious, unlike a woman presenting

masculinely. Similar to Trish, Mac, a 22-year-old who identifies as gender fluid, describes their understanding of masculinity.

Sometimes like I did feel masculine but I didn't feel like hypermasculine or masculine enough, like I was on the brink of being male but I didn't always step over the edge into manhood. Like there was like a barrier like this close and it just didn't get there... I could do my utmost performative best to look masculine and people would just think I'm butch or a dyke, you know like a very masculine lesbian not like a boy like how I want to present.

Mac describes how even at their best efforts to be masculine, and even though they felt masculine, they still felt as though they were not accepted as a man. As they were assigned female at birth, they felt they would always be kept out of the category of men, being called a 'butch' or 'dyke' when they attempted to enter. This indicates how they could never breach the barrier they perceived in male identities, for even at their best attempts of entering manhood, they are still seen as a woman.

Negative exposure to transidentities. The final subtheme within external restrictions to becoming trans is negative exposure to transidentities. This subtheme describes participants' experiences in which transidentities are shown in a negative light, thereby encouraging transphobia. Trish, a 24-year-old who identifies as neutrois/gender fluid, describes their first encounters with the LGBT community:

Most of my exposure to the LGBT community was through like SNL skits where they're kind of making fun of it... or like tragic movies about how they are homeless, or just sexual deviants... so I'm like I can't be that cause I'm not a deviant.

From this example, Trish is describing how their first exposure to a transidentity was shown from a negative perspective as a sexual deviant or homeless. They then describe how this turned into their definition of being trans, and since they did not want to be a deviant, they therefore could not identify as trans without also identifying with this negative stereotype.

While this example shows a negative exposure to a transidentity from the media, other excerpts exemplify how participants also experienced a more personal negative exposure to their transidentity, such as when Asher, an 18-year-old who identifies as transmasculine/male stated: “When I came out to her [participant’s mother] as genderfluid and pansexual... She kinda just like laughed and was like ‘Oh, no that’s not like real.’” In addition, Trish, a 24-year-old who identifies as neutrois/gender fluid, also mentions a similar situation: “If I ever talk about like how I want to look physically in the future, she [participant’s mother] phrases it in a way that makes me feel kind of gross. Like ‘oh you want to do that? Ew.’”

In these two examples, both participants when talking with their mother regarding their gender, experienced negativity regarding their own transidentity. Both participants’ mothers responded to their gender in a negative fashion with the first devaluing their identity claiming it was not real and the second showing disgust to the identity, thereby making it seem wrong to identify that way. Both examples work to push the participant away from a transidentity, as they are less likely to want to identify with an identity that is viewed negatively by their loved ones. These various external restrictions, restrictiveness of gender categories, hyperrestrictiveness of masculinity, and negative exposure to transidentities, all impede the participants’ gender development by making them feel they cannot achieve the identity they wish due to the external roadblocks. These roadblocks can then become more internalized to the point when the

participant will not only see them externally, but will act in a way that indicates they have begun to strengthen these restrictions within themselves and act upon them in some instances.

Internalized restrictions. While many participants described external restrictions to their gender development, they also spoke about how many of those external restrictions became internalized as they began to believe and sometimes even act upon these newfound beliefs. This describes the second group of restrictions, internalized restrictions, for they occur when an individual creates an impediment for becoming trans by internalizing various external forces, or perceiving a lack of control over their gender expression.

Gender barriers. Within the group of internalized restrictions, the first subtheme was gender barriers. This subtheme is described as the individual perceiving each gender category as being highly restrictive and therefore must adhere to the guidelines within each to identify with that category. This is often a result of the internalization of the external restrictions of “Restrictiveness of gender categories” and “hyperrestrictiveness of masculinity.” Mac, a 22-year-old who identifies as gender fluid, for instance, describes their first memories of gender barriers:

When you're a child you get told about like things boys do and things girls do and I kinda like.. enforced that a little bit too much like as a five-year-old I remember like scolding girls for wearing the color blue because it was a boy's color. And I really don't know why, or who taught me that, or where that came from.

Initially, Mac was told about the various things boys and girls were allowed to do, thus creating rigid guidelines for both genders. However, this then became internalized when they began to correct others who were not following these guidelines thereby showing how what was originally an observation of the restrictiveness of gender categories became an internalized

gender barrier which was acted upon. While this internalization may or may not have affected Mac's gender development, another participant describes the detrimental effect internalizing gender restrictions can have on their own gender development:

I look at the- the world of... masculinity and I look at umm.. what people see what men look like, and I don't- I'm not gonna be like that, I don't think I ever want to be like that. So, it's a difficult thing of like well does that make me a man or does that not?" (Justice, 21, female-to-male transgender/male)

Within this example, Justice describes how he first viewed masculinity as being a set image that must be matched. However, in endorsing this view, his own gender identity is attacked, for he does not identify with that set image he made. Therefore, he begins to question his own manhood as it is threatened by his own observations of masculinity. While these gender barriers are typically seen in binary standards of men and women, some participants described how these barriers can be perceived for all gender categories.

The options are female, where I am, by birth designation, and that's where I can be feminine. Male, where you have to swear off all femininity, and- and umm this like concrete definition of nonbinary which is umm androgynous... but if you look at it, it's clearly masculine but in a light way. (Hayden, 19, non-binary female-aligned)

Hayden describes how they first see these barriers in the genders of men and women, and that these barriers make it impossible to express one's gender if it does not match the current norm. However, they take it one step further, for they also see a barrier around the gender identity of non-binary, which is still defined by binary standards. This indicates that the participant has internalized these binary barriers and then expanded them to other gender categories not within the binary, suggesting that the internalization of restrictive gender

categories can be generalized to all genders. This can then create restrictions within the individual regardless of if they are working within the binary or outside of it.

Internalized transphobia. A second subtheme under internalized restrictions was internalized transphobia, which can often occur after having a negative exposure to transidentities and stereotypes. However, in general this is described as when the individual internalizes some negative views of transidentities and begins to feel hate or disgust to either their own or others' transidentity. Asher, an 18-year-old transmasculine/male, describes the origin of their fear of medically transitioning:

I was afraid of like, umm, I guess going on hormones while I was in school, because I feel like there's like a lot of times you hear about people say 'Oh I'm fine with trans-people as long as they don't like, medically transition' or whatever, like they think that is like the worst thing.

As one can see, Asher first witnessed opinions of others describing their disgust towards individuals medically transitioning. However, he then internalizes this disgust, which begins to create fear within himself to transition. This ends up delaying his gender development goals, specifically medical transitioning, as he is unable to transition until this fear is overcome. Another participant, previously mentioned in the "negative exposure to transidentities" theme, describes the effects of their mother's negative views of medical transitioning: "I probably would've started it [medically transitioning] by now.... Step one, I'm aware of it, but step two is like actually not feeling gross about me being.. like what I want to look like" (Trish, 24, neutrois/gender fluid).

Trish previously described how their mother would speak in a tone of disgust whenever they mentioned medical transition. However, in this excerpt, they describe how their mother's

view slowly became their own view. Now they too feel disgust at the very idea of them transitioning, when they initially felt happiness in regards to transitioning. This internalized transphobia ends up creating a roadblock for both participants, as they are unable to medically transition, which would encourage further gender development.

Lack of agency in gender expression. The final internalized subtheme, lack of agency in gender expression, is described as the perceived lack of control of one's ability to express their gender through restrictions relating to finances, social rules, familial structures, and context. Trish, a 24-year-old who identifies as neutrois/gender fluid, describes two instances of how their initial attempts of expression failed due to a lack of control of those factors in their life: "I associated gender quite a lot with the clothes that you wear and a lot of the clothes that were put in my room were like polos, t-shirts, shorts, sneakers, and khakis", "I know that I didn't have a lot of control over what I got to look like though cause I think it was like a monthly thing where my dad took me to the barber to get a bowl cut."

In these two examples, Trish describes how they perceived their gender expression through clothing and hair style were out of their control. This therefore limits their ability to express the gender they identify with, as those aspects were out of their control. This makes it nearly impossible for Trish to experiment with their gender in this particular way, as the parts of gender they associated with clothing and hair style were not able to be changed. While most participants described parental authority limiting their expression, Nico, a 19-year-old who identifies as non-binary/transmasculine, describes how a general context can also limit their expression when they stated: "Cause then I had to wear formal clothes, and there are- there's not a whole lot of, uh, neutrality I suppose, in... formal clothes."

In a formal attire setting, Nico is unable to express their non-binary identity, for they perceive all formal attire as being highly binary restrictive. This therefore creates a similar issue Trish faced in the previous example, as Nico is unable to express their identity in certain settings due to the attire they are required to wear. This could then lead to increased feelings of dysphoria, as they may be forced to express their gender in a way they do not identify with.

These internalized restrictions generally seem to initially come from external sources, but are then internalized, creating an impediment to participants' gender development not just from their environment, but from within themselves as well. While these impediments may seem to be too powerful to overcome, many participants explained the various strategies they utilized to overcome these external and internalized restrictions to becoming trans.

Overcoming Restrictions

The second major theme that was revealed was overcoming restrictions. This theme describes how participants were able to overcome the various restrictions described previously through the use of support systems, safe spaces, and cognitive remapping of gender categories.

Support systems. The first form of overcoming restrictions to becoming trans, and the first subtheme, is support systems. This subtheme is described as any form of support from people in their life which gives the individual comfort, confidence, and/or information regarding their gender identity. While there are many different forms of support systems, a common support described by many participants took the form of a trans role model. Such as when Trish, a 24-year-old who identifies as neutrois/gender fluid, mentions the benefits of seeing another person in their life transition.

Interviewer: Do you think that experience of seeing him [participant's friend] transition like helped support more of an open mind in thinking about it more?

Trish: Yea, definitely, cause once he started transitioning and referring to himself as [MALE NAME], it's like oh that's a person that exists instead of a caricature. Like oh there's more people like that, and maybe I'm one of them.

In this example, Trish expresses how seeing their friend transition gave them not only information to see that transitioning is possible, but also gave them a role model to follow on their path to becoming trans. Before seeing an actual person transition, Trish had no example of a transperson to relate to. But after seeing someone transition, they now get real-life information of one example of a transperson, while also gaining some reassurance in exploring their own identity. While Trish's friend provided a clear example for them to follow in transitioning, Justice, a 21-year-old who identifies as female-to-male transgender/male, describes another role model and friend who provided a different form of support.

He [Participant's cis-male friend] is someone where I've learned and grown with him and we've learned and grown together and we've been able to communicate and work things out and talk and.. let our outlets out together with each other. Like in the way that we show each other the things that we've been creative about and things like that and I think that's the closest model of the kind of man I'd want to be.

Here, Justice's friend is not seen as a role model to follow, but instead a collaborator in understanding Justice's identity. Together, they talk openly about personal topics in their life, thereby creating their own model of what a man is for themselves. What is most interesting, is that Justice's friend identifies as a cis-man, but seems to help Justice break through the hyperrestrictive barrier that many participants perceived around masculinity, allowing for both

men to reconstruct a new type of man that best suits them. While many support systems that participants described were in-person, they also described how Tumblr, a social media outlet, was used in lieu of an in-person support. For example, Asher, an 18-year-old who identifies as transmasculine/male, talks about his first exploration into transidentities online:

I think it was like around the beginning of eighth grade, um, when I started learning more about like the LGBT community, which a lot of it was from Tumblr... of all places. Um, and like, I remember like right away when I was learning about those things I was like “Oh hey maybe this is me.”

Asher used the online resource of Tumblr to gather more information regarding his identity as well as other LGBT identities by communicating with this online community. This provides him with not only information, but also a sense of confidence as Asher, in particular, frequently mentioned his fear of coming out to people as trans in public when he says: “I was like terrified about like coming out at school um, because I feel like I — I had never really heard many stories of people doing that, um and it just felt like a really ostracizing experience.” Tumblr, therefore, provides an alternate area for him to continue his gender development without the fear of some sort of backlash from his peers.

Safe spaces. The second subtheme is safe spaces, which is described as an environment in which the individual feels comfortable and confident in their gender identity, allowing them to actively engage in expressing their identity freely without fear of backlash from others. This differs from a support system, as safe spaces add in active engagement from the participant in working to create or further understand their gender identity. On the other hand, the primary function of support systems is to provide information and confidence in a less active fashion.

Trish, a 24-year-old who identifies as neutrois/gender fluid, describes their experience of a queer space acting as a safe space for them:

I like dressed up in like a suit and sunglasses, put mousse in my hair and like my roommate at the time was like wow you look- that's the most masculine I've seen you... it didn't feel dysphoric for once like dressing like that. Cause I think it was just a queer space like a queer community sort of viewing me instead of just everyone else on campus and everyone at work.

Since Trish does not identify as a man, they often feel uncomfortable being masculine in heteronormative spaces, as they are often misgendered as a man. However, in stepping into a queer space, in which the definition of masculinity becomes more fluid, Trish is able to express their masculinity without the need to identify as a man. In this sense, their dysphoria that was previously present when they were masculine is alleviated as a direct cause from the environment they are in. Another participant, Asher, an 18-year-old who identifies as transmasculine/male, also discussed a safe space in an LGBT summer camp he went to:

It's so interesting to see like all these people like experiment in gender in like different ways, like I have a friend um, he's a transguy, and like uh the week of camp this summer like he just wore dresses all week and like he never does otherwise and like I don't know it's just like really interesting to see people like just kinda play around with that and like have fun with it I guess....I feel like um, like when I was there this year I was definitely a lot more feminine while I was there um which I guess like, shows me that that's kind of how I want to be like if I'm in a comfortable place I am more feminine, um, and I feel like while I'm there like that's so much easier to accept and like you leave there and it's kind of like, harder um, to be that like free with yourself.

In this example, Asher first sees how other people around him are expressing their gender identity freely within this new environment. This not only provides some support, in the sense of a role model, but allows him to feel more comfortable expressing his own identity. Therefore, he is able to be more feminine even though he identifies as a transmasculine male. He also discussed how when he leaves this space, he again must act more masculinely in order to be perceived as a man, thereby showing the importance of a safe space for the individual to act out the identity they want to be, rather than the identity that is expected of them.

Cognitive remapping of gender categories. The last subtheme within overcoming restrictions to becoming trans is cognitive remapping of gender categories. This subtheme is defined as the participant using gender categories to loosen the barriers they previously perceived in gender categories. Once these barriers are loosened, the participant is more easily able to fit their identity into a more fluid model of gender categories. For instance, Asher, an 18-year-old who identifies as transmasculine/male, talks about the cognitive change he made from when he was younger to where he is now.

When I was like younger and I was transitioning, being male definitely meant being masculine, and now I feel like I kind of separated it from that. It doesn't necessarily mean being masculine, or, another way that I've heard people put it um, is that like, if there's like a guy and he says that he's masculine and he wants to like wear nail polish and say that's masculine then that could be masculine to him.

Within this excerpt, Asher acknowledges that earlier in his gender development, he perceived very strict boundaries around each gender category, in particular the category of men. However, after having experiences of support systems to understand his gender and safe spaces to act out his identity, he began to remap gender categories to allow for fluidity within each

category. This then allowed him to create a definition of gender for himself, which will then help him to feel even more comfort within his identity. Mac, a 22-year-old who identifies as gender fluid, also describes how their current understanding of gender is now fluid:

I wrote a poem about my gender fluidity about how like there's like different islands of gender, there's like the masculine island, and there's the feminine island, and I'm usually out at sea, but I get washed into.. an island every now and then and I stay there for a little bit and the tides pull me back in.

Mac now perceives these gender categories as still being restrictive in the sense that each "island" or gender described is separate from the others, however they are able to step into each category now. They also note how they are not confined to just one gender, but are pulled from one to the other and able to experience all of them. When previously, they perceived these categories as being highly restrictive. While some participants simply remapped gender categories to make them more fluid, allowing them to more easily enter each one, Justice, a 21-year-old who identifies as female-to-male transgender/male, described how this loosening of categories allowed for him to strive to become a new kind of man.

Justice: I also don't think I want to be that kind of man. That big, strong house; goes to work every day and then comes home and sits on the couch. I want to contribute and have an equal partnership and do everything I can.

Interviewer: So [you want to] be your own man?

Justice: Yeah and figure out what it means to be my own person and not be stuck to expectations like I feel like a lot of... assigned male at birth men feel like, especially cis gender men.

Justice expresses how after working with his friend to understand what it means to be a man, and receiving support in this endeavor, he is now able to become the man he wants to be. While previously, when he acted in a non-masculine way, he felt his identity as a man was threatened, he is now more comfortable in rejecting masculine norms and still identifying as a man. Therefore, he has loosened the perceived restrictive nature of masculinity to allow for his identity to fit within the definition of a man.

Many participants told stories of the various restrictions they encountered in their transgender identity development. These restrictions seemed to first be viewed externally through participants' observations of the restrictive nature of gender categories, as well as negative attitudes towards becoming transgender. These external restrictions were often then internalized as the participants began to endorse or act upon the very attitudes they observed externally. While these restrictions created impediments in their gender development, they were able to utilize strategies to overcome these restrictions. Most participants noted multiple avenues for gaining confidence and comfort in their identity through the use of support systems and safe spaces. They also noted that after gaining enough experience with support systems and safe spaces, they were then able to cognitively remap their understanding of gender categories to best suit their own identity.

Discussion

Summary

As with most individuals' gender development, the transcommunity has its own unique set of challenges it must face. These challenges were described in terms of restrictions for becoming trans, which seemed to first occur externally through the participants' observations of the world. Then these restrictions were often internalized as participants began to believe and, in

some cases, act upon them. As noted from the participants' examples, these challenges can seem insurmountable at first. However, they are not impossible to overcome, as each participant discussed at least one avenue of support or one strategy they utilized to overcome these restrictions that challenged their transgender identity development.

Connections to previous research

The data from this study shows how complicated gender development can be, and the unique perspective the transcommunity has on gender. As previous research suggested, it was expected that transgender individuals would be likely to endorse gender norms in order to create a smoother developmental trajectory that would prevent backlash from society (Herman-Jeglinska, Grabowska, & Dulko, 2002). However, this finding was then challenged by Vegter (2013), who found that transmen, in particular, no longer believed they needed to endorse stereotypical masculine qualities to identify as a man. The data from this current study seems to suggest that whether transgender individuals are endorsing gender norms is more complicated than a simple "yes or no" question.

While many participants did note that following the gender norms dictated by society would likely lead to less backlash, they also noted that this was only the case in an environment which is focused on the binary model of gender. However, when participants were engaging with their gender in a safe space, these norms then changed to allow for more fluidity in one's gender expression. This suggests that the best avenue for future research may not be in whether or not the transcommunity endorses gender norms, but how the specific contexts they are in dictate which norms are best to follow. This may also reveal another strategy for overcoming restrictions to becoming trans in adopting a gender fluid identity.

Since many participants felt that they had to adopt certain gender norms depending on the specific context, a solution to allow for the least amount of backlash from society could be adopting a gender fluid identity. This could then relieve the tension within the individual to fit into a specific gender category across all contexts. For they would be able to flow between gender norms depending on the context, allowing them to prevent some social backlash while still being able to develop their transgender identity.

Devor's (2004) model of transgender identity development through the use of witnessing and mirroring was also seen within many participants. Many participants noted in their interview that they felt "different" from their cisgender peers since an early age. Additionally, many mentioned that unlike their peers of the same gender they were assigned at birth, they tended to have friends from the opposite side of the binary spectrum of gender. This suggests how these participants were engaging in witnessing by noticing the difference between themselves and peers who were the same gender they were assigned at birth. Many participants also showed cases of them engaging with the other side of the model: mirroring.

In particular, Justice, who identified as a female-to-male transgender/male individual, shared stories of how he grew into his own masculine identity by engaging with his close cisgender male friend. While Devor (2004) described mirroring as the individual seeing a similar peer and literally mirroring their behaviors to better fit into that identity, Justice's case suggests a slight alternative, for Justice was taking a much more active role in his gender development. He was not watching his friend and mirroring his behavior, but instead the two worked together to create their own identity simultaneously. This specific example of mirroring could appear in more participants in the future, which could add another level of complexity to Devor's theory of transgender identity development.

Similar to previous findings related to increased difficulties in transitioning from male to female as compared to female to male (Devor, 2004; Levitt & Ippolito, 2014; Pollock & Eyre, 2012), participants from the current study also mentioned their perceived difficulties in entering the realm of masculinity. While participants did not explicitly state that transitioning from a male gender to a female gender is more difficult, they did note how the realm of masculinity is perceived as being more restrictive for people not only leaving masculinity, but also entering it as well. When discussing female genders, participants noted how, in society, it is accepted to be a masculine woman, however, if someone identifies as a feminine man, they believe they will be more likely to receive backlash from society. These findings add to previous research by demonstrating that transgender individuals perceive difficulties in not only leaving masculinity, but entering it as well. Participants noted how even with their best efforts to be identified by others as a man, they were unable to do so. On the other hand, participants who were attempting to identify as a woman were successfully identified as women by others, even when the participants noted they were not attempting to present as overtly feminine. This perception that being identified as a man, when someone is not assigned male at birth, is more difficult than being identified as a woman suggests a perceived greater restrictiveness around masculinity than femininity.

Another interesting concept that came up in interviews with the participants was their general understanding of “discovering” their own gender identity. Many participants noted how their transgender identity was not something that was necessarily hidden away as they began to discover their “true self.” Instead, many participants saw their gender development as constantly in flux. This therefore indicates that their “true self” is not just a single image they are trying to achieve, but they are instead just growing and learning more about the world and themselves.

However, if the individual perceives gender categories as highly restrictive, this would then limit their ability to grow. This makes it crucial for the individual to be capable of finding a way to cognitively remap the restrictiveness of gender categories to allow for their own personal growth.

Limitations

While this current study has revealed more complexities in gender development, there were limitations. The first limitation was the size and representativeness of the sample. As the transgender population in the US is roughly 1.4 million (Flores, Herman, Gates, & Brown, 2016), a sample of 9 participants cannot describe the community as a whole. This is especially true as the participants for this project were all current college students recruited primarily from the Pride Center at Bridgewater State University, which is considered a safe space. This would then suggest that all participants will be able to note at least one support system and/or safe space during their interview. However, what is yet to be found are the stories from transgender individuals who are not able to find a safe space or support system. Furthermore, this sample was relatively homogenous in terms of their age, education level, ethnicity, and location, suggesting that some of the themes found in this project may or may not be unique to this population. With further investigation in a more diverse sample, we would be better able to understand the nuances of how transgender individuals from various backgrounds develop their gender identity.

Future Directions

Future research could look to investigate the effect of support systems and safe spaces in regards to transgender individuals' developmental trajectory over time. As this study had all participants mention at least one support system and safe space, it is impossible to determine, without further investigation, if these are necessary in order to cognitively remap one's own

beliefs on gender categories to better benefit their own gender identity. While participants did make note of the importance of both support systems and safe spaces in providing them support through their gender development, it is yet to be determined the magnitude of this support and if one is more beneficial than the other or if a combination of both is most beneficial for the individual. In order to measure this effect, a scale could be created to determine the level of cognitive remapping the individual is engaging, which could then be compared to various challenges they faced, support they received, and general measures of physical and mental health to quantitatively determine the benefit or harm of each.

Implications

This project is able to provide mental health specialists who work with the LGBTQ community further information on the specific challenges faced by the transcommunity in terms of their gender identity development, as well as various strategies to overcome these challenges. This data could be used to devise treatment plans for individuals who are struggling to develop their transgender identity by providing similar solutions the participants in this study used. Additionally, the data found from this project can be used not just for professionals who work with the LGBTQ community, but for the transcommunity as a whole. Individuals who are developing their transgender identity can seek out similar support systems the participants in this study utilized, including support systems such as Tumblr and safe spaces such as queer spaces. In noting the importance of safe spaces and support systems, public policy could focus on creating more access to safe spaces for the LGBTQ population. Additionally, many participants noted the financial burden that was put on them while transitioning and how this burden added another level of stress to their lives. In response to this, public policy could focus on providing more access to things such as binders and gender-neutral clothing, both of which are often

expensive and/or difficult to obtain. For the general population, this study can provide a better understanding of what it means to be transgender. This would act to possibly decrease the amount of transprejudice acts in the U.S. sparked by fear or misunderstandings. Overall, this project has shed more light on the complexities of gender, providing new perspectives on past research, and avenues for future investigations, as there is still much more information to gather before we can fully understand the complex nature of gender identity development.

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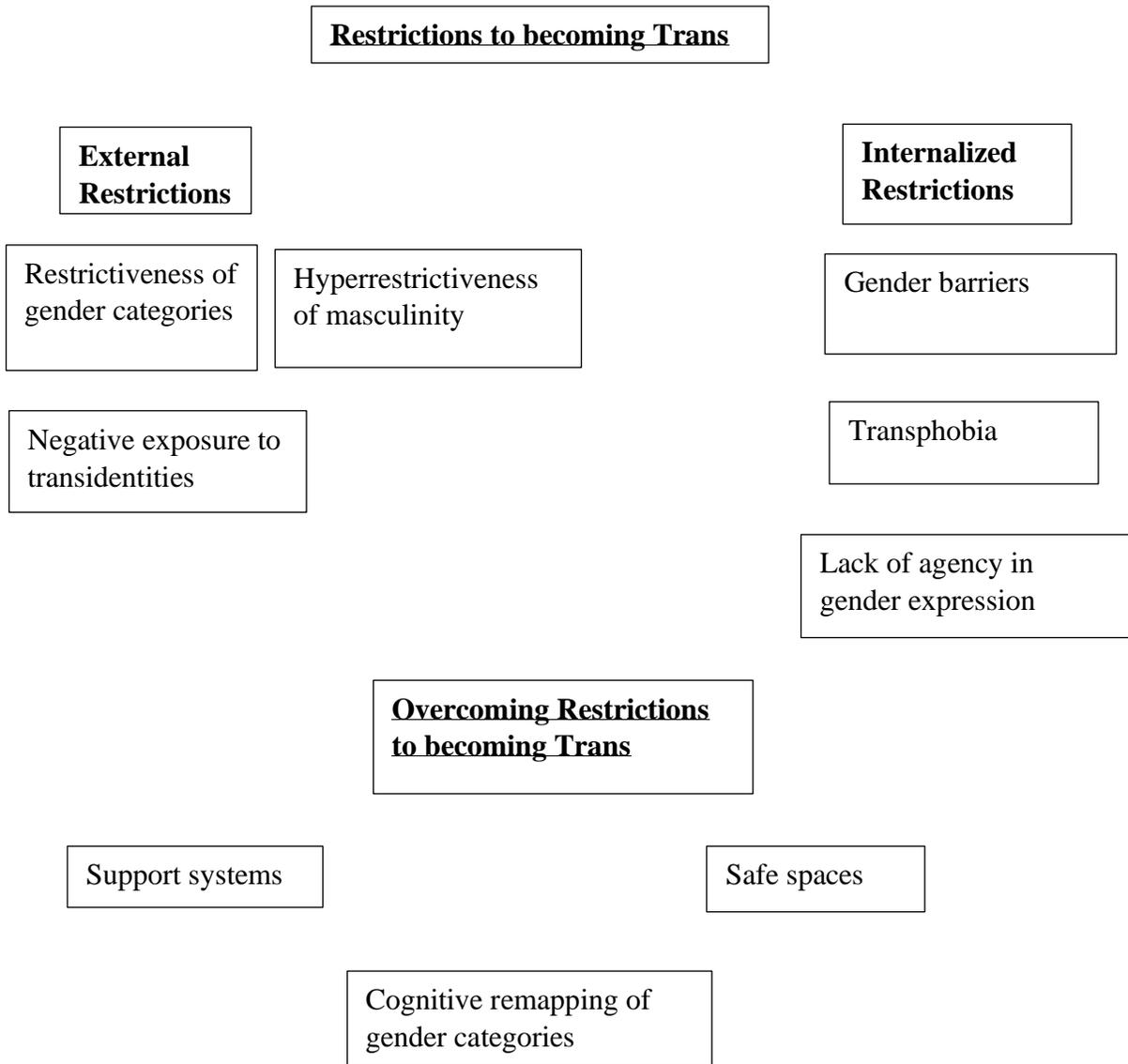
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Table 1.***Demographic Information of Participants***

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Pronouns
Jamie	28	Transwoman/female	She/hers
Trish	24	Neutrois/ gender fluid	They/them
Hayden	19	Nonbinary/female-aligned	They/them
Justice	21	FtM transgender/ male	He/him
Mac	22	Gender fluid	They/them
Jesca	19	Transwoman	She/her/they/them
Asher	18	Transmasculine/male	He/him/they/them
Nico	19	Nonbinary/transmasculine	They/them
Al	18	Male	He/him

Figure 1

Thematic Map of Themes and Subthemes



Appendix A

Hello, my name is _____ and I use the pronouns _____, _____, and _____. I wanted to introduce a study that you may be interested in participating in regarding transgender identity. This study is focused on how the transcommunity and individuals within the community align with norms and concepts of masculinity in modern society and whether adhering to these norms helps or hinders one's identity development. We are looking for participants who identify as transgender and are willing to participate in a loosely structured interview about their experiences with gender and masculinity throughout their life that will last approximately one hour, and they will be paid \$20 cash for their participation. We are hoping these interviews will help society to understand not only transgender identity development, but also gender as a whole, while initiating a dialogue with the transcommunity in the field of identity research. If you are interested in participating, or would like more information on this study, please e-mail either Dr. Joseph Schwab at jschwab@bridgew.edu or Alan Stamper at astamper@student.bridgew.edu. Additionally, if you know someone who you think might qualify for this study, please forward this information to them.

Appendix B

SEEKING PARTICIPANTS!!

Looking for study participants **who identify as transgender** and are between the ages of 18-29 for a one-hour interview to talk about their experiences.

You will be asked to talk about moments in your life that you define as important to your gender development as well as your thoughts on masculine norms in society.

Compensation will be \$20 cash

For more information contact either Dr. Joseph Schwab at jschwab@bridgew.edu or Alan Stamper at Astamper@student.bridgew.edu

Appendix C

Participant # _____

Pseudonym: _____

Demographic Survey: The Modern Man: A Transgender Perspective

What is your age (in years)? _____

What is your current year in college?

- Freshman
- Sophomore
- Junior
- Senior
- Graduate school
- Other: _____

What is the highest level of education your mother (or primary female guardian) has completed?

- Less than high school degree
- High school degree
- Some college or vocational school
- Vocational school degree
- College degree
- Some graduate school
- Graduate school degree

What is your ethnicity/race?

What is your gender identity?

Do you identify as transgender in any way?

What pronouns do you use?

What is your sexual orientation?

Appendix D

Bridgewater State University Informed Consent Document

Title of Research: The Modern Man: A Transgender Perspective

Researchers:

Dr. Joseph R. Schwab, Primary Investigator, Psychology Department (jschwab@bridgew.edu)

Alan J. Stamper, Co-Investigator, Psychology Major (astamper@student.bridgew.edu)

Introduction

You are being asked to participate in a project that is being conducted through Bridgewater State University. The University requires that you give your signed agreement to participate in this project. The investigator will explain to you in detail the purpose of this project, the procedure(s) being used, and the potential benefits, as well as the possible risk of participation. You may ask him/her any clarifying questions that you have that will help you understand the project. A basic explanation of the project is written below. Please read this explanation and discuss with the researcher any questions or concerns you may have. If you then decide that you would like to participate in the project, please sign on the last page of this form in the presence of the investigator that has explained the project to you. You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

Nature and Purpose of Project

This study is being completed in order to investigate how the transcommunity align themselves with concepts and norms of masculinity and whether adhering to masculine norms helps or hinders an individual's gender identity development. This study's purpose is also to understand how transgender individual's thoughts on gender have developed over time.

Explanation of the Procedures

You will be interviewed and asked a series of questions pertaining to your gender identity developmental experiences from childhood to present as well as your thoughts on masculinity and gender. You will be audio recorded and your participation in this study is estimated to last about one hour.

Discomfort and Risks

Talking about your feelings and experiences with gender identity while growing up may cause discomfort or feelings of stress. If you are to experience any discomfort or stress during the interview you are welcome to not answer any questions you do not wish to, and you are welcome to end your participation in the study at any time. If you wish to talk to someone about your feelings upon completion of this interview, there are free resources available to you that are listed at the end of this consent form.

Benefits

You may find that reflecting on your feelings and experiences may help your understanding of yourself, while also giving you a chance to share your experiences as a member of the transcommunity. We hope that this study can be useful for you and others who may have encountered similar feelings or experiences during their development.

Additionally, this study is beneficial for the scientific world and society as a whole because it will provide professionals with a better understanding of transgender identity development as well as gender as a whole. We hope this study will also initiate a dialogue between the transcommunity and the world of research to encourage more research that is inclusive to the transcommunity.

Confidentiality

Your information will be kept confidential. Your name on this consent form will not be connected to the audio from our interview. The transcript that will be made from this interview will not include your name, and no identifying information will be included. The audio will be kept locked on a password-protected computer, and it will be destroyed upon the completion of the project.

Additionally, while every effort will be made to keep your study-related information confidential, there may be circumstances where this information must be shared with:

- * Federal agencies, for example the Office of Human Research Protections, whose responsibility is to protect human subjects in research;
- * Representatives of Bridgewater State University, including the Institutional Review Board, a committee that oversees the research at BSU.

Refusal/Withdrawal

Refusal to participate in this study will have no effect on any future services you may be entitled to from the University. Anyone who agrees to participate in this study is free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

By signing below, I am indicating that I understand that it is not possible to identify all potential risks in an experimental procedure, and I believe that reasonable safeguards have been taken to minimize both the known and potential but unknown risks. I agree that all known risks to me have been explained to my satisfaction.

Participant Signature and Date

Witness Signature and Date

Any questions regarding the conduct of the project, questions pertaining to your rights as a research subject, or research related to injury, should be brought to the attention of the IRB Administrator at (508) 531-1242.

Any questions about the conduct of this research project should be brought to the attention of the principal investigator Dr. Joseph R. Schwab (jschwab@bridgew.edu) and/or Alan Stamper (astamper@student.bridgew.edu).

Should you wish to discuss your feelings or topics mentioned during the interview, please contact the Bridgewater State University Wellness Center, Counseling Services, located in Weygand Hall at (508) 531-1331. You can also contact the Pride Center located in the Rondileau Campus Center in room 109 at (508) 531-1408, or the Director of the Pride Center, Lee Forest, at lforest@bridgew.edu.

Appendix E

Interview Script: The Modern Man: A Transgender Perspective

I would like to thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. Before we begin, I would like to introduce myself and go over the purpose of this study and its intended goals.

My name is Alan and I use the pronouns he, him, and his. This interview study will be part of my honors thesis that is focused on understanding transgender identity development, while also focusing on the role of masculinity.

For you, this study can help you to reflect on your past experiences regarding your gender identity development. This study can also give you a chance to tell your story of your gender identity.

I have a notepad here with me that I will be using to take notes in case you mention something that I want to ask about further, or if a question pops into my head that I do not want to forget. I also want to make sure you understand that I am by no means a therapist. I am simply a researcher interested in hearing your story and gaining a better understanding of who you are. If we come across any sensitive information that you find troubling and would like to talk to someone further about it, then I will provide you with resources that can help.

Do you have any thoughts or questions about the study so far?

Before we begin, I will administer a consent form stating that you agree to participate in this study and that you acknowledge your right to withdraw from this study at any point should you feel the need to do so.

Administer Consent Form

Additionally, I am going to administer this demographic survey to give me a little bit of background information about you.

Administer Demographic Survey

As it is written in the consent form, this interview study will be audio recorded. If you are ready, then I would like to turn on the recorder and begin the interview.

Turn on audio recorder

Interview Protocol

Part 1: Explaining the Interview Protocol

As it has been described to you, this study is aimed at revealing the potential experiences and/or people that have influenced your gender identity development throughout the years. Therefore, I will begin by asking you a series of questions starting in early childhood and following chronologically to your present-day experiences. In childhood, we will discuss some of your first

experiences with gender. In adolescence, we will discuss how those initial experiences of gender influenced your gender identity. These discussions will lead into the present-day section of the interview where we will discuss your current gender identity and how you believe your past experiences led to this identity. After the present-day experiences section, I will ask some more questions focused on your view of masculine norms in our society, and generally what it means to be a man. As everyone's gender identity is unique and often complex, the questions I have listed in the transcript as well as the sections themselves may change depending on the flow of our discussion. My goal is to open a dialogue between the transcommunity and researchers so that we can add your perspective on gender which will help us to understand gender as a whole and move past dated beliefs of gender. In addition, I am interested in hearing your personal story of how you came to align with a transgender identity, and how masculinity may or may not have played a role in adopting this identity. With all of this being said, I would like for you to begin sharing your life story with me, so let's begin with your earliest memories of childhood.

Part 2: Childhood experiences

Goal: To learn about the participant's earliest experiences with gender.

- What was your family life like? Who did you live with? Who were you closest to?
- What was the first experience you had with gender?
- What gender did you first identify with? Why?
- Generally speaking, what was your childhood (experiences before 12-years-old) like? How was school, friendships, involvements?
- What one or two stories do you remember most clearly about your childhood?
- What were your interests like as a child?

Part 3: Adolescent experiences

Goal: To begin connecting some early childhood experiences to adolescent experiences and learning about how the participant's gender developed.

- What was your adolescence like (middle school, junior high, high school)?
- What was your relationship with your parents and closest friends like during this stage?
- What was your experience of gender in adolescence?
- How did your views/opinions of gender change or not change from childhood?
- What were a few events in your adolescence that you feel influenced your gender identity?

Part 4: Present-day experiences

Goal: To bridge the gap between early experiences and present experiences and to understand how they affected the participant's identity in present day.

- What gender do you identify as now? Why?
- Overall, how positive do you feel about your self-identification as a transgender individual?

- How do you express your gender? What about the clothing you wear, the day-to-day activities you do, and the pronouns you use?
- How do you think others perceive your gender?
- What are your friends and relationships like? Family life?
- Who have you come out to? What helped you come out to that person or group? What prevented you from coming out to others?
- Have you found a community as a transgender individual?
- What sort of reactions do you typically see from people when you tell them about your gender?
- Was there a moment in your life where you felt right or complete in your gender identity? If yes, could you describe this moment? If no, why not?

Part 5: Views of masculinity norms and concepts

Goal: To further investigate the ways the participant has aligned with masculinity and to understand their perspective on masculinity and gender.

- You told me earlier you identify as _____, how much of your identity do you see is male? Why? What characteristics do you believe are associated with being a man?
- What does it mean to be a man?
- How is a man different from other genders?
- What do you believe is required for someone to pass as a man?
- Is identifying as a transman different from identifying as a man? If so, how?
- What characteristics do you associate with masculinity?
- Do you believe other people share the same ideas you do about masculinity?

Part 6: Closing Statements

Goal: To ensure that the participant has had the chance to say anything they believe is important and related to gender.

- Is there anything that you feel we missed or did not go over?
- Do you have any other thoughts or opinions on masculinity or gender as a whole that you feel is important to talk about?
- In general, is there anything that you wish to clarify?
- Given all that we have talked about, when you imagine yourself in the future, what do you hope to see?
- What did you think about the questions asked in this interview? Are there any you thought were particularly good? Were there any you thought should be revised or removed? Are there any questions you think should be asked or topics that should be included in this interview in the future?

Remind Participants of Information on Consent Form

- If you have any other questions regarding this study, feel free to contact my mentor, Dr. Joseph Schwab, or myself. Our contact information is on the consent form provided to you.
- If you feel anxious, worried, or have any further experiences that you feel compelled to share with a professional, we have listed contact information for campus resources, such as the wellness center, transgender support groups, and the Pride Center that can all help you, on the consent form.
- Give them \$20, have them fill out the receipt and reimbursement form.