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Transgender Women and the Male Gaze: Gender, the Body, and the Pressure to Conform

Lefebvre, Danielle

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

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Gender, the Body, and the Pressure to Conform

by

Danielle Lefebvre

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Abstract

Transgender women may feel pressured to achieve certain societal standards for women that are largely created and reinforced by a society that prioritizes male perspectives. The male gaze, as it is termed, has been found to be associated with appearance anxiety, body shame, and insecurity for cisgender women. To date, the experience of the male gaze has not been examined exclusively with transgender women. It is a particularly important topic to explore as transgender women often face additional discrimination and pressure for being transgender. The current study aimed to answer the following research question: How does the male gaze influence the experiences of transgender women with their body? Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was used to analyze interviews with eleven transgender women. Four themes emerged from the data: (a) male gaze as potentially harmful and dehumanizing, (b) internalization of the male gaze, (c) male gaze as affirming, and (d) absence or rejection of the male gaze. Subthemes were also identified and explored. This research is significant for several reasons. Understanding the experiences of transgender women and the male gaze allows for more targeted interventions and guidance for mental health practice. On a larger scale, this study informs on advocacy, and challenges cultural expectations and stereotypes for transgender women, while emphasizing self-expression, authenticity, and acceptance.

Key words: Male Gaze; Transgender; Transgender Women; Body; Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

Preface

This thesis is the original, independent, unpublished work by Danielle C. Lefebvre. The certificate issued by the University of Calgary Conjoint Research Ethics Board for the Project, "Transgender Women and the Male Gaze: Gender, the Body, and the Pressure to Conform" (ID: REB18-1677) on May 29, 2019, covered in the study described in Chapters 3 and 4.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Gender is a broad social construct that is important to many people's personal identities. Recently, society is beginning to move towards an understanding that there are not only two genders, but rather a complex and intricate web of genders. With this shift has come more interest in researching gender and the experiences of those individuals who do challenge society's traditional conceptualizations of it. However, society, specifically the ingrained social structures and citizens who enforce systemic misogyny and heteronormativity, continues to attempt to regulate how people present and identify in several ways, including through the male gaze, or the ways in which women are depicted as objects for the viewing pleasures of men (Mulvey, 1975). Such individuals and structures often pressure transgender people to look and act certain ways in order to be accepted by society and avoid discrimination. What is more, little research has been conducted to understand what the experience of the male gaze may be like for transgender individuals, specifically transgender women. Therefore, I explored transgender women's experiences of the male gaze, particularly as it relates to their bodies and societal norms. This chapter will begin by discussing appropriate language and terminology related to the study goals.

Sexuality and Gender Identities

There are a variety of acronyms that are used to represent diverse gender identities and sexualities, including 2SLGBTQ+ (Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer, and the plus refers to questioning, pansexual, intersex, asexual, and more). The most common acronym is LGBT, which has since expanded to LGBTQ+. Recently, as a way to acknowledge the traditions of Indigenous peoples and the diversity that exists, the acronym became 2SLGBTQ+. . Queer is a term that comes up in this thesis, and broadly refers to sexual and

gender minorities (Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation [GLAAD], 2019). This is by no means an exhaustive list, and there are certainly many more identities that exist which are meant to be captured by the plus sign. Other acronyms have also been suggested in place of 2SLGBTQ+: MOGII (marginalized orientated, gender identity, and intersex), and SOGI (sexual orientation and gender identity). There are terms and acronyms that are, and historically have been, derogatory and offensive, which will be described in further detail below. The use of acronyms is largely based on personal preference of the individual identifying as a member of the 2SLGBTQ+ community and the cultural climate. As it is the most common and current form, I will use the 2SLGBTQ+ acronym throughout this thesis.

Gender is a complicated concept, and there are many different theories that attempt to conceptualize gender and explain how it develops. *Gender*, or gender identity, refers to a person's internal gender, and is not the same as *sex*, which is assigned at birth based on certain traits (e.g., genitalia, chromosomes). *Transgender*, therefore, refers to someone whose gender identity is different from the sex they were assigned at birth, while *cisgender* refers to someone whose gender identity is the same as the sex they were assigned. Sometimes, transgender people may choose to say they were assigned/designated female at birth (AFAB/DFAB) or assigned male at birth (AMAB/DMAB). *Transgender* does not only apply to transgender women and transgender men, but it can also refer to people who are non-binary (not exclusively male or female), genderfluid (gender varies over time), agender (without gender). Intersex people may also identify as transgender if the sex that was selected for them at birth does not match their gender identity. Intersex people are born with variations in sex characteristics (e.g., genitalia) that do not "fit" within the binary, biological understandings of male and female. Being intersex may be apparent at birth, during puberty, or sometimes not at all (GLAAD, 2019). It is also

important to acknowledge the role of culture in gender-related terminology. For example, some Indigenous peoples prefer the use of the term *Two-Spirit* to reflect a "third gender." *Two-Spirit* can both refer to someone who has a feminine and masculine spirit, and to sexual orientation (Filice, 2015). Not all Indigenous peoples use this term as many have their own terms in their own languages, which will be described in more detail later on. Across many cultures, gender is separate and distinct from sexual orientation, although the two often get conflated.

When discussing the experiences of transgender people, particularly within the field of psychology and medicine, dysphoria is a term that may come up. *Dysphoria*, as a broad term, refers to an unease or discomfort, and gender dysphoria, therefore, describes a discomfort with one's gender. It is often described as a disconnect between the body and mind, with the body "appearing" as one gender, but the individual identifying as another. Gender dysphoria is often used by medical and mental health professionals, such as psychologists, where a diagnosis of gender dysphoria is often required to begin any intervention, such as hormones and surgery (Bizic et al., 2018; Dhejne, van Vlerken, Heylens, & Arcelus, 2016). Transgender people themselves may elect to use this term to describe their experience, while others may avoid using dysphoria due to its roots in medicine and diagnosis. Dysphoria can also occur as body dysphoria and social dysphoria. Body dysphoria refers to a fixation with and on a body part(s), or one's whole body. The body part(s) and the perceived flaw may not be noticeable to others, but often becomes a source of anxiety and distress to the individual. As it relates to transgender individuals, it may be distress due to certain body parts that are not associated with their gender (e.g., genitalia). Social dysphoria is the distress or discomfort that occurs in social situations, and relates to how one is perceived by society. For transgender people, social dysphoria can refer to not being perceived as their gender and thus being misgendered, and it can also refer to the

societal expectations of one's gender that do not fit with their identity (Fallon, Colby, Hedge, & Frey, 2019; Parekh, 2016; Roman, 2018). Not all transgender people experience dysphoria in the same way, or label it as such. Some may experience dysphoria in all areas, and some may not experience dysphoria at all. In addition, as will be discussed, cisgender people may also experience these forms of dysphoria, and it is not exclusive to transgender people. Therefore, the experience, or lack thereof, of dysphoria is entirely unique to each individual.

When discussing appropriate language and terminology, it is also important to know what terms are not appropriate to use when describing transgender individuals. Words such as "Berdache," "transgendered," "transvestite," "transsexual," and "male-to-female"/"female-to-male" (as they may have never identified as the former) are generally considered offensive. *Queer* has been considered offensive by some individuals, largely because of how it has been historically used to be derogative and insulting (Perlman, 2019). Recently, it is beginning to be reclaimed; however, some still find it offensive. Therefore, it will only be used in this thesis if participants use it, to avoid using potentially offensive terminology. "Passing" is also not acceptable as it implies that a person is only "passing" as their gender, rather than actually *being* their gender (GLAAD, 2019). Those within the transgender community may feel comfortable using some of these terms, but it is generally not acceptable for cisgender people to use these terms, and so they will not be used in this thesis. The term is quoted if it is referenced in the cited literature or mentioned by participants.

Transphobia

Transphobia is a broad term that describes prejudice, negative attitudes, and harmful actions towards transgender people. Transphobia can occur in many forms, including discrimination, harassment, violence, avoidance, dismissing gender, misgendering, and hatred of

transgender people (Hill & Willoughby, 2005). Misgendering can be accidental or deliberate, with some individuals consciously using the transgender person's "deadname," or the name that was given to them at birth which they no longer use (Merriam Webster, 2019). When someone uses their deadname, this is referred to as being "deadnamed." Some transgender individuals refer to their birth name as their deadname while others may not. In a study by Trans PULSE (Bauer & Scheim, 2015), a Canadian organization, researchers found that virtually all transgender participants reported regular experiences of transphobia. For instance, 73% had been bullied for being transgender and 67% worried they would die young due to the prevalence of transphobia and hatred expressed towards transgender people (Bauer & Scheim, 2015). Transmisogyny is a specific form of transphobia and includes both transphobia and misogyny. Misogyny is the hate or contempt for women, thus transmisogyny refers to the discrimination and hatred towards transgender people who are more feminine (Serano, 2007) and, as such, is particularly relevant to this study which is focused on transgender women's experience of the male gaze.

Some transgender people choose to pursue medical interventions as part of their transition. Interventions are not necessary for everyone's transition, and the validity of a person's gender does not depend on what procedures they have or have not experienced. One of the main interventions is hormone replacement therapy (HRT), or simply hormone therapy (HT). Generally, people are given either estrogen and anti-androgens if they are hoping to appear more feminine, and androgens if they are hoping to appear more masculine (Trans Care, 2019; Unger, 2016). It is also possible, though not necessary, that transgender people will choose to pursue surgery as part of their transition, and these are often referred to as gender-affirmation surgeries. Generally, the main surgery options are "top" and "bottom" surgeries. "Top" surgery refers to

surgery on the chest, whether that be breast augmentation, mastectomy, or chest reconstruction. "Bottom" surgery generally refers to surgery on the genital area, and may involve phalloplasty (construction of a penis), metoidioplasty (use of existing genital tissue for the penis), orchiectomy (removal of testes), and vaginoplasty, although this list is not exhaustive (Healthcare Utah, 2019; Kuper, Nussbaum, & Mustanski, 2011). Again, it is essential to understand that these are only possible interventions an individual may choose to pursue; they are by no means expectations for all transgender people, nor are they necessary for one's gender identity to be valid.

In order to situate the findings of this study, and to understand the context in which transgender people exist in the West (parts of Europe, Australasia, and specifically North America), it is important to explore the history of transgender people and their rights. As the current study is situated in the West, only the history of Western transgender people will be explored. However, many countries and cultures have their own histories. The "first" accounts of transgender people are varied and sparse; this could possibly be due to a lack of recognition of transgender people in the past, as transgender people have always existed. There are more concrete records when it comes to surgeries performed. The first recorded phalloplasty was performed by Dr. Harold Gillies on Michael Dillon, a transgender man, in 1946 (Kennedy, 2007). There are fewer records regarding the development of other procedures, such as vaginoplasty. The history of transgender rights is much more detailed and reached a major turning point in 1969 with the Stonewall Riots. The Stonewall Riots occurred at the Stonewall Inn, one of the few places that welcomed 2SLGBTQ+ people, in New York City where people of the 2SLGBTQ+ community protested and rebelled against a police raid. At the time, there were significant legal barriers for people in the 2SLGBTQ+ community, and many citizens had

negative perspectives about them, which is, unfortunately, still common today. The Stonewall Riots were particularly revolutionary as it demonstrated to the 2SLGBTQ+ community that there was much work that needed to be done ensure equal rights for individuals who identify as 2SLGBTQ+ and it was essential that they form a solid community moving forward. Thus, 2SLGBTQ+ activist organizations, including the Gay Liberation Front (GLF), Gay Activists Alliance, and the beginning of Gay Pride, arose from the Stonewall Riots to advocate for the rights of 2SLGBTQ+ people across North America (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2019; Grinberg, 2019). Since then, the rights of transgender people have progressed significantly. In Canada, transgender people are free to change their sex on their birth certificates, as well as other records, and can choose to not designate their sex as male or female on government identification (IDs). In addition, transgender people have legal protections against discrimination, although this does not mean they do not still experience discrimination. One such area in which these laws are reflected is in the military, in which transgender people can serve, which is different from other countries and historically in Canada (Harris, 2019). This is by no means an exhaustive history of transgender people and rights in North America, rather a brief outline of some of the significant events. In addition, this section is not claiming that no more work is needed, as there is certainly more progress that needs to be made, rather it is to highlight that there has been progress in North America in the last several decades.

Male Gaze

The concept of the male gaze was developed by feminist film theorist, Laura Mulvey, in 1975. The male gaze describes a phenomenon in which women are depicted as submissive objects for the viewing pleasures of men, particularly "masculine," heterosexual, cisgender men (Mulvey, 1975). As a film theory, it involves men holding three perspectives: (a) behind the

camera, (b) characters in the film, and (c) the audience. The women in the films therefore hold two functions: (a) erotic objects for the characters, and (b) erotic objects for the spectators/audience. These perspectives have strong ties to misogyny (the dislike of and prejudice against women) and patriarchy (privilege, power, and control given to men in a particular social system). The male gaze has since been applied to realms outside of film and is recognized as a phenomenon that occurs in everyday life. The male gaze can involve verbal harassment, objectification, and a general pressure to look and be a certain way (Clark, 2017). It can be perpetuated by men, society more broadly through systemic and institutional structures, those who are not men, and by the self through internalization and self-monitoring.

The male gaze can also influence other men, particularly when men do not conform to traditional gender norms (i.e., stoic, independent, strong, assertive). Specifically, when men demonstrate non-masculine traits, or more "feminine" traits, such as kindness, emotionality, vulnerability, and pacifism, they may be faced with significant backlash (Mayer, 2018). For example, identifying as a feminist or being associated with femininity in some way may increase men's likelihood of experiencing sexual harassment themselves in the workplace (Holland, Rabelo, Gustafson, Seabrook, & Cortina, 2016; Lee, 2000). Sexual harassment in Holland et al.'s (2016) study included sexual coercion (attempting to facilitate a sexual relationship using job-related threats or bribes), unwanted sexual attention, and gender harassment (hostile behaviours, verbal harassment, degradation). While the characteristics of the perpetrators of harassment were not explicitly stated, previous research suggests that harassment can be carried out by men and women (Lee, 2000), and the goal of sexual harassment is to enforce traditional masculinity and "punish" men who do not conform to these norms. In addition, as men are expected to be independent, it has been found that men asking for help leads to them being viewed as less

competent and confident (Rosette, Mueller, & Lebel, 2015). Similarly, men who demonstrate some form of vulnerability are viewed as lesser compared to men who maintain an image of "strength" and independence (Gibson, Harari, & Marr, 2018). As it relates to emotions, men who show sadness or other "unacceptable" emotions (i.e., not stoicism or anger), are considered "unworthy" of experiencing those emotions as a man, and are seen as less competent and less likely to receive promotions at work (Fischer, Eagly, & Oosterwijk, 2013). Therefore, the male gaze is not just harmful to women; it can negatively impact the way individuals view, police, and respond to men who deviate from social expectations. Therefore, we need to emphasize flexibility, openness, and diversity in expression so that people are able to exist in the way that they want.

The male gaze has been tied to other concepts that help in understanding it. Scopophilia is one such concept. Chandler and Munday (2011) provided a definition in the *Dictionary of Media and Communication (1st ed.*):

> Pleasure in looking; in Freudian psychoanalytic theory, an infantile instinct. In relation to the dominance of the male gaze in classical Hollywood cinema, Mulvey refers to scopophilia as the pleasure involved in looking at other people's bodies as (particularly, erotic) objects without being seen either by those on screen or by other members of the audience. Mulvey argues that cinema viewing conditions facilitate both the voyeuristic process of the objectification of female characters and also the narcissistic process of identification with an ideal ego seen on the screen.

Freud's use of scopophilia initially referred to a developmental stage but it has since expanded to refer to more voyeuristic tendencies and a pleasure in observing others. It speaks to, in a sense, being removed from the gazed upon and, therefore, feeling as though one has permission to gaze

upon them without consequence. Here, narcissism refers to a lack of empathy, selfishness, and a tendency to dehumanize others. It relates to scopophilia as it is gazing for oneself and for one's pleasure. By not viewing those they are gazing upon as people, one can gaze without remorse.

Another highly criticized psychoanalytic term that is partially related to the male gaze is that of phallocentrism, or the idea that the phallus is central to society and how the world operates (Ermarth, 1992). It is a very rudimentary and Freudian way of stating that society is patriarchal. This term is problematic in that it, along with Freud's earlier descriptions of "penis envy," sorts people into those who either have a penis and those who do not, and those who have a penis are afforded more power and society. Furthermore, not all men have penises and thus the term phallocentrism is outdated.

To understand the "gaze" component, it helps to consider Foucault's metaphorical panopticon (Foucault, 1975). A panopticon is a structure used in prisons and asylums that allow an observer, typically a guard, to observe all at all times. The panopticon relates to the term *omniscience*, or "all knowing," as the observer may always be watching. They may not necessarily be watching, but the thought that someone could be watching, and has the opportunity to do so, creates a sense of paranoia for those being observed. Those gazed upon may also not always realize they are under scrutiny. Foucault specifically used the term in reference to societal surveillance and a need to watch others. A key component of the panopticon is the disciplinary component. Since it was originally intended for prison systems, the panopticon was used to ensure prisoners were following the rules and behaving appropriately. As it applies to society, the metaphorical use of panopticon also refers to observing and policing others to fit societal norms (Foucault, 1975). There are clear parallels between Foucault's panopticon and the male gaze, in that they both watch and evaluate to push others to fit the norms or risk some form

of punishment. As it relates to this study, the metaphor of the panopticon describes the male gaze and how one might gaze upon transgender women as a way to monitor their appearance and behaviour, and subsequently impose a set of standards on to them as a way to maintain order.

Study Significance

Understanding the experiences of transgender women with the male gaze is important for several reasons. Generally, there is a deficit in the research with regards to transgender people. Historically, heteronormative and patriarchal social structures, as well as individuals who embody these norms, discriminate against transgender people for not conforming to norms, claiming that their experience is not real, or that they should be punished for "disrupting" the order of society. Research examining the experiences of cisgender women with the male gaze highlights how the male gaze influences appearance anxiety, body shame, and feelings of insecurity (e.g., Clark, 2017). Transgender women may have experiences that are both similar and different to those of cisgender women. Transgender women offer unique insights into their experiences with the male gaze due to having previously been socialized into a male role, having received certain messages from society, and having to cope with an additional layer of discrimination to being women, that of transphobia.

It is also important to explore this particular topic as it will allow us to challenge existing harmful systems. It allows us to understand the ways in which individuals and misogynistic structures observe, police, and evaluate or judge others based on societal expectations. This research will also help to broaden an understanding of gender and contribute to an emerging body of literature that recognizes that gender is not a strict binary based on biology. There is much diversity in gender, and this diversity is something to encourage and embrace as a society. In addition, understanding that there is not only one way to be a gender is critical. Allowing for

diversity of self-expression, and the freedom to live authentically is imperative for everyone, particularly transgender people who have been made to live as the wrong gender. Understanding that it is wrong to police another person's appearance based on our own assumptions, socialization, and stereotypes is also an important goal of the current study. Highlighting how the male gaze may police transgender women and attempt to enforce a rigid binary will help us in taking the necessary steps forward.

Relationship to Topic

A more detailed exploration of my personal relationship to the topic, including my identities and possible biases, is in the third chapter of this thesis. Part of the research process included extensive self-reflection, so that I may understand my position in the research and my beliefs as they pertain to this study (Clancy, 2013). My interest in this topic was piqued when I found the "male gaze" and understood some of the oppressive experiences I, and those close to me, have had. The messages I have received conveyed that my appearance, and existence more generally, was for the benefit of men, not for myself. It was my understanding that I had to dress a certain way, wear makeup – but not too much – and behave in a way that would be "appropriate" as a woman; submissive, quiet, and to be controlled. According to the male gaze, my goal in life was to attract a man and get married, and not doing so would make me less worthy as a woman and as a human being. I grew dissatisfied and frustrated with these societal messages, as I thoroughly enjoyed pursuing other goals, including my own personal academic and career pursuits, but this was not seen as enough to be worthy as a person.

I have also had an interest in gender and understanding its complexity and diversity. My interest in working with transgender women for this study stemmed from wanting to understand how they experienced the male gaze. My position, as a social constructivist, is that gender is a

social construct. However, I do acknowledge and understand that gender can be a significant part of a person's identity and I do not intend to dismiss its importance by taking this stance. It is important to understand why certain social structures exist, and why and how they are perpetuated and reinforced by society. The rigidity with which we enforce gender is problematic, as it can cause distress for those who challenge society's systems.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, relevant terms pertaining to gender and the male gaze were defined. Furthermore, I outlined which terms are appropriate to use, and which are not, in transgender research and society more generally. I provided background information on these concepts to further understanding of the topic. Lastly, my personal experiences and identities were also discussed in relation to the research topic. The next chapter, the literature review, will provide more detail about the relevant concepts involved in the current study. Specifically, background on the male gaze, experiences of transgender people, and existing beauty standards will be explored in depth.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter is divided into four main sections: an exploration of the literature on the experiences of transgender people, the body in context, the male gaze, and a brief explanation of the current study. The literature review on the experiences of transgender individuals outlines accounts of discrimination, violence, and mental health concerns, as well as descriptions of resilience. The body in context section of this chapter explores the societal expectations that exist for women in Western culture, body dissatisfaction, and gender performativity. The section on the male gaze explores the literature surrounding the concept and its influence on individuals who identify as female. Lastly, an explanation of the current study is provided.

Transgender Individuals

As stated in the introduction, gender is different and separate from biological sex, and there are a variety of gender identities that can, and do, exist; transgender is one such identity. Transgender can be used to refer to anyone whose gender identity is different from the sex they were assigned at birth (GLAAD, 2007), and does not only apply to transgender women or transgender men. The experiences of transgender people are also varied and diverse, and the purpose of this section is not to generalize the literature to all transgender people, but rather to provide a review of the existing literature as it pertains to the current study. When considering the literature, it is imperative to explore both negative experiences, as well as the strengths and resiliency of transgender people. This balance is important to prevent the dismissal of experiences and areas that need improvement, as well as to avoid reinforcing the stereotype that being transgender is a wholly negative experience. In this section, the experiences of transgender people will be explored in reference to discrimination, violence, mental health concerns, and resiliency.

Discrimination

Discrimination refers to the action or decision to treat a person or group of people poorly, or make a distinction towards someone, based on one or more aspects of their identity, such as race, age, disability, sexual orientation, or gender identity (Canadian Human Rights Commission [CHR], 2019). Transgender people may experience discrimination and barriers in a variety of areas, including medical care, housing, education, and employment (e.g., Bradford, Reiner, Honnold, & Xavier, 2013; Factor & Rothblum, 2007; Winter et al., 2016). Bradford et al. (2013) highlighted discrimination based on multiple intersections of identity, including socioeconomic status (SES), race/ethnicity, ability to obtain healthcare, location, and social support, or lack thereof, for transgender people. They highlighted that one's identity as a transgender person cannot be separated from their other identities, all of which may influence their experiences of discrimination. Factor and Rothblum (2007) reported similar findings when comparing transgender individuals to their non-transgender siblings. Transgender people were significantly more likely to experience discrimination, harassment, and violence compared to their cisgender siblings. They also received far less support from family members. Winter et al. (2016) noted that this discrimination and stigma often perpetuates a negative cycle that marginalizes transgender people and keeps them from accessing services, such as medical treatments and mental health supports, which serves to further isolate them.

One term that frequently arises in discussions about transgender people and discrimination is the controversial concept of "passing." "Passing" refers to being correctly perceived as one's gender, with the individual not being identified as "visibly transgender" (GLAAD, 2019). "Stealth" is a similar term, and equally controversial, and refers to blending with one's gender and not being identifiable as transgender. Passing is considered offensive

because it implies a person is passing as something they are not. For transgender people, this would infer that they are not their gender, but rather passing as it. Similarly, stealth implies deceit and has obvious negative connotations, implying that transgender people are "tricking" others. While transgender people may use terms like passing themselves, it is generally not appropriate for cisgender people and media to use them. Instead, GLAAD (2019) suggests using "visibly transgender" and "not visibly transgender." As these terms are recommended by GLAAD, they will be used in parts of this thesis. However, these terms may also be based on stereotypes as to what a transgender person "looks like" and careful attention needs to be paid to avoid using these terms with the intent to imply that a transgender person is not their gender.

Alternatively, related to the notion of "not visibly transgender," Sevelius (2013) uses "gender affirmed" to refer to being correctly identified as one's gender, and so, where possible, this term will also be used as it avoids assumptions of what a transgender person looks like. When referring to gender identity and being identified as their gender within a social situation, gender affirmed/affirmation will be used. In the context of appearance, when one's transgender identity appears to be at the forefront, "not visibly transgender" will be used. A need for affirmation was identified in Sevelius' research, as many participants desired to be correctly identified as their gender, for personal reasons and for safety. Not having one's gender affirmed is invalidating and demonstrates a lack of support and acceptance. "Passing," the term used in Sevelius' study, was also identified as important for access to healthcare and hormones, both of which were understandably important to participants. Another study with transgender women found that body image was related to societal stereotypes as to what is acceptable for women, and other traits (e.g., large hands, sharp jawline) were considered undesirable (Gordon, Austin, Krieger, Hughto, & Reisner, 2016). The researchers noted an internalization of transphobia and a

normalization of societal norms for women, as well as participants' biases towards those who did not "pass." Gordon et al. also mentioned that there is significantly more pressure to adhere to societal norms and "pass," and so this was not a criticism, but rather highlighted the impact of society's expectations and the very real dangers transgender people face.

In terms of visibility, there is often a lot of debate and distress. Articles by Godfrey (2015) and Xavier (2010) reported that there is a certain privilege that comes with not being visibly transgender. Being able to "appear" as cisgender directly relates to safety in that if one is not identified as transgender, they are less likely to experience violence, harassment, and discrimination that often comes with being visibly transgender. The debate within the transgender community is whether or not a desire to be identified as cisgender is conforming to norms and stereotypes of how that gender, and thus transgender people, should look and act. Many within the transgender community reject the desire or pressure to "fit" society's standards, and are instead choosing to live authentically (Godfrey, 2015). It is a complex issue as safety is an integral part in the decision about how one presents themselves. The purpose of exploring the situation is not to pass judgement either way or to say which is correct, but rather to highlight the complexity of the circumstances some transgender people face: a conflict between living authentically and being safe, which should not be a choice anyone has to make.

Violence. Violence is a particularly dangerous component of discrimination against transgender people. Rodríguez-Madera et al. (2016) conducted a study with transgender people in Puerto Rico and found that many of the participants experienced violence (e.g., verbal, physical). 74% knew a transgender person who was murdered, and 69% knew a transgender person who had been beaten because of their gender. Similarly, a study with 402 transgender participants found that a quarter experienced some form of violence (physical, sexual, verbal),

and this was further amplified by economic discrimination (Lombardi, Wilchins, Priesing, & Malouf, 2002), highlighting the importance of exploring the experiences of transgender individuals from an intersectional lens. Klemmer, Arayasirikul, and Raymond (2018) investigated violence and discrimination against transgender women and found that 90.7% experienced discrimination or violence in one or more areas of their daily life (e.g., work, housing) for their gender identity. Additionally, 84.1% of participants reported experiencing verbal abuse or harassment based on their identity, and 63.5% experienced physical violence for being transgender. Further, a review of several studies on gender-based violence (e.g., physical intimate partner violence, and sexual non-partner violence) against transgender people across the United States yielded a prevalence of violence ranging from 7-89%, with physical intimate partner violence being the highest. Sexual intimate partner violence was the second highest at 69% (Wirtz, Poteat, Malik, & Glass, 2018). Moreover, Stotzer (2009) reviewed self-report questionnaires, needs assessments, hot-line calls, social service records, and police reports to examine transgender people's experiences of violence. It was found that violence against transgender people typically begins early in life, occurs in multiple forms at multiple times, and persists throughout their lives.

Sexual violence against transgender people is also particularly high, especially compared to their cisgender counterparts. In the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey, it was reported that 47% of transgender people have been sexually assaulted at some point in their lives. The rates increased for Indigenous transgender people (65%) and Black transgender people (53%), which indicates the importance of considering intersectionality when working with transgender individuals (James et al., 2016). In Canada, the Trans PULSE Project reported that 20% of transgender people had experienced physical and/or sexual violence for being transgender (Bauer & Scheim,

2015). Many of the participants did not report to the police for fear of further discrimination and harassment, with 24% reporting past harassment from police themselves. Furthermore, it has also been found that 43% of gender diverse and Two-Spirit people in Canada experienced some form of physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime (Scheim et al., 2013). Supporting these findings, in Stotzer's (2009) review of the literature on violence against transgender people in the United States, sexual violence was found to be one of the main concerns from self-reports surveys. The prevalence of sexual violence appeared to be higher for transgender women compared to transgender men, which may be attributed to how society views and treats women (Waites, 1982). It was found that sexual violence against transgender people also begins at an early age and persists throughout one's life. Stotzer reported that sexual violence was motivated by a hatred of, or negative attitudes toward, transgender people, and was most often perpetrated by partners or family members.

The rates of violence against transgender people are alarming and indicate a strong need for societal change to address negative attitudes, perceptions, and violent reactions towards transgender people. Experiencing violence and discrimination is associated with increased prevalence of depression, anxiety, somatization (e.g., Klemmer et al., 2018; Sánchez & Vilain, 2009), substance abuse, and suicide (Xavier, Bobbin, Singer, & Budd, 2005) for transgender people. Testa et al. (2012) examined the effects of violence on transgender people and found that those who had experienced violence were more likely to have a history of suicide attempts. Transgender men and women were both more likely to engage in alcohol abuse, and transgender women were more likely to engage in illicit substance use. These researchers also found that violence was generally gender related and perpetrated by a variety of individuals (e.g., strangers, family, and partners). There was a low prevalence of reporting assaults to the police for fear of

being further discriminated against, which is particularly concerning given the lack of a sense of safety around those who are supposed to keep them safe.

Mental Health Concerns

The literature illustrates that transgender individuals often experience a variety of mental health concerns (e.g., Carmel & Erickson-Schroth, 2016; McCann, 2015), including depression, suicidal ideation (Budge, Adelson, & Kimberly, 2013), and weight and shape control behaviours (Gordon et al., 2016). However, there is a tendency of the medical and mental health fields to pathologize transgender people. While many transgender people may experience mental health concerns, not all do and their behaviour and feelings should not simply be considered symptoms, but rather understood through their experiences. This reflects the impact of possible discrimination, harassment, and violence, rather than considering the symptoms as solely residing within the individual and placing them at fault. Understandably, discrimination and violence are often related to poorer mental health (e.g., Carmel & Erickson-Schroth, 2016; Klemmer et al., 2018; McCann, 2015; Sánchez & Vilain, 2009) due to its attack on self-esteem, self-worth, and more generally, a person's existence. Therefore, the literature reporting on the mental health of transgender people should be interpreted with caution and the context of discrimination and violence in mind. The purpose of this section is to illustrate the impact of discrimination and violence, not to pathologize or generalize to all transgender people.

Depression and anxiety. Depression and anxiety are particularly common topics explored in the literature on transgender people. Research suggests that transgender people, particularly if they are not receiving hormone treatment, are four times more likely to experience depression compared to their cisgender counterparts (Witcomb et al., 2018). Witcomb et al. (2018) also found that older age, and poorer self-esteem, interpersonal relationships, and social

support were predictors of depression. This is particularly concerning given that it is not uncommon for family and social networks to be unsupportive of transgender people (e.g., Factor & Rothblum, 2007). Supporting Witcomb's findings, Williams et al. (2017) conducted a study in Canada with women and transgender/gender liminal (e.g., ambiguous, questioning, fluid) people. A high prevalence of depression was found, particularly for those who experienced frequent discrimination. Also similar to Witcomb's findings, Gómez-Gil et al. (2012) research at a gender identity clinic in Spain demonstrated that transgender people not receiving hormone treatment had significantly higher anxiety than those who were using hormones. This research demonstrates that there are many factors that may contribute to mental health concerns for transgender people, and it is not simply an internal experience. Mental health concerns are situated within the cultures in which they exist, how they are treated by others, and access, or lack thereof, to resources.

Suicidality. In addition to experiences of depression and anxiety that stem from gender-based victimization, suicide is also a common concern. In an extensive review of the literature by Haas et al. (2011), it was found that approximately 19-25% of transgender people have attempted suicide, which is two times more likely than LGB people. Other articles report the prevalence to be around 22-43% (Bauer, Schiem, Travers, & Hammond, 2015). Goldblum et al. (2012) conducted a study with 290 transgender individuals and asked about their experiences with gender-based victimization (e.g., bullying) and suicide. These researchers reported that those who experienced victimization due to their gender were four times more likely to have attempted suicide. This highlights the influence of discrimination and violence, and situates suicide within the context of external factors (i.e., victimization), rather than depicting suicide as solely

internally motivated and a "choice" made by an individual (e.g., Clements-Nolle, Marx, & Katz, 2008; Gomez, Miranda, & Polanco, 2011).

Gender dysphoria. Gender dysphoria refers to the distress or discomfort due to a mismatch or disconnect between assigned biological sex and subsequent socialization, and gender identity (Harris & White, 2018). There is debate as to whether or not gender dysphoria should be included in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5), with some opponents suggesting that referring to it as a clinical term further pathologizes transgender people (Gender Spectrum, 2019). Gender dysphoria is considered the opposite of gender congruence (i.e., the harmony and satisfaction one may feel with their gender) and is not the same as gender nonconformity. The terms have often been used interchangeably to refer to a discomfort with societal gender norms, but gender nonconformity does not necessarily evoke distress; instead it is a means of self-expression that does not necessarily align with societal norms and expectations of gender (Parekh, 2016). In addition, gender dysphoria is almost always associated with transgender people, but cisgender people can also experience it. For instance, it can refer to a general discomfort with how society genders a person's body or the gender roles that are expected of them (Gender Spectrum, 2019).

Being "visibly transgender" may contribute to a person's experience of gender dysphoria. If they do not see their bodies aligning with their minds (i.e., their bodies not "looking" like what is expected of their gender), this can contribute to distress (Gordon et al., 2016), and may impact a transgender person's body satisfaction, although this might not always be the case (van de Grift et al., 2016). In Gordon et al. (2016) study, the majority of the participants engaged in weight and shape control behaviours, such as binging, fasting, and purging, as a way to obtain the societal ideal. Gender socialization and exposure to societal expectations for women was

identified as a major theme in developing these weight and shape control behaviours. In addition, participants in this study were low-income and from a variety of ethnic backgrounds (e.g., Black, Latina), indicating that the pressure of societal standards reaches a variety of people from a variety of backgrounds. It indicates the importance of intersectionality in research and life more generally, and that one's gender identity must be considered in conjunction with their other identities. This research is also particularly relevant to the current study, as it highlights the pervasiveness of beauty standards and the impact it may have on transgender women. Therefore, with the current study, the hope is to challenge these standards and demonstrate its potential influence on transgender women and their experiences with their bodies.

In sum, transgender people may experience discrimination and violence in a variety of forms based on their gender, and this can be exacerbated by other identities and social locations, including ethnicity. Experiences of discrimination and violence can contribute to depression, anxiety, and suicidality. Body-related concerns, such as dissatisfaction and dysphoria, have also been reported. However, that transgender people persevere and continue to strive for authenticity, and the next section will illuminate these strengths.

Resilience

Social support, particularly from family, has been identified as a major protective factor for transgender people, and has been found to be related to resilience (Puckett, Matsuno, Dyar, Mustanski, & Newcomb, 2019). These findings are supported by another study, which found that resources and support help foster resilience for transgender people (Zeeman, Aranda, Sherriff, & Cocking, 2017). Knowledge, awareness, and engagement have also been found to be protective factors against mental health concerns for transgender people (Testa, Jimenez, & Rankin, 2014). Resilience can manifest in many forms and includes coping, standing up for oneself and resisting

discrimination, and finding safe places and people (Scourfield, Roen, & McDermott, 2008). In addition, activism and advocacy can provide a sense of empowerment and resilience, particularly when society may be pushing back against progress (Bockting et al., 2019). Discussed below are several important studies that have examined the resilience of transgender people.

Singh and McKelroy (2011) conducted a qualitative study with eleven transgender people of colour regarding resilience after a traumatic life event(s) (e.g., sexual abuse). The following themes were developed from the interviews: (a) pride in one's gender and ethnic identity, (b) recognizing and negotiating oppression, (c) navigating familial relationships, (d) accessing healthcare and financial resources, (e) connecting with the community, and (f) cultivating spirituality and hope. These findings reflect the adaptability, resourcefulness, and resiliency of many transgender people, especially in the face of tremendous adversity and oppression. To find hope, pride, and connection following trauma and ongoing discrimination reflects immense strength and commitment to oneself. Singh conducted another similar study with colleagues Hays and Watson (2011) examining resilience strategies of transgender people. Findings were similar in that themes of hope, connection, self-acceptance, and pride arose. In addition, developing personal definitions of the self, involvement in activism, and being a role model for other transgender people were identified as empowering experiences for participants. These findings also highlighted self-compassion, empathy for others, and a commitment to social change to improve the lives of others. Similarly, Higgins, Sharek, and Glacken (2016) investigated how LGBT people in Ireland adapted to adversity, and found similar themes of self-acceptance, empowerment, connection and support, and involvement in the community.

Gordon et al. (2016) research investigated weight and shape control behaviours in 21 transgender women as a way to attain the societal ideal for women, but they also highlighted the

resilience of participants in the face of this pressure. Participants often challenged societal ideals and messages, engaging in media literacy to protect oneself from the pressure of the unrealistic ideal. Knowledge of "fatphobia" (i.e., the dislike and discrimination of people in larger bodies) and the influence of marketing was also helpful in addressing societal pressures. Engaging in positive body talk and surrounding oneself with positive influences was an important strategy employed. Knowledge of the existing societal attitudes and of oneself appeared to be important in adapting to and coping with situations, as well as committing to living authentically. Levitt and Ippolito's (2014) research also investigated how transgender people coped in everyday life, and found that being transgender led to a greater sense of awareness and openness to various gender identities and self-expression. This research highlights the importance of appreciating the diversity present in how individuals express themselves and underscores the value of expanding gender identities beyond the binary. Rather than viewing gender as binary and determined by biology, it is instead important to be open-minded and understand that there is much diversity in gender, and people should be free to express themselves. This is something that we, as a society, should strive for, and we can learn a lot from the ways in which transgender people approach life and self-expression.

Altogether, the literature highlights many of the negative experiences that transgender people may encounter, but it also demonstrates the strength and resilience of the community. As mentioned, it is important to validate the negative experiences, while also emphasizing their resiliency, commitment to the self, and openness to the diversity of gender and self-expression.

The Body in Context

The purpose of focusing on transgender women in this study was to take a critical perspective on the societal norms, expectations, and beauty standards that exist for women, and

how it may influence transgender women. The image that transgender women may feel pressured to achieve is largely created by a patriarchal society, which prioritizes men's perspectives regarding physical appearance, among other things (Bonafini & Pozzilli, 2011). In this section, the current societal expectations for women will be explored, as well as the internalization of the standards, and experiences of objectification.

What is "Beautiful"?

Bonafini and Pozzilli (2011) demonstrated through their analysis of art over the years how societal standards, and thus women's bodies, have changed over time. They identified a constant theme of the ideals for women being dictated by men, although the appearance of "desirable" women has changed. The researchers also noted the influence of media in recent years, and how the body has come to be portrayed as something that can be sold and exploited based on what is considered desirable. Previously, in eras such as the Renaissance and the 1950s, women in larger bodies were considered desirable as it was a symbol of wealth and fertility. This ideal shifted, starting in the 1960s, to very thin bodies, and in the 2010s, to thin, toned, but sometimes curvy bodies (Forbes, Collinsworth, Jobe, & Wise, 2007). Forbes et al. also identified three factors that have remained constant throughout the changing of beauty ideals for women: (a) the ideals do not represent the bodies of most women, but rather a largely unattainable standard, (b) many women may invest time, energy, and resources to attain these standards, and (c) people of all genders scrutinize and monitor the bodies of women in degrading and demeaning ways to uphold these standards. The third point particularly relates to the male gaze, described in the next section, and all three factors highlight the distress beauty standards can cause women. This distress and body dissatisfaction have become so commonplace it has been

termed “normative discontent” (Rodin, Silberstein, & Striegel-Moore, 1984), and confident women are seen as outliers and anomalies.

The current standard of beauty for women in Western society include: being tall, but not taller than a man; skinny, but with large breasts and butt; tanned, but still white; full lips; long, silky hair; and flawless skin (i.e., no acne, dryness, skin conditions, etc.; Melitauri, 2016). Victoria’s Secret Models are typically considered the embodiment of this “gold standard,” which is concerning as they have strict diet and exercise routines that are not feasible, nor are they healthy, for the average woman (Cook, 2018). These beauty standards are also inherently racist as they prioritize whiteness, but may appropriate style, hair, and certain features (e.g., darker skin, full lips, etc.), which are celebrated when they are embodied by a white person (e.g., Musariri, 2018; Stokes, 2017; Thompson, 2015; Walker, 2015). However, in recent years, there has been a strong push for body diversity and positivity, particularly through social media (Bahr, 2018). In addition, more critical views on societal expectations and the systemic devaluing of certain traits is beginning to gain traction, which indicates hope for the future where beauty is not limited to one specific image (Karazsia, Murnen, & Tylka, 2017).

Internalization and body dissatisfaction. In the age of social media, it is impossible not to be exposed to images of “ideal” beauty. These images are often presented in an extremely favourable manner, in that one who aligns with these standards is highly valued in society, is popular, accepted by their peers, and receives many opportunities (Langlois et al., 2000). It is therefore difficult not to internalize these standards and want to strive for them as a way to gain acceptance and happiness. However, internalization of these standards has been found to be related to higher body dissatisfaction and poorer mood (e.g., Hoffmann & Warschburger, 2019; Yamamiya, Cash, Melnyk, Posavac, & Posavac, 2005). It is also related to body surveillance,

shame, and disordered eating (Dakanalis et al., 2014). This indicates a need to address societal expectations and push for body diversity and acceptance.

Not all transgender people experience body dissatisfaction or dysphoria, but for those who do, the experience is typically more complex. In van de Grift et al. (2016) study conducted with transgender people diagnosed with gender dysphoria, the researchers found that dissatisfaction was often related to specific body parts, rather than body dissatisfaction as a whole. Dissatisfaction with one's genitals and visible characteristics (e.g., muscularity, hair) were the two components related to overall body dissatisfaction. This demonstrates that, for transgender people, there are additional factors related to gender involved in body dissatisfaction. Another study conducted in the UK found that binary transgender people (i.e., transgender women and transgender men) experienced lower gender and body satisfaction compared to non-binary transgender people (Jones, Bouman, Haycraft, & Arcelus, 2019). This was thought to be because there are certain societal body standards for those who fall within the gender binary, but there is less representation and expectations for non-binary people. This is particularly important as it demonstrates the influence of societal norms and expectations for those within the binary, hence the decision to focus on transgender women in the current study. In addition, transgender women have historically not been considered "real" women, and so it is important to conduct research that considers their accounts as part of the experiences of women.

Body dissatisfaction has been found to be related to a variety of concerns, including eating disorders (Jones, Haycraft, Murjian, & Arcelus, 2016), depression (Brechan & Kvalem, 2015), and overall quality of life (de Morais et al., 2017), indicating a need to critically examine and challenge the existing societal norms that may influence body dissatisfaction. As was

mentioned, transgender women may experience pressure to conform to societal norms for women, and this may influence their relationship with their bodies, hence the focus of the study.

Gender Performativity

There are a variety of theories regarding gender. One such theory is that of gender performativity, developed by Judith Butler in 1990. It refers to how one presents themselves and behaves in certain situations according to what is expected of their gender. Performativity often occurs in interactions with others, where one may monitor and police themselves to fit the context and the conversation in order to be accepted. It operates on the basis that gender is a social construct developed by a patriarchal society in order to keep certain genders (e.g., women) submissive to and controlled by men. This theory suggests that individuals have to "do" gender in order to gain acceptance, and those who do not perform "appropriately" may be pathologized, excluded from society, or discriminated against (e.g., Klemmer et al., 2018). Butler also states that gender is omnirelevant in the sense that people are constantly being evaluated, or externally regulated, by what is expected of their gender. Butler suggests that socialization is inseparable from one's self-concept, and, certainly, it is very ingrained and may be difficult to push against. Some scholars have, however, critiqued this theory for being too deterministic and lacking a consideration of individual agency and choice (Brickell, 2005).

The Male Gaze

As previously mentioned, the male gaze originated in film theory, and initially referred to the way in which women are presented in media and art as objects for the viewing pleasures of heterosexual men (Mulvey, 1975). Since then, it has expanded beyond film into everyday lives and can manifest itself in one-on-one interactions and in public spaces (e.g., Clark 2017). The male gaze, and "girl watching" (Quinn, 2002) have become normalized in Western society,

where women are continually observed. A key component of the gaze is that it relies on a power imbalance between men and other genders, particularly women, and is generally not reciprocated within that particular interaction (Well, 2017). When the male gaze is turned upon other men, particularly more "sensitive" men (Holland et al., 2016), the male gaze can be seen as coming from a place of privilege (those who adhere to societal norms) and directed towards those with less privilege (men who do not adhere to traditional masculine norms), and thus the gaze may also be one-sided. The male gaze can be experienced in multiple modalities: (a) direct, verbal harassment (e.g., catcalling), or policing of one's appearance from another, (b) a general feeling from society, perpetuated by all genders, and (c) internalized, leading to self-surveillance or recycled outwards to other women (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997).

The media appears to reinforce the male gaze by portraying those who are in accordance with the appearance standards with various benefits, such as social acceptance and involvement in romantic relationships (e.g., Northup & Liebler, 2010). Women and girls, and potentially other genders (though as of yet unexamined in the literature), may thus view appearance as a kind of "social currency" to help them navigate society. This may lead to an internalization of the gaze, and self-monitoring and self-objectification (i.e., fixation on appearance and a dismissal of other humanistic traits, such as intelligence and kindness; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997).

Thus far, the male gaze has been demonstrated to have an impact on university-aged women's body image, regardless of sexuality (Calogero, 2004; Randazzo, Farmer, & Lamb, 2015), but it has not been studied exclusively with transgender women. Calogero (2004) conducted a study with 105 undergraduate women who were told they would either be interacting with a man or a woman. They then completed self-report measures assessing self-objectification, body shame, appearance anxiety, and dietary intent. It was found that simply

anticipating interacting with a male and being subjected to the male gaze elicited greater feelings of body shame and appearance anxiety, compared to anticipating an interaction with a woman. The researcher noted that the increase in body shame and appearance anxiety was related to self-objectification in anticipation of a male gaze. Body shame and appearance anxiety were significantly lower when anticipating a "female gaze," which the author suggests reflects a feeling of safety. Previous research has shown that women do evaluate other women, and this can lead to poorer body image and negative attitudes (e.g., Pike & Rodin, 1991; Thornton & Maurice, 1997); however, Calogero's study did not involve actual interactions, nor did it involve exposure to images of women for participants to compare themselves to as some research has done (e.g., Bould et al., 2018) to demonstrate the influence of images on body satisfaction. With the rise of fourth-wave feminism, people are beginning to move away from comparisons between women, and rather than competitiveness, there has been a movement towards connection among women (Fetters, 2013; Hajnosz & Ganz, 2017; Hollinger, 1998).

Randazzo et al. (2015) conducted interviews with 12 queer women on their perspectives of sexualization of women in media. Several themes and subthemes arose: (a) how media treats women and queer people (powerful women discredited, pressure to be straight, lesbian sex for the male gaze, invisibility, cookie cutter queers), (b) sexualization and objectification (sexualization as objectification or imposed femininity, media leads to rejection of our own bodies, media's effects as insidious, sexualization as images influencing desire, women objectify other women because of media influence, judging others tied to self-image), and (c) pro-desire messaging and positive transgressions (positive sexualization, being queer is protective, sexual attraction need not imply reduction, healthy and authentic female sexually defined). While all findings are interesting and critical, there are a few that are of particular relevance to the current

study. Lesbian sex for the male gaze demonstrates that the male gaze is not necessarily about mutual attraction between gazer and those gazed upon, nor is it limited to heterosexual women. This subtheme demonstrated that queer women feel they are still subjected to the male gaze, and lesbian sex in media and pornography becomes something that is geared towards men. It dismisses the identities of lesbian women and is related to the other subtheme of the pressure to be straight. Women can have sexual relationships with other women, as long as it is for the viewing pleasures of men and as long as they are straight. Thus, the male gaze is pervasive and occurs in realms where the male gaze is not relevant. In addition, the second theme was related to a general feeling of dissatisfaction with one's body due to the media's influence, and a pressure to self-monitor and critique other women. This reflects an internalization of the gaze and the pressure to "fit" society's standards of what is acceptable and desirable for all women, regardless if sexual attraction is a factor.

Researcher Amy Clark published two papers examining the experiences of women in UK gyms (2017; 2018). Generally, gyms are considered to be "male dominated" spaces, and Clark's research analyzed the objectifying and gazing experiences for women in these spaces. In her 2017 study, Clark highlighted that gyms are spaces full of observing, gazing, and evaluating. The women in her study reported different kinds of "gazes" from men, some of which were supportive (e.g., congratulating on lifting weights), some out of discomfort (e.g., a woman being too "aggressive"), and some objectifying. Clark also reported that some women internalized the objectifying gazes and felt pressured to wear makeup and look a certain way since they were going to be in "male" spaces. The participants also reported evaluating other women based on how they looked and what they were wearing, thus perpetuating these standards themselves. In the second article, Clark (2018) explored women's experiences of sexist humour in gym settings.

It was reported that participating in the sexist banter and sexual comments were viewed as protective factors against possible repercussions of confronting or disagreeing with men. In addition, some participants noted that sexual harassment at the gym was "normal" and it was better to not push against it. This demonstrates the power dynamics that exist between genders, which were more visible and explicit in gyms, or "male spaces." Women who confronted those making them uncomfortable were often met with backlash for behaving in ways they were not expected to. They were also considered at fault for "inviting" the attention and then rejecting it.

These studies provide evidence for the spaces in which the male gaze may occur, as well as the various ways in which it can manifest in everyday life. They provide interesting findings from cisgender women, but thus far, no research has been conducted looking at the experiences of the male gaze for transgender women. Some research exists looking at the experiences of transgender people with objectification (e.g., Flores et al., 2018; Nadal, Skolnik, & Wong, 2012), but none to date specifically examine the male gaze. The male gaze is similar to objectification in that they share the aspect of viewing and treating a person as an object. Sexual objectification expands on objectification by adding sexual desire to the equation (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). The male gaze differs from objectification as it explicitly includes gender dynamics, particularly how a misogynistic society influences the authority men may feel to objectify others, specifically women (Mulvey, 1975). The male gaze situates objectification within a particular context and incorporates the power dynamics that exist in said context. Hence, the "male gaze" was used in the current study, rather than "objectification" or "objectifying gaze," as a way to capture the influence of gender and societal power structures.

Flores et al. (2018) study analyzed the experiences of transgender people of colour and found that intersectionality was critical in understanding sexual objectification. Objectification

was highly racialized, and participants reported experiences of fetishization, intrusive comments, and body policing from others. Self-objectification was also mentioned as a way to affirm one's identity and to reduce potential victimization. Discrimination, power, and privilege were important elements of the objectification participants felt, which further emphasizes the significance of considering societal structures in this kind of research. Nadal et al. (2012) had similar findings when they interviewed nine transgender men and women. Their study examined microaggressions more broadly, but several themes aligned with experiences of objectification. The authors reported that participants experienced exoticization and denial of bodily privacy, highlighting the undertones of power and oppression within a Western context. Exoticization is similar to objectification in that involves being dehumanized and treated like an object for the use of others. It further expands on objectification by considering transgender people as "exotic" and romanticizing their experiences. Denying a person's right to bodily privacy was another relevant theme and referred to the entitlement people may feel towards a transgender person's body. Participants reported feeling like they were being examined, as well as critiqued, and felt inferior to those objectifying them. These studies highlight the complexities of the experiences of transgender people, and how objectification is intersectional. With the consideration of power, entitlement, and policing at the forefront of this study, I aim to expand on previous research by examining how transgender women experience the male gaze.

There is no shortage of studies that examine the consequences of objectification. Tiggemann and Williams (2012), for instance, tested Fredrickson and Roberts' (1997) objectification theory variables with 146 female undergraduate students, and found that objectification was related to self-surveillance, body shame, appearance anxiety, depression, disordered eating, and poorer sexual functioning. Tiggemann (2013) also conducted a review of

the literature on objectification and eating disorders, and found a strong correlation between the two, in addition to body shame and appearance anxiety. This is supported by Calogero's (2004) research reported above, wherein the anticipation of the male gaze led to greater shame and appearance anxiety. Other researchers have found that objectification and self-objectification can lead to a fixation on appearance, dehumanization (Gordon, 2008), depression (McKay, 2013), weight control behaviours such as smoking (Fiissel & Lafreniere, 2006), poorer mood and work performance (Gervais, Wiener, Allen, Farnum, & Kimble, 2016), as well as dissociation and self-harm (Erchull, Liss, & Lichiello, 2013). There is much literature on objectification more generally and its effects, but not with transgender women. It is therefore important that we challenge this tendency to gaze upon others and objectify them. We can begin by examining the ways in which objectification and gazing behaviours can occur and better understand the experiences of those who are subjected to it.

The Current Study

The male gaze is a concept that was developed in film theory and has since seeped into everyday life through the influence of media (Muley, 1975). Researchers have not yet explored how transgender women may, or may not, experience the male gaze. Thus far, the literature has examined the experiences of transgender people with their bodies, particularly in relation to gender dysphoria, body dissatisfaction, and objectification (e.g., McGuire, Doty, Catalpa, & Ola, 2016; Peterson, Matthews, Copps-Smith, & Conrad, 2017). It lacks consideration of societal power structures, such as that of transmisogyny, and the influence of these factors on how one experiences their body. Understanding the influence of society and power dynamics will allow us to challenge the root of the problem, rather than simply reacting to it.

Previous research has shown that women experience the male gaze, regardless of their sexual orientation (Randazzo et al., 2015). This demonstrates that the male gaze is not necessarily about sexual attraction, but rather about a power imbalance, perceived male authority, and entitlement to women's bodies. Therefore, transgender women were chosen as the participants of interest for the current study to analyze the influence of gender and power, as well as the ideals that exist for women and how they may influence the experiences of transgender women.

The current research adds to the existing literature by taking a critical perspective on the male-dictated beauty standards that exist for women, and how this gets monitored and policed for transgender women. It examines the experiences of transgender women as they adjust to living as their true gender, and the power dynamics that may shift throughout the process. Transgender women may be able to offer insights into how they experience the male gaze, having previously been socialized into a male role, and how the male gaze now influences their perception of themselves and their bodies. Therefore, the current study answered the question: How does the male gaze influence the experiences of transgender women with their body?

Chapter Summary

This chapter has explored the literature surrounding the experiences of transgender people, societal norms and expectations for women, and how the male gaze and objectification has been experienced by women. The purpose of this review was to identify a gap in the literature and provide a rationale for the current research project, which examined the experiences of transgender women with the male gaze. The following chapter will discuss the methodology used in the current study, as well as the theoretical framework employed.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The current study used interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) to explore the experiences of transgender women with the male gaze, and how this may have influenced their relationship with their bodies. This chapter includes (a) an explanation of IPA, (b) the theoretical framework, (c) an exploration of the researcher's background and possible biases, (d) a description of the current study, and (e) ethical considerations.

Method of Investigation

IPA was used to answer the question: How does the male gaze influence the experiences of transgender women with their body? IPA is a qualitative method that aims to understand participants' unique, subjective experiences of a particular situation or phenomenon. It stems from phenomenology, which is the study of experience, and hermeneutics, which involves interpretation. In addition, IPA utilizes an idiographic approach in that it values the individual and subjective descriptions people can offer about a particular phenomenon. This aspect of IPA is of particular interest and importance for the current project. IPA operates on the notion that people are able to offer meaningful insights into a particular topic (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). For this study, IPA was used to explore how transgender women understand their experiences with the male gaze, specifically in terms of their perceptions of their body, how they view themselves, and how they feel others view them. Transgender women have unique insight into this phenomenon and so IPA is an appropriate method to honour their experience and how they make meaning of the experience of the male gaze. Also, with IPA, there is an expectation that participants have shared experiences. In this case, the participants shared the experience of being assigned a sex that does not match their gender, as well as the experience of existing in society where the male gaze and transmisogyny may influence their experiences with their

bodies. As previously mentioned, the male gaze typically reinforces existing social norms of what is considered acceptable and desirable for women, and this was incorporated as part of the study. The assumption was not that the participants adhere to these cultural standards and follow the male gaze, but rather that the male gaze may have had some influence on their relationship with their body at some point in their life, regardless of whether or not they accept these standards. IPA has three main pillars that will be explored below, they are: (a) phenomenology, (b) hermeneutics, and (c) idiography.

Phenomenology

In qualitative research, phenomenology is the study of experience with focus on a particular group who is experiencing a particular phenomenon. The goal is to explore and generate a description of said phenomenon based on the accounts of the participants who have experienced it (Creswell, 2013). Edmund Husserl is largely credited with introducing the idea of phenomenology as a way to understand one's own experience and step outside our "natural attitude" about an occurrence we may take for granted, such as the male gaze, to fully understand it (Smith et al., 2009, p. 18). In other words, phenomenology allows us to take the time to analyze an everyday experience that may not be given much thought. Moustakas (1994) and Creswell (2013) stated that phenomenological research aims to answer two general questions: (a) what have you experienced in terms of the phenomenon? and (b) what contexts or situations have influenced your experiences of the phenomenon? Both questions were addressed in the current study. These questions are typically answered through interviews with participants, as was the case in this study.

A pure phenomenological approach to research involves bracketing, or *epokhé*, the Greek word for *doubt*. Giorgi (2009) notes that this refers to the setting aside of personal judgements,

biases, and preconceptions we may have regarding the research topic to allow us to fully explore the experiences of participants (Padilla-Diaz, 2015). Originating in mathematics, bracketing refers to treating the parts "in brackets" separately from the equation (Smith et al., 2009). The process of bracketing involves avoiding pre-judgements or conclusions about the research, and waiting until the experiences of participants have been analyzed. There is some criticism surrounding bracketing (e.g., LeVasseur, 2013), such as that we are unable to separate our identities from ourselves and thus pure bracketing is impossible. In addition, the knowledge we already possess may be helpful in working with the data. IPA is an inductive method wherein themes and codes are developed from the data, rather than from pre-existing hypotheses or theories. The focus is on participants' subjective experiences and understanding a particular phenomenon through their eyes. This understanding of one's subjective experience is a core component of IPA, and thus a core component of the current study.

Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics, the second pillar of IPA, is the theory of interpretation. Within the context of IPA, it is the interpretation of personal experiences within a particular context. Similar to phenomenology, it emphasizes a focus on subjective experiences, while also analyzing and interpreting these experiences. Contrary to phenomenology, hermeneutics, in a sense, rejects bracketing. Instead it acknowledges that one is influenced by their experiences and cannot be separated from themselves, and the interpretation takes into consideration the meanings, intentions, and ideas of the author or researcher. As such, in the context of IPA, it is important that researchers understand their position and how they understand the data within their context, rather than being completely "objective," as this is impossible. Hermeneutics suggests that there is a richness to data when researchers understand their subjective experiences and how they

influence interpretation. Hermeneutics therefore seeks understanding, of a particular phenomenon and of oneself, as a way to expand knowledge (Smith et al., 2009). Smith et al. also note that, in IPA, researchers engage in a double hermeneutic, wherein "the researcher is trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of what is happening to them" or what they are experiencing (Smith et al., 2009, p. 9). As mentioned above, I am unable to separate myself from the research, my identities, and the context in which I exist, but due to the power imbalance between cisgender people and transgender people, I needed to engage in self-reflection to avoid reinforcing stereotypes or perpetuating stigmatization.

Idiography

In addition, IPA utilizes an idiographic approach in that it values the individual and subjective descriptions offered by individuals about their experiences of a particular phenomenon, rather than nomothetic approaches, which aim to make generalizable and universal claims about a group (Smith et al., 2009). In these nomothetic approaches, larger sample sizes are typically used to explore a single truth, while idiography uses smaller sample sizes to explore the many truths about a certain experience. The experiences of these individuals occur within a context, which is also an important consideration in IPA, and so the analysis of the data is situated within these contexts. Within the current study, the individual experiences of participants were valued, and the goal was not to make generalizable claims about all transgender people. In addition, a core component of the current project is context and the societal influences (e.g., beauty standards, misogyny) on participants and their experiences.

Theoretical Framework

This study was grounded in a feminist framework. Specifically, a critical feminist framework was used. A feminist framework allows for the consideration of the unique issues

women face in society, and gives value to their experiences (Reinharz & Davidman, 1992). The purpose of utilizing a feminist research approach is to bring these issues to light and use research to work towards a more equal and just society. With this topic, it is important to acknowledge and understand the exploitation, devaluation, and oppression that transgender women face in society today. Feminist research also attempts to examine the institutional structures (e.g., the male gaze) that devalue women and take away their power. Ollivier and Tremblay (2000) outlined three principles of feminist research: (a) construction of new knowledge and producing social change, (b) grounding in feminist values (e.g., empowerment, acknowledgement of oppression), and (c) diversity, in population, methods, and culture. The current study fulfilled these three points by: (a) providing new knowledge with the goal of broader social change, (b) acknowledging and validating the possible oppression of transgender people through the male gaze, and (c) incorporating diversity by conducting research with a minority population, with extensive attention paid to the cultural context in which the research took place.

Critical feminist theory specifically recognizes the various types of oppression that exist, and the multiple, intersecting identities people hold (MacKinnon, 1983; Wing, 2003). Intersectionality is an important concept in critical feminist theory and this research project. Intersectionality considers the multiple and interlocking social identities a person holds, and includes an individual's gender, race, sexual orientation, and class. It posits that these identities are not separate from each other, but are rather interwoven (Cooper, 2016; Crenshaw, 1989). It is therefore important that the current research project incorporates intersectionality, since an individual's gender identity is closely tied with their other social identities. In addition, transgender women have the unique experience of transitioning from a "privileged" role (i.e., socialized into a male role), which they were assigned at birth, to a marginalized position as

women. Considering this, in combination with multiple marginalizations (e.g., race, class, etc.), was important in the research. Critical feminist theory strives to push further than feminist theory and aims to eventually eliminate the subordination and devaluation of women (Wildman, 2011). Geisinger (2011) outlines several key assumptions of critical feminist theory: (a) gender oppression has become normalized and is endemic in our society, (b) challenging dominant, male-dictated gender roles is critical, (c) a social justice approach allows for change, (d) the experiences of women are unique, valid, and critical in understanding gender inequality and pursuing change, (e) intersectionality is important to consider, (f) historical context must be considered in order to understand issues, and (g) critical feminist theory is an interdisciplinary approach. These are also key in the current research project, particularly the second assumption, because thinking critically about gender norms and roles is an integral part of this study. In addition, there is a focus on ingrained gender oppression, intersectionality, social justice, understanding the unique experiences of women, and an exploration of context.

Feminist theories tend to focus on acknowledging and challenging existing ways of life that are detrimental to women. More recently, feminist approaches have expanded to include other social identities to encourage consideration of intersectionality and tend to have a goal of advocacy and social change. Using this approach with IPA allowed for a critical view of the male gaze, an understanding of how the current culture produces a specific reality that devalues certain peoples, and also fulfilled the project's goal of allowing transgender women the space and the platform to discuss issues that are particularly relevant to them.

The pressures that exist for women, especially transgender women, to conform to strict and often harmful beauty ideals can cause significant distress, body dissatisfaction, and frequently, a feeling of danger (e.g., Klemmer et al., 2018). These standards are created by and

rooted in a misogynistic society that privileges men's opinions over women's, treats women as objects, and denies diversity in gender and self-expression. Presently, we do not fully understand the experiences of transgender women and, therefore, it is critical for research to help us understand the experiences of transgender women who encounter added discrimination, pressure, and transmisogyny, which may occur as a result of the patriarchal, and often close-minded, Western society in which we live. Since the proposed study aligns with these principles and the end goal is social change, feminist research is an appropriate framework.

Previously, there has been some critique of phenomenology by feminist theorists due to the fact that many phenomenology-focused approaches, like IPA, were created by men and are, therefore, guilty of a male bias (Fisher & Embree, 2000). However, more recently, IPA and feminist theory have been used together in research studies, since possible male bias may be easily challenged. Using feminism and IPA together allows for the exploration of women's lived experiences and multiple social identities. Both approaches caution against personal bias, power, and privilege clouding the experiences of others. Fisher (2010) states that using a phenomenological approach with feminism allows for rich research and is an especially appropriate combination for conducting research with women. IPA provides a framework for the analysis (e.g., interview questions, codes, themes) and useful data on participants' lived experiences, while feminist theories expand upon this by considering the context in which these lived experiences occur (Fisher, 2010). Research has continued to evolve, and several studies to date use a feminist theoretical approach with IPA (e.g., Dukas & Kruger, 2014; Stanley, 2013). Dukas and Kruger's study used IPA with a feminist approach to study depression in low-income South African women. The purpose of using this combination of approaches was to explore the multiple, intersecting identities of participants, and to analyze their experiences within a

particular socio-cultural context. Stanley (2013) used both approaches as well to determine college women's body image within the context of college culture. Cultural context and social identities were both important components in these studies and was explored in depth through the use of IPA and a feminist approach. Therefore, given the importance of cultural context (i.e., a patriarchal, Western society) and participants' intersecting identities in the proposed study, a critical feminist framework and IPA were appropriate methods, as they expanded on each other and further contributed to the development of knowledge.

Reflexivity

In research, particularly qualitative research which involves interpretation and generation of themes, reflecting on one's identities and positions is important, especially in relation to the research topic. Throughout the research process, I engaged in extensive self-reflection, particularly with regards to my position as a privileged, white, cisgender woman. Part of this self-reflection process was understanding and working with various gazes that I may possess as a privileged individual, including cis, oppositional, and colonial gazes. In addition, the internalization and "recycling" out of the male gaze was also be reflected upon. Since this study focuses on the male gaze and the analysis involved interpretation and generation of themes, I practiced reflexivity while reflecting on the gazes that are connected to different aspects of my identity.

As it relates to bracketing in IPA, the purpose of reflexivity was to understand my personal identities, particularly those relevant to the research. Chan, Fung, and Chien (2013) recommended using reflexivity as a way to approach bracketing and used the terms interchangeably. True bracketing, however, is aspirational as it aims to eliminate all preconceived notions and assumptions, which, realistically, is not possible (Fischer, 2009). More

current uses of bracketing are similar to reflexivity, which emphasizes an exploration of personal values and interests that might influence one's research (Primeau, 2003). Reflexivity, therefore, serves the purpose of identifying potential bias, power, and privilege, and minimizing its influence in the research to capture the true experiences of participants (Ahern, 1999), which is critical in feminist research (e.g., Ackerly & True, 2008; Letherby, 2002). Therefore, it was essential that I engage in reflexivity and bracketing, both as a feminist researcher and an IPA researcher.

Internalization of the Male Gaze

In the introduction, I briefly explored my personal connection to the male gaze and my motivation for researching this concept with transgender women. One potential concern with the male gaze is that it may be internalized, resulting in self-monitoring and self-objectification, and also "redistributed" outwards towards other women (Strelan & Hargreaves, 2005). Berger (1972) suggests that as women, we are used to being surveilled by men, and so we begin to critique ourselves in accordance with the male gaze. Women learn that their bodies are to be visible and subject to judgement by an "unknown male watcher," which reflects the patriarchal power structures within Western society (Clark, 2017). These structures aim to strip women of their power and autonomy, pushing them into subordinate positions. However, there has been a movement towards promoting self-confidence, and observing the self and taking the time to admire one's physical appearance can be seen as empowering and is a way to take back the male gaze (Well, 2017). Regardless of one's perspective, it was important that I be aware of the ways in which I might experience and perpetuate the male gaze so that I could avoid doing so in interviews with participants. The internalization of the male gaze can also occur as internalized misogyny and a rejection of "feminine" things (e.g., certain clothes, makeup) due to a devaluing

of women and femininity (e.g., Jing-Schmidt & Peng, 2018; Spengler & van Ligten, 2014). It was also essential that I did not hold this perspective when meeting with participants, as it could create an unsafe, judgemental environment.

Women also might not only be objectifying themselves; they may be objectifying other women too (Sims, 2016; Strelan & Hargreaves, 2005). I reflected upon my possible internalization of the gaze and recycling it outwards by observing other women in an objectifying way. It may not have previously been in my awareness, but since starting this research, I was mindful of my observing of other women. It may not be about physical appearance; it can be how I might treat people differently depending on their gender, believing unconsciously that men are "superior" than any other gender, and subsequently criticizing and dismissing those who are not men. We are often exposed to these power structures throughout our lives. It can be difficult to move past these beliefs and completely separate ourselves from them, but it is important to work on them and attempt to create safe spaces for others, free of judgement.

In doing this, I asked myself: am I holding women to a standard I have been held to? What do I think of women who do not adhere to these standards? What do *I* think it means to be a woman? Do I treat people differently based on their gender? Why might this be? To reflect on these questions, as well as to understand my perspective on and possible perpetuation of the male gaze, I answered all the interview questions myself before conducting the interviews. This was to ensure that I was reflecting on my own position and experiences with the male gaze to gain better insight into how I might perpetuate it. I did not want to maintain the male gaze with participants, and so this was important for me to reflect on. It was also to ensure that questions would not be offensive or overly personal to avoid making participants uncomfortable during the

interview. Furthermore, I also experienced and perceived the male gaze to be very negative. Throughout this process, including in the interview process, I had to "bracket" this personal bias in a sense so that it would not influence the interviews, particularly if participants did not notice the gaze, were indifferent towards it, or had a positive experience with it. To do this, I engaged in empathic openness to listen to their experiences without judgement, verbal disagreement, or dismissing their experiences (Finlay, 2009). This, at times, may have also involved reframing questions to allow for a broader range of experiences and responses.

Cis Gaze

Although I did not come across the "cis gaze" as an official term until later in the interviews, I have been aware of my identity as a cisgender woman doing research with transgender women since the beginning of the project. The cis gaze was believed to have been first introduced by Sophia Banks, a transgender activist, on Twitter in 2014 (sophiaphotos, 2014). Initially, it solely referred to the depiction and treatment of transgender people as objects to be subjected to scrutiny by and for the entertainment of cisgender people, similar to the origins of the male gaze. But like the male gaze, it has expanded to incorporate the influence of privilege and power of cisgender people. One of the goals in introducing the concept was to bring to the attention of cisgender people their potential ignorance and blindness when it comes to the experiences of transgender people (Lourenco, 2014). A critical way to address this privilege is to directly involve transgender people in exploring their experiences, rather than making assumptions and "buying in" to stereotypes. Sophia Banks' tweet received many responses from transgender people stating their personal experiences and definitions of the cis gaze. Some individuals mentioned being purposefully misgendered, a dismissal of gender nonconformity, forced disclosure, expectation that they have surgery to be valid in their gender, expectation that

they perform gender according to cisgender people's standards, and discrimination and a lack of understanding more broadly. This only captures a few of the experiences of transgender people in the #cisgaze hashtag, but certainly their experiences are not limited to these points.

A common way in which the cis gaze is perpetuated is through stereotypes of transgender people and perceived entitlement to ask intrusive, personal questions (e.g., what genitalia they have). There are certain expectations that cisgender people may have about transgender people and transitioning, specifically that one's identity is not valid until they have bottom surgery. Mitchell (2017) stated that "a cis person's body and gender exists without questions, whereas a trans person's body and gender exists to be scrutinized, laughed at, or pitied" (p. 1). This demonstrates the dismissal of transgender peoples' identities and cisgender privilege at not having one's gender be questioned or dependent on what procedures they have had done. Each transgender person's transition looks different and medical interventions (e.g., surgeries) are not always necessary. Many transgender folks may decide to pursue operations as a way to address their dysphoria, but an incorrect assumption is that all trans people must have surgery for their gender to be valid. Not all transgender people experience gender dysphoria, and not all pursue medical interventions, such as hormone replacement therapy or surgery. These are just some of the assumptions that cisgender people may have, and it was important for me to confront these and become aware of them in developing my interview questions and meeting with participants. It meant being careful about what I asked and how. Attention was paid to avoid questions that were intrusive and regarding physical appearance as a way to avoid tying gender to physical attributes (e.g., genitalia). Leading questions were not asked about their transition process, "stage," and what "interventions" they have undergone thus far. Rather, open-ended and more general questions were asked about their experiences to allow participants to answer with as little

or as much detail as they felt comfortable, in order to avoid coming across as judgemental and presumptuous.

There are also expectations of transgender people and what they "should" do, largely for the benefit of cisgender people. A quote by Filar (2015) explores this expectation:

> To be trans, you must "come out" as trans. You must undergo a lengthy process of "transitioning." You must make a "trans statement," appearing as trans in public, before preferably disappearing into your "new" gender: man or woman. Visibility is key here: the cis gaze demands you reveal yourself, offer yourself up for evaluation, even as it threatens you with violence for doing so. (p. 1)

In this quote, Filar explains how transgender people are expected to transition, often for the comfort of cisgender people. Disclosing one's identity is seen as necessary, and one must immediately begin living as their gender and presenting as such. It leaves little room for variability in self-expression and reinforces the gender binary. It also highlights the evaluative component of the cis gaze in that cisgender people feel they have the authority to critique and police transgender people to fit what they believe to be "appropriate." It is oxymoronic as we demand visibility and that people be "out," while also criticizing transgender people and subjecting them to violence for being visible. Therefore, given that the current project examined the male gaze, it was important that I not perpetuate a gaze of my own when interviewing transgender people and analyzing the data.

Many of the gazes, including the male gaze, have strong ties to media. The cis gaze is also influenced and perpetuated by media and has a strong impact on the stereotypes that exist about transgender people. Some particularly negative stereotypes that are often put forth in films with trans characters include them often meeting tragic ends (e.g., murder), being unable to find

love, are oversexualized, portrayed as a "joke," or used for "shock value" (Fairchild, 2018). Often, films about transgender people are made by cisgender people and have cisgender actors playing the roles of transgender people (e.g., *The Danish Girl*, *Dallas Buyers Club*, *Boys Don't Cry*). Having cisgender people play these roles reinforces the assumption that transgender people are not actually their gender, but only "pass" as their gender (Fairchild, 2018). As stated above, visibility is essential, even if it means being subjected to violence and discrimination, because certain cisgender people need to know "how much" of a gender a transgender person is (Filar, 2015). By buying into these stereotypes, "the cis gaze takes a trans person and scoops out everything that makes them unique" (Stansfield, 2015, p. 1). Model Hari Nef, interviewed by Stansfield, also went on to say that "within the cis gaze, the trans body becomes a paper doll to be posed, superimposed, dressed up, dressed down. The cis gaze asks what the trans body can do for it" and "[the cis gaze] doesn't hear, it only sees" (p. 1). As with other gazes, the cis gaze has a strong element of power and entitlement, believing that cisgender people have the authority to critique and police transgender people, and that a person can be defined solely by how they look.

Being a cisgender woman means that the data from this study was interpreted through a cisgender lens. To address this and reduce my preconceptions and biases as a cisgender person, I engaged in several self-reflective exercises. I participated in events, discussions, and advocacy groups that work with transgender people. I also read articles and watched videos by and about transgender people to better understand the diversity of the community and hear about their experiences firsthand. Blog posts (e.g., Collar, 2018) supported that the male gaze can be and is experienced by many transgender people. Also, during the interviews and throughout my research, I paid careful attention to my emotions and experiences. If something evoked a particularly strong emotion, I reflected on it through journaling and engaged in further research.

While it can be uncomfortable to address one's privilege, it is essential when doing research from a privileged position, particularly when this identity is at the center of the research.

Based on what has been described, it is entirely possible, and likely, that my being a cisgender woman impacted the relationship with the interviewee and their responses to questions. This may have occurred in many ways, such as a distrust and hesitancy to discuss their experiences with me, a concern that my motivations were to study a "hot topic," and that I would misinterpret and misrepresent the experiences of transgender people with my research. Throughout the analysis process, I reflected on each theme and subtheme to determine what potential consequences there could be. I would ask myself how people would use these findings, if it reinforced existing stereotypes, and if it painted a negative image of transgender women. And, as will be stated throughout this document, the experiences of the transgender women in this study are not universal to all transgender women and it does not serve to remove the uniqueness of each individual. With regards to epistemology, or the theory of knowledge, specifically with regards to research and methodology, I identify my epistemological position as a social constructivist. However, in doing so, I feel it is important to emphasize that gender, while a social construct, is incredibly important to many people and I do not attempt to dismiss its importance.

While I engaged in reflexivity, I can never truly know the experiences of transgender people. I can engage in empathic openness and educate myself on the history and experiences of transgender individuals, but I am still learning and understanding from a cisgender lens; this should be kept in mind while reading this thesis. Altogether, I do not attempt to claim to know what it is like to be transgender, I only put forth the experiences of the transgender women in this study.

Oppositional Gaze and White Gaze

Since the male gaze was developed by a white ciswoman, Laura Mulvey, and is arguably a very Western, white term, it has been criticized for only depicting the experiences of white cisgender women. The "oppositional" component of this gaze refers to black women viewing themselves in opposition to the ideal image (i.e., white) portrayed in media. It is a resistance to the whiteness of the male gaze and the lack of representation in media. The male gaze also emerged during second-wave feminism in the 1970s, a movement which many black women, women of colour, 2SLGBTQ+ women, and non-binary people felt overlooked them (Butler, 2013). One of the critics of the male gaze, bell hooks, stated that media and film historically privileged white women and portrayed them as the ideal, essentially excluding any woman who is not white from visibility and representation (hooks, 1992). She stated that feminism, specifically white feminism, tends to generalize the experiences of white cisgender women to all women without consideration of intersectionality and the unique experiences and struggles of minorities. In media, this can either occur through no visible representation, or by having women of colour play roles that white women have typically occupied, rather than roles specifically made for them, which hooks refers to as "'transfer' without 'transformation'" (hooks, 1992). To be a truly diverse society, we need to understand peoples' positions and experiences, rather than "copying and pasting" them into molds that already exist.

Similar to the male gaze and cis gaze, the oppositional and white gaze are based on power, privilege, surveillance, and judgement. In Western society, the "ideal" woman is presented as white, and so many white women are held to this standard, but it leaves a blind spot for women of colour. They are in a position where they are "outside" of the gaze in a sense, but are also critiqued, policed, and discriminated against for not being white in the first place (hooks,

1992). The point is not to have all women under a gaze and be objectified, but rather to critique the very white, heterosexist, patriarchal system that Western society occupies.

As a white cisgender woman who has experienced the male gaze in a variety of forms (e.g., critiquing appearance and pressure to gain approval from men), I had to reflect on the oppositional and white gazes. It was also important that I engaged in reflexivity because of the historic erasure of transgender women of colour and their significance in the movement. Again, the experiences of transgender women of colour in this study were analyzed through my white lens. To avoid this, I regularly immersed myself in the literature on transgender women of colour to understand how their experiences may be different and similar to white transgender women. In addition, I participated in events and discussions, where the experiences of transgender people of colour were discussed to broaden my knowledge. In developing this study (e.g., recruitment, interview questions), I left the inclusion criteria open to allow for a diversity of participants. The term "male gaze" was still chosen to specifically address misogyny, patriarchy, and other power structures within Western society, and how this has potentially affected transgender women. While it has been criticized for being a "white" term, I had hoped that through the broad questions and inclusion criteria, and the more general goal of understanding transgender women's experiences with societal expectations and their bodies, that this would allow for a diverse sample. As will be shown, the sample for the current study was predominantly white. The discussion will explore how my study and recruitment may have unintentionally appealed to a predominantly white population.

Colonial Gaze

When engaging in research with participants, the researcher should reflect on their power and authority in the situation. One way in which this power may manifest is through the colonial

gaze, or how the "colonial agenda seeks to maintain and [legitimize] power by determining colonial realities, including the dehumanization of colonial subjects and the perpetual separation of Us (colonizers, civilized) and Other (colonized, savage; IGI Global, 2019, p. 1)". The colonial gaze can also refer to the visual consumption, surveillance, and control of land from a privileged, colonial perspective (van Eden, 2004), but for the purposes of this study, only the gazing upon other individuals from a colonial perspective will be discussed.

As a visitor, I need to acknowledge the history of Indigenous peoples, particularly Two-Spirit individuals who have lived in Canada long before the Western understanding of transgender people. Two-Spirit is a broad term that refers to having a masculine and feminine spirit, and can be used to describe sexual, spiritual, or gender identity that is outside of the gender binary and heterosexuality (LGBTQ2SHealth, 2019). Many Indigenous languages are verb-focused, rather than noun-focused, and so the term "Two-Spirit" in Indigenous languages refers to something a person does rather than who a person is (Filice, 2015). Two-Spirit is the English translation, and in many Indigenous communities, Two-Spirit individuals have their own terms, including: *ayahkwêw*, *înahpîkasoht* (Filice, 2015), *nádleeh* (TransgenderGlobe, 2010), and *lhamanav* (Adams, 2018). In Western society, transgender and diverse identities (e.g., sexual orientation and genderqueer) are seen as deviations from cultural norms, whereas in many Indigenous cultures, Two-Spirit has historically been about cultural belonging and a deeper understanding and connection to oneself, a greatly positive experience (Robinson, 2017). Two-Spirit individuals were largely respected in Indigenous communities, but colonialism and residential schools tried to eliminate Two-Spirit traditions, as well as every other aspect of Indigenous culture (Filice, 2015). Therefore, it is important that I, a descendant of colonialist societies, understand the history of Indigenous peoples and how they welcomed diversity in

gender, sexual, and spiritual orientation. In addition, I was careful in doing this research so as to not make it seem as though I am pioneering a new and important movement, as Two-Spirit individuals have existed long before I have, and their openness to gender variance existed long before fourth-wave feminism.

I am a white cisgender woman, and these are identities I cannot separate from myself, but I can step back and allow others to talk freely about their experiences without judgement or attempting to "take over." This empathic openness is essential when conducting research, especially from a privileged position and working with underrepresented populations. In terms of the colonial gaze, this would involve acknowledging and understanding the history of Two-Spirit individuals in Indigenous cultures, and how colonialists, of which I am a descendent, attempted to erase their culture. I can attempt to address the past by conducting research that will hopefully help to create more awareness and understanding of Two-Spirit and transgender individuals.

A common theme across the gazes is an underlying sense of power and authority of the gazer (Foucault, 1982). There is a sense of ownership, something which many of those who are gazed upon attempt, and often succeed, in resisting and rejecting (Eileraas, 2003). Fanon (1963), when exploring the colonial gaze, noted a possible resentful envy of those who are privileged. He also emphasized the sense of pride that an underrepresented individual may experience in themselves and their identity, while understandably desiring the comfort and safety that comes with being privileged. He was not stating that people want to give up their identity, but that they desire for societal change to experience the same opportunities and safety privileged people do.

Positioning Myself Within the Research

I have my own experiences with the male gaze, and the goal was to understand how others experience it. Since I am a cisgender woman conducting research with transgender

women, it was important that I engage in some form of self-reflection, so as not to impose my own understanding from a cisgender perspective. Bracketing in the context of this study, does not mean being completely separate from the research, but rather not remaining ignorant about the experiences of transgender people and listening with an open mind, particularly as a cisgender person. This is important since I occupy a position of privilege in the context of this study, and there has been a history of silencing and dismissing of the transgender community. The goal of self-reflection is therefore to avoid stigmatizing the community and reinforcing existing power structures.

In sum, I possess these gazes and, as such, the process of learning and reflection for this project was extensive. I sought research articles, writings, and personal accounts, volunteered, and reflected on my biases to welcome the experiences of my participants. George Yancy, a philosophy professor, wrote that a white person should not "run to seek shelter from your own racism . . . practice being vulnerable. Being neither a 'good' white person, nor a liberal white person will get you off the proverbial hook" (Yancy, 2015, p. 1). His objective was to have white people, and other privileged people, listen to the experiences of those less privileged. It is not our place to offer opinions or experiences, but to listen and address their concerns as best we can. In the context of this study, my goal, and the goal of IPA, was to provide a space for participants to talk about their experiences and my role was to listen, ask questions out of curiosity and a genuine desire to understand, maintain an open mind, and avoid passing judgement. Therefore, the questions were developed to avoid judgements or biases, and were open-ended to allow participants to discuss what they felt was relevant. During the analysis and write-up of the findings, transcripts were referred to in order to ensure accuracy of participants' quotes and

proper context. This was to ensure that the meaning participants' accounts were not adjusted to fit a theme or subtheme, rather that the themes and subthemes fit with the participants' accounts.

The Research

Participants

Inclusion criteria. As per Pietkiewicz and Smith's (2012) recommendations, a small sample size was used for the study. There is no set number of participants recommended by IPA, and the authors noted that sample size depends on: (a) depth of analysis, (b) richness of each case, (c) how the researcher plans to analyze the data, and (d) pragmatic considerations (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). There are few statistics regarding how many individuals identify as transgender in Calgary, and Canada more broadly, only general estimates and a wide range of percentages, but they are in the minority (Carlson, 2012). Therefore, as it pertains to the pragmatic concerns mentioned by Pietkiewicz and Smith, the proposed sample size was five to seven participants. However, 16 participants responded to the advertisement on the University of Calgary research page, and 11 participated in the interviews. I chose to limit my sample to transgender women. According to Smith et al. (2009), it is preferable to have a small, homogenous sample (i.e., transgender women) to better understand their experiences and generate themes. In addition, a major point of interest in this study was to examine the potential influence of societal norms and expectations for women on transgender women and their experiences with their bodies. It is not to say that other populations do not experience societal pressures, but a main focus of the current study was to look at the expectations for women specifically.

Inclusion criteria involved identifying as a transgender woman (i.e., being assigned a different sex at birth and currently identifying as a woman), age 18 and over, and being willing

to and comfortable with discussing experiences with the male gaze and her body. Gender affirmation surgery, hormone treatment, conforming to gender norms, and any other medical interventions were not required, nor expected, of any of the participants. It was also not a requirement that participants be "out" (i.e., those in their personal life did not need to know of their identity), and stage in transition was not an exclusion criterion. This was to avoid restricting participation to those with access to certain resources and interventions, and also to avoid unintentionally making individuals feel shame or discomfort at not being "out" or not pursuing "typical" processes of transitioning.

Recruitment. Participations were largely recruited through the University of Calgary research recruitment website (see Appendix A for recruitment descriptions). Although posters (see Appendix B) were created and the intent was to distribute these to community centres, it was not needed. Snowball sampling (Goodman, 1961) was also used as participants shared the study information and link to the university research website with their acquaintances. Participants mainly sent this information to other individuals in a local support group for transgender people. Interested participants contacted me by email through the recruitment website, and I followed up by email or by phone depending on their preferred method. Participants were briefly screened to ensure they fit the study criteria (see Appendix C for email scripts and screening). If participants met the inclusion criteria, an interview was scheduled either at a public, but private, place (e.g., a meeting room at a library), or over the phone. To maintain privacy and confidentiality, pseudonyms were used in the analysis and write-up of findings. Participants' names were only collected for the purpose of contacting them and filling out the consent form and gift card form. Their name was not tied to any of their data; their chosen pseudonyms were used instead. In the instance a participant did not want to be

anonymous, they were allowed to use their real first name. No last names were collected/created. Participants were compensated with a $25 gift card to a place of their choice (e.g., Safeway, iTunes, Indigo, and Bon Apetit) for their participation (see Appendix D for gift card form).

Demographics. Eleven transgender women, ages 20-65 (M = 40), took part in the study (see Table 1 for participant demographics). Ten out of the eleven participants identified as White, and one participant identified as part Indigenous and part White. Some participants chose to elaborate and identified their heritage as German, Scottish, Irish, and European more generally. Participants had a variety of educational backgrounds and employment. Education included high school, undergraduate degree, and diplomas/certificates. Participants were employed full-time or part-time, and others were underemployed or unemployed. Some participants chose to elaborate on their field of work, listed in general terms below, but this was not required. Demographics are provided in Table 1 below.

Table 1

Participant demographics

#	Pseudonym	Gender and/or Sex Identity	Age	Ethnicity/Race	Educational Background	Employment Status
1	Karen	Transgender woman	56	White, German-Canadian	BSc	Unemployed
2	Sid	Transgender woman	26	White	BA, Diploma	Full-time, contract work
3	Bridget	Transgender woman	43	White, Northern and Western European	BA, BComm (accounting)	Unemployed

4	Catherine	Transgender woman	65	White, Scottish-Canadian	Grade 12, multiple diplomas and certificates	Full-time, home builder, sales
5	Runhildr	Transgender woman	39	White	Diploma, Computer Engineering	Unemployed
6	Sarah	Transgender woman	45	White	Some post-secondary	Part-time, AISH
7	Monica	Intersex, Transgender woman	52	Part Indigenous, White, Irish	High school, some post-secondary	Retired electronics technician
8	Maggie	Transgender woman	38	White	Some high school	Full-time, hospitality
9	Dianne	Transgender woman	21	White	Grade 12	Unemployed
10	Hope	Transgender woman	20	White	High school, current student	Full-time, researcher
11	Jocelynn	Transgender woman	35	White	Some college, IT certificates	Full-time, underemployed

Procedure

In line with IPA, semi-structured interviews (1-2 hours) were conducted with the participants to understand how the male gaze potentially influenced their perceptions of their bodies. I was the only one present during the interview. The interviews took place in person or over the phone for those who did not wish to meet in person, or if they did not live in the same city. See Appendix E for the consent form. Open-ended questions were asked, and participants were encouraged to discuss what they found to be particularly relevant and important to the

topic. This was to ensure that the participants had the opportunity to discuss what was significant to them, a key component of IPA and feminist research. In addition, the research questions were designed to evoke a sense of understanding from the participants and have them explore their experiences with the male gaze. After, I analyzed their verbal accounts to understand how they made sense of their experiences through their descriptions. As the researcher, my role was to facilitate the conversation and take an open-minded stance to avoid pushing my own ideas, preconceptions, or judgements, and allow the participants to openly share their experiences. The interviews began with a brief exploration of the participant's background, interests, and other personal information. This was to help the participant feel comfortable speaking with me before progressing into the more personal, in-depth questions. The interviews then proceeded to explore the participants' experiences with societal standards and expectations, the male gaze, and interactions with others. Prompts were used to explore the "obvious" in order to unpack the particulars of their experiences (Smith et al., 2009). See Appendix F for the interview guide. Interviews were audiotaped (i.e., only their voice was recorded; there was no video recording of interviewees), and were then transcribed verbatim by me. Consent to be audiotaped was conditional for participation; individuals were not be able to participate if they did not consent to being audio recorded. All components of the interview were transcribed and, in line with IPA, the exact duration of pauses, and overlapping speech, were not recorded (Smith et al., 2009).

Data Analysis

Although there is no set step-by-step process for analyzing data in IPA, there are a few essential characteristics. Researchers are to immerse themselves in the data, which can occur through reading and listening to the interviews several times and making sense of the data through the participants' eyes (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). A general outline mentioned by

Pietkiewicz and Smith (2012) was used to analyze the data, which involved the following: (a) multiple readings and making notes, (b) transforming notes into emergent themes, and (c) seeking relationships and clustering themes. First, I immersed myself with the data as mentioned above. I conducted the interviews, transcribed them, and engaged in multiple listens and read-throughs to immerse myself in the data. Discussions regarding demographic information and conversations that deviated from the topic were not analyzed. As I read through the interview transcripts, I made notes and exploratory comments or codes if something stood out as particularly relevant and important. The notes pertained to the content of the interviews, context, initial interpretations of the data, and personal reflections (e.g., my influence in the interview, if certain comments evoked strong emotions), and typically were at a slightly higher level of interpretation or understanding than rephrasing in that they focused more on the underlying message of the passage (Eatough & Smith, 2007). After this stage, I paid more attention to my comments to begin to look for emergent themes. IPA is an inductive method, and emergent themes are derived from the data rather than pre-existing hypotheses or theories (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012; Smith et al., 2009). These emergent themes were then grouped together based on conceptual similarities to develop broad themes. This was done to generate a list of superordinate themes and subthemes that accurately represented the data.

Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1985), and Shenton (2004) operationalized a set of criteria to enhance rigour in qualitative research. To ensure *credibility*, the current project received feedback at several stages from several individuals, including those well versed in the topic area and methodology. Interview questions were developed for a pilot study as part of a qualitative research course, and feedback was received from the course instructors to ensure it addressed the

topic, was in line with IPA, and was approachable and open-ended. The pilot study also provided information as to what should be changed (e.g., questions) and what was helpful. Research used in the same topic areas (i.e., transgender people, the male gaze) was used to identify an area for exploration, and to inform the research question and interview questions. To facilitate *transferability* of study findings, a thick description of the context in which the findings emerged was provided in the literature review and methodology sections, including background information about the participants, the researcher, and context of the study (Lietz & Zayas, 2010). In addition, themes were developed by identifying patterns within the data. To address *dependability*, a thorough description of the research procedures and materials, including the design, data collection, and analysis, was provided. Reflexivity was also an integral component of this research, and was employed throughout the research process (Shenton, 2004). Lastly, *confirmability*, the extent to which research findings result from participants' accounts rather than researcher perspectives, was ensured through extensive self-reflection and involvement in expanding personal knowledge on the topic. In addition, hypotheses and pre-existing theories were not used to develop themes; the themes emerged from the data, as is in line with IPA.

Ethical Considerations

The current study had several ethical considerations related to consent, privacy and confidentiality, researcher identity, and ethics board approval. As part of the informed consent process, participants were able to stop the interview at any time, withdraw from the study without penalty, and decline to answer any questions. This was to ensure that participants felt their participation was completely voluntary, and also to avoid causing distress or discomfort. Privacy and confidentiality were essential in this study; as such, pseudonyms were used if participants wished. Email, full name, and address were only used to contact the participant

about interviews and to send their gift card through email or by mail. This information was not tied to their data. Their data (e.g., computer files, hard copies) were kept secure through password protection and locked filing cabinets to protect their identity. As mentioned, I also engaged in extensive reflexivity to address my identity in the research. The current study underwent ethical approval by the ethics board at the University of Calgary to ensure safety, privacy, and confidentiality.

Chapter summary

In sum, in this chapter, I examined IPA as the selected research method and its relation to feminist approaches. Furthermore, I outlined my reflexivity practice, which included an exploration of the various gazes that may have influenced the research. Lastly, I described the study itself (e.g., participants, procedure, analysis), and concluded with relevant ethical considerations. The next chapter explores this study's findings.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

This chapter outlines the results of this study. Using IPA to analyze the data, four superordinate themes emerged from the participants' descriptions of their experiences with the male gaze and their bodies, while considering the influence of gender. The superordinate themes include:

1. Male gaze as potentially harmful and dehumanizing
2. Internalization of the male gaze
3. Male gaze as affirming
4. Absence or rejection of the male gaze

Superordinate themes also contain two to four subthemes that contribute to the description of the experience. Each superordinate theme and subtheme are explored below, with quotes to enhance understanding and conceptualization of the topic. All participants are referred to by their names or chosen pseudonym: Bridget, Catherine, Dianne, Hope, Jocelynn, Karen, Maggie, Monica, Runhildr, Sarah, and Sid. Participants' ages ranged from 20 to 65, with an average age of 40. Participants were predominantly White, with one individual identifying Indigenous heritage. However, these results are not intended to be generalizable to every transgender woman. These are the experiences of the participants in the study, and it may be very different for others depending on a variety of factors. In addition, the participants at times had different experiences, and one person's account does not invalidate the experience of others, nor does it claim that anyone's experiences are not real. Not everyone is able to reject or have the confidence to ignore the male gaze or criticism at all times, and it very much depends on the people and the situation.

Superordinate themes and subthemes were determined by their significance and the frequency in which they occurred across participant descriptions, with all superordinate themes

existing in the accounts of seven to eleven participants (See Appendix G for Table 2). See Table 3 for superordinate themes and subthemes.

Table 3

Summary of Themes

Superordinate Theme	Subtheme
Male gaze as potentially harmful and dehumanizing	Safety and visibility
	Invalidating of identity
	Adjustment to an underprivileged position
	Male gaze and societal expectations as influencing (gender) dysphoria
Internalization of the male gaze	Insight into the male gaze
	Internalization of ideals and "self-gazing"
Male gaze as affirming	Validating gender
	Male gaze as a previously denied experience
Absence or rejection of the male gaze	Abstention
	Gender euphoria
	Personal agency and commitment to the self
	Redefining gender and challenging societal norms

Male Gaze as Potentially Harmful and Dehumanizing

While the male gaze typically focuses on the act of looking, there can also be many harmful effects, explored through the following subthemes: (a) safety and visibility, (b) invalidating identity, (c) adjustment to an underprivileged position, and (d) male gaze and societal expectations as influencing (gender) dysphoria.

Safety and Visibility

Safety and visibility were major components of transgender women's experiences of the male gaze in this study. Visibility, in this context, generally refers to being seen, subject to the gaze, and in some cases, being identified as transgender. Being seen by those who may hold aggressive and transphobic beliefs may lead to violence. The male gaze may not always lead to violence, it can also lead to threats of violence and verbal harassment, as was the case for Runhildr. Jocelynn explored the male gaze as a new experience that brought concerns of safety:

> It's uncomfortable . . . Also, in a lot of cases there's a concern for safety. Because I'm trans, I've been assaulted by men before, so men staring and looking critically at me has this weird like, 'I wanna get out of this situation now because, even if it's just perceived, I may not be safe here.'

Jocelynn did not feel she had the luxury of giving the gazer the benefit of the doubt as her safety was possibly at stake. Bridget and Jocelynn also mentioned realizing and adjusting to a position where they are afforded less safety because of their gender. Safety became something that had to be on their radar. There is a sense of fear that comes with being a woman, and as a transgender woman. Bridget said:

> A large part of that is [being] constantly on guard for safety. Again, trying to find a niche where being hyper-feminine is dangerous because people will accuse you of tricking them. Being not feminine enough makes you a target and a joke. So, trying to walk that middle ground where you're slightly feminine enough but nobody can accuse you of trying to trick them. And walking that line [of] being safe in that place and always policing yourself, making sure that you're never alone, that you always have an escape route.

Bridget noted that safety is often a concern and ensuring that she has an "escape route" is important if the situation turns unsafe. This shows that the power is in the hands of the gazer. Bridget's experience also speaks to being subjected to harassment for being too feminine and for being not feminine enough, and so Bridget was able to find safety in the middle ground where she is, in a sense, more invisible.

"Hiding," or invisibility, are also important in safety. Monica mentioned that she is intersex, having been assigned male at birth and has female hormones. She developed breasts in her teenage years, and this created an internal conflict because she was told she was male and others perceived her as such, but she felt and knew she was a woman. She therefore "learned to hide myself as much as possible." Being intersex, transgender, part Indigenous, and previously living in the Southern United States created an unsafe environment for her to live authentically. Thus, she adapted to the situation and hid herself to stay safe. Bridget shared a similar experience:

> When I was younger, I wanted to be invisible, and as I grew taller and became more of a physical presence, I would try to almost fold in on myself and take up as little space as possible. And in public, I still do that. Part of that is obviously a safety measure. If only I'm taking up a little bit of space, I'm less visible, less in people's spaces.

Being "invisible," or not identified as transgender, allowed Bridget to be safe and go unnoticed by the male gaze. Furthermore, women are often told to make themselves occupy as little space as possible (e.g., Argintar, 2013; Campoamor, 2017; Rollin, 2018), and so part of this may be the influence of socialization, both as a child and when she began living as a woman. As a child, Bridget received the message that women and girls are to be submissive, particularly to men, and now living as herself, she may feel she is having to adopt those ideals.

Participants also identified being correctly gendered as important for safety, which was explicitly expressed by Maggie, Jocelynn, and Dianne. Some referred to "passing privilege," which allows people to be safe from harassment and aggression because they were not identified as transgender. Bridget discussed this:

> While there is certainly a part of me that is like, 'no, I've gotta be out there and visible and challenge those assumptions,' there's also the part of me, from a safety perspective, that's like, 'you don't want to go too far in that, and potentially make yourself unsafe.' I mean, it's one thing to be visible- I kind of have this thing where realizing that I don't pass 100% and not really wanting to, I'm kind of visible for people who can't be . . . So, for somebody to know that we can exist in this space and we don't have to hide and be invisible, I fight against that. Finding the balance between safety and being visible is hard, and that I'm aware of a lot of the time in physical spaces, which is why I try and make sure that I'm somewhere I can be safe so that I can be visible.

Bridget explored an inner conflict of choosing between being visible to the male gaze and being safe. It also highlights the convoluted nature of gender and "passing." For transgender women, being correctly perceived as their gender is validating and affirming, and in order to be perceived as a woman, they have to "appear" as a woman based on what traditional societal norms prescribe for women.

With regard to visibility and the influence of presentation, Hope referred to certain behaviours as "residual" and as "scars" from when she was socialized in a male role. She expressed an awareness of the influences of socialization, and how it might come into play in her interactions:

> I find there's almost a pressure for me to act that out. I find myself . . . [acting in a] more masculine way, you know. If I'm in a store like all male, male salesclerk, I find I have a way of acting and talking, that sort of thing. And then if it's all girls, there's a different way I act then. And then depending on which group, I'll put on this act. . . because I can avoid trouble in a way.

Hope described performing gender as a way to "avoid trouble." By behaving more "masculine" in situations where only males are present, she ensures her safety by putting forth an image that will be met with respect. In Western society, there are expectations for how one should behave, and generally, certain genders (i.e., men), are met with more respect.

Sexualization, fetishization, and objectification are also related to visibility and the male gaze. Each involves viewing people, particularly women, as objects for others' use and may result in men treating women however they choose. Bridget stated that one of the ways in which transgender people get portrayed by the media is as a "horrifically sexualized porn star." Bridget stated that it is harmful for sexualization to be one of the only ways in which transgender people are represented. Society then expects transgender women to be hypersexualized. Generally, people in Western society, do not have a kind view of porn stars, despite being content objectifying and dehumanizing them (Griffith, Hayworth, Adams, Mitchel, & Hart, 2012). Runhildr experienced this objectification as well, and stated that transgender women are "fetishized . . . by cisgender, straight men. Where they're kind of hyper-attracted to you because you are transgender." Being attracted to transgender people because they are transgender and fetishizing them dismisses them as human beings, and instead views them as objects.

Being excluded and ostracized from society for one's identity can be a very powerful threat and form of trauma; this was a concern for some participants with regards to safety and

visibility. Jocelynn mentioned being discriminated against and excluded for her identity due to a lack of acceptance and understanding. Society is structured in such a way that those who do not adhere to norms are viewed as "deviant" and needing to be punished (Killen, Rutland, Abrams, Mulvey, & Hitti, 2013; Murray, 2017), through discrimination and exclusion. Sarah expressed a similar fear of exclusion:

> It was always this fear of, if I actually went through with it [transition], I would just look like a guy in a dress and be on the fringes and outskirts of society. And I wouldn't have any chances at a sense of normalcy in life, and that terrified me.

Being accepted and part of society would provide Sarah with the comfort of a "normal" life, and there was a very real fear of being denied that because of her identity.

To summarize, the male gaze can be potentially harmful to transgender women as it may threaten their safety, particularly when they are "visible" in the sense that they are identified by others as being transgender. Specifically, the male gaze can lead to violence, harassment, or exclusion through its oppressive nature. Participants explained often being faced with a choice of conforming to societal norms or finding a middle ground, and living authentically. In the middle ground, the male gaze may be less present or less noticeable due to not being either too feminine or not feminine enough.

Invalidating Identity

The male gaze can also be invalidating of one's identity, and this invalidation can involve dismissing one's gender, misgendering, or challenging one's gender based on stereotypes and societal expectations. Jocelynn provided an example of the latter, and described an instance where a co-worker challenged her gender based on her interest in more stereotypically male hobbies, stating that Jocelynn has "a guy's brain." She questioned and invalidated Jocelynn's

gender on the basis of her interests, even though hobbies are not inherently gendered. Hope shared similar experiences where others invalidated her identity and made her feel as though she was not doing enough:

> I feel like there's the judgement piece . . . questions like, 'why are you not dressed up as much? Why aren't you presenting more? [Why aren't you] wanting to be more attractive,' right? . . . It's almost like I'm not transitioning because I'm not wearing stereotypical like female clothes and things like that.

Receiving the male gaze in this way led Hope to question, "am I not transitioning properly?" because she does not always enjoy, wear, or do stereotypically feminine things. In addition, there is a fear of being misgendered if one does not "transition enough." This was expressed by virtually all participants in almost the exact same way: a fear of being viewed as "a guy in a dress." These kinds of comments have root in transphobia because the perpetrators do not view transgender women as women, but as "a guy in a dress." Hope also discussed this fear and the potential consequences:

> There's always this fear of like, if I go to the changeroom, there's always this fear that someone's going to assume I'm a man. You know, start shit. Like I'll be the predator . . .
>
> You know, like I generally don't get called 'sir' by a woman, I get called 'sir' by men.

Hope expressed that transgender people are sometimes viewed as "predators" for using the correct changerooms and bathrooms. Also, Hope mentioned that it is predominantly men who are intolerant and misgender her. This may be due to certain men feeling they have the power and authority to make these comments without consequence.

Karen described her experience as it relates to being misgendered:

> Being outside, in public, [I] feel a bit awkward because I may not be as graceful as the other ladies, right? So, you kinda work on that and you're always conscious, right? How am I moving? And I mean, it's not a huge thing; sit down with a 'plump' kind of thing . . . Just the little things. Mannerisms, right? . . . I mean they are important, right? They're just clues. They're little tells. That you can kinda say, 'well look they're obviously this, they're obviously a *guy* trying to be something'.

Karen describes a self-consciousness that occurs when in public and a concern of being misgendered based on how she looks and acts. For her, it can boil down to the "little" behaviours, or mannerisms, such as how she sits and walks. Karen used words like "clues" and "tells," which demonstrate a fear, which many transgender people may have, of being identified as transgender and, thus, being misgendered or even subjected to harassment. Dianne mentioned misgendering as well, but noted an additional layer, "I've never gotten like the 'sir, ma'am,' 'sir, ma'am' sort of jump back, where they don't really know what sort of title to give you. It's always been 'sir' or 'miss.'" Dianne expressed that this would be invalidating because the other person would not correctly identify her as a woman and, thus, switched between "sir" and "ma'am."

Similar to the transphobia participants experienced, participants also described experiencing a particular kind of homophobia. In the context it was described, it does not refer to participants' personal sexualities and being discriminated against on that basis. It, instead, refers to how others, in this case men, do not view them as women, but rather "a man in a dress," and thus gazing upon or interacting with them intimately would make them gay. For Monica, this occurred while she was a sex worker, and many of her male clients were attracted to her, but did not want anyone to know for fear of being seen as gay, even though she is a woman. Bridget shared a similar experience in which she described a reason for not experiencing the male gaze:

> When I notice people looking at me, it is 90% of the time women who actually stare. I'm sure that the men notice, but as men, somebody who is socialized in that, when there's a hint of being accused of being gay, a lot of straight men would look away. So, if they catch a look at me, they're probably looking away because if they stare, they're afraid that that will make them considered gay.

Again, this viewing of transgender women as men and how, at times, men will outright avoid gazing upon transgender women for fear of being considered gay. This speaks to extensive internalized homophobia because, as Sid stated, men "liking men" is the "ultimate betrayal of the male gaze" as it is associated with femininity.

Participants also mentioned that the male gaze has been dehumanizing and invalidating when it viewed them as a "joke." Dianne provided an explanation of this:

> I'll be critiqued both as a woman and as a transwoman, sort of like as two different things. Because there's the stereotypes of trans people as jokes in popular media of like, 'man in dress is funny, ha ha.' . . . So, I don't want to be that to people. I don't want people to see me and think like, 'oh, this is a joke,' . . . You know? And a part of that is why I have such a seeded sort of goal to pass as much as I do, is I don't want to be seen as invalid or as a joke or 'oh, they're just doing this for attention.'

Dianne explored the connection between her appearance and how others view her, as well as intersectionality in the male gaze. Not being correctly perceived as a woman and being seen as a joke is invalidating. Bridget shared a similar experience:

> Unfortunately, growing up in the 80s and 90s, most of my experience with people who would've been trans were either the joke of 'men in a dress,' or horrifically sexualized porn star type stuff. So, by the time I figured out that gender was my issue in high school,

> I was drowning. I'm like 'that's not me. I must be wrong because I don't see myself anywhere.'

This highlights how important proper representation is in Western culture. Portrayals of transgender people as "jokes" for the entertainment of others is dehumanizing. In addition, Bridget described that a large portion of mainstream media produced about transgender people is made by those who are privileged, generally cisgender men, and portray others through their lens and their preference, with the idea of having a male audience to appeal to. The media also involves the white gaze and cis gaze, especially in instances where cisgender actors play the parts of transgender characters. It reinforces the harmful and transphobic idea that transgender people are not their gender because the audience watching knows the actor is not transgender. Rather, they are just playing the part, or "dressing up" as a woman or as a man, in binary terms.

Another component of this subtheme is that of disgust and discomfort. A few participants mentioned the male gaze as being a reaction of disgust or discomfort at them being transgender, which is invalidating and harmful. Dianne explored this:

> I've definitely noticed a sort of overarching sort of want to quote-unquote 'pass as a woman.' . . . I don't want people to look at [me] and be like, 'ew, trans,' you know? . . . [I want] to just be just another woman.

Those who respond in this way may leave a lasting impact due to the harshness of such comments or gazes. Runhildr and Bridget also mentioned this experience and explained how the negative male gaze towards them often occurs as either hyper-sexualization or disgust and discomfort, both being invalidating.

Several participants mentioned a pressure to "prove" and "defend" their gender, and noted a double standard in which cisgender women are often not challenged on their gender. This

is inherently invalidating as it posits that cisgender women have nothing to prove and people accept their gender, but transgender women may feel they have to do so. Sid explained that, for transgender women, the pressure is much greater to adhere to societal standards at all times, or risk being invalidated by others. Hope explored this as well, "I feel like I'm apologizing for not doing enough, or to justify something." Here, she referenced the pressure to "fit" societal norms and transition in a way that is expected of her. In not doing so, the male gaze has created almost a sense of shame by making her feel she is not doing enough, and that she therefore has to justify and defend herself and her gender. Hope explained that she experiences these pressures in the form of messaging and others questioning, although not always explicitly, things like:

> 'Why don't you act like a woman?' You know, there's never an expectation for ciswomen, but [being] trans, I get questioned, 'why am I not dressed for a formal dance?' You know, 'why am I not wearing makeup?' Like my haircut, the back is shaved, [and people are] like 'why don't I have long hair?'

Hope also highlighted the double standard that exists as cisgender women seem to not be questioned in this way and to this extent about their gender. In addition, an expectation exists for transgender women to be hyper-feminine in order to be accepted as their gender, otherwise they risk being misgendered or invalidated because people do not view them as their gender. To examine this, Jocelynn explored her behaviour in all-male or male-dominated environments:

> I'm also a big gamer, so I go to like a games store where I play tabletop games. Those stores are generally all men. I generally do my makeup a little bit better on those days. Or I'll wear a dress, or I'll look usually a little bit nicer than I would if I was just going to meet a girlfriend for coffee, 'cause then I'm just wearing like jeans and a t-shirt and I don't really care.

In situations where one's gender feels obvious or "exposed," such as in an instance where Jocelynn was the only woman, there is a pressure to perform gender in accordance with what is expected of said gender. Jocelynn stated she was not aware she was doing this, which highlights the intrinsic nature and pervasiveness of the male gaze. In addition, Jocelynn's comment reflects a greater comfort around other women, and that there is, in a sense, a "need" to care about the perspectives of men in male-dominated environments.

Having to defend one's gender occurs in other areas, not just with regards to physical appearance. Sarah explained how she experienced this barrier in reference to being taken seriously as a mother and parent, "I definitely felt a double-standard as a transwoman . . . with pursuing the validity of my position as a mother to my child." This particular point is related to transphobia in that people do not view transgender women as women and, thus, have difficulty viewing them as mothers, if they choose to be referred to as such. They are, of course, valid as mothers if they choose to use this term for themselves, and as parents more generally, but society is lagging behind in understanding this (Colage, 2019; Ross & Giese, 2017). Some transgender women may elect to describe themselves as their child's parent or father as a generic term, particularly if they used this term when they were perceived as male, and the specific term they use for themselves is entirely individual and dependent on their preferences. Sid also highlighted the over-pathologizing of the transgender community by society and the medical community, and how members of the community need to have gender dysphoria in order to be considered valid as a transgender person. While, in reality, cisgender people may experience dysphoria as well, but this experience is not integral to their gender. To conclude, Maggie noted her frustration with the double standard and having to defend her gender, "I don't like the idea of

justifying a person's womanhood . . . we don't ask ciswomen, what it means to be woman or to justify that."

Invalidating one's identity is a particularly harmful and dehumanizing way the male gaze exists. The media has a large influence, and in everyday life, this attitude gets adopted and perpetuated in interpersonal interactions, further dehumanizing transgender people and invalidating their identity. In addition, having to defend one's gender can be invalidating and dehumanizing, particularly if people refuse to acknowledge them for their gender. In addition, participants explained that the male gaze may put them in a position where they have to defend or "prove" their gender, either by conforming to societal norms for women or defending their choices regarding how they look and present themselves.

Adjustment to an Underprivileged Position

The male gaze exists within a power dynamic in which the male gazer is afforded privilege and power while the other is not (Mulvey, 1975). Particularly in the context of the study, the male gaze was viewed as a way to exert power over women as a form of control. Several participants noted the adjustment of moving from being socialized into a position with a lot of privilege, to an underprivileged position in which the male gaze has become part of their experience. Part of adapting to this new position involved experiencing male entitlement and the subsequent devaluing of women. Male entitlement can occur through behaviours such as "mansplaining," in which men speak to women in condescending and patronizing ways, often explaining something to them, which they may already know, in basic terms. It also relates to the perceived superiority of men over all genders, and the idea that men are more respected, and women need help. This perceived superiority and condescension is, as Sid explained, the position that:

> I believe that even though I'm not the one living through that experience, that I should be the one listened to, that I should be the one telling them what their normal should be, often without listening or considering the needs of the people that I'm dictating. It's the male gaze through a telescope of an ivory tower, kind of thing.

Sid made the point that condescension, or patronizing someone more generally, comes from a place of privilege and power (i.e., the ivory tower). "Ivory tower" is used as a metaphor to demonstrate that those who are privileged are removed from the lives of those less privileged due to their power, and generally lack understanding of the realities of the average person (Shapin, 2012). It also refers to perceived superiority above everyone else. The telescope allows privileged individuals, specifically men in this instance, to see all. They can subsequently dictate how they feel others should look, think, and act.

Women are also highly devalued and, as such, several participants noted the adjustment to an underprivileged position. Perhaps one of the most explicit ways in which devaluing women and femininity occurs through the gaze is the broad, binary statement that being a woman is bad, and being a man is good. Bridget explored this:

> As a child who couldn't come to terms with the fact that she was a girl yet, always hearing about how bad it was to be a girl. I mean, I realize in some ways it was supposed to be 'boys aren't supposed to be girls,' but I mean, the truth is society devalues femininity in any way. So, very much internalizing this sense that being feminine, being girly is bad.

This particular situation caused a conflict for Bridget; while she was not necessarily aware of her identity at this point, the messages she received were that being a woman is bad. Women are systemically devalued and viewed as lesser and inferior to men, and this is a difficult idea to

grapple with. With this devaluing of women and equating femininity with "bad" comes the need to, in a sense, distance oneself from women and femininity. Sid explored how this can occur as an internalization of the male gaze and recycling that hatred outward towards other women:

> In its most logical extreme is what I think being a trans girl in the closet is like . . . Is the ultimate 'I'm not like other girls,' because as soon as you admit you are, you have a target on your back.

Perpetuating the disrespect one may have received and distancing oneself from other women may serve the purpose of gaining acceptance from those with more power. Doing so can also prevent one from being "targeted" by not associating with other women. Individuals with sexist and misogynistic perspectives may accuse and consider women notorious for being "catty." These individuals may also police women, and view them as being competitive with each other to a point where women may mistrust and resent each other. When men or others evaluate women, it goes unnoticed or is considered natural, so no one objects. It also becomes almost a safety measure to align oneself with the male gaze and be the one perpetuating it so that one is not the target.

Furthermore, in terms of adjusting to an underprivileged role, Jocelynn described it as "alien and foreign" and "unfortunately it's something I just have to get used to 'cause that's part of my life experience now going forward." The male gaze, to which she referred, is considered an essential part of being a woman. Having been socialized into a male role, the male gaze was not something she had previously considered. Sarah described this adjustment as well:

> I didn't have the need to be aware of the gaze of men in my environment. It did become more prevalent and a necessity to- I'd always been conscious of situation awareness and my dynamic, but specifically where I would sort out certain things, I now found the need

> to be very attentive to the way men were looking at me, and 'is that out of a shy curiosity? Is it out of a bold curiosity?' Or is it out of, I don't wanna say malicious, out of a harmful curiosity? And certainly got very attuned to that very, very fast.

Sarah highlighted how it was important to understand the meaning of men's gazes and the situation she was in. Runhildr expressed a similar perspective, "now [being] subjected to actual attention that's like actual negative attention based on how I appear, as to before when I was less subject to any kind of gaze." As did Jocelynn:

> Even though a lot of the messages on female beauty standards weren't directed at me when I was a kid because everyone perceived me to be a male, I still heard all those messages. They're still there. So, now that I've realized what's going on and what I am, all of a sudden those messages apply to me in a way that they didn't before.

The beauty standards that exist for women were always present and she was exposed to them, but not in the way she is now, where the standards are turned on her. Dianne also mentioned being treated differently as a woman compared to when people perceived her as male:

> I've noticed that a lot of people are a lot more physical with me. Like, people touch me now. . . . And that never really happened when I was a boy. I've had men, you know, just sort of put their hand on my shoulder when they're telling me something and then continue what they're doing. . . . Never happened when I was presenting the male.

This can be attributed to a greater comfort people generally have around women and an overall sense of cautiousness around men. It could also relate to feeling as though one is entitled to touch women, but not men. To end this section, Bridget provided insight into the experience of being transgender and the adjustment that came along with it:

> Being trans must be real because at the time, I was existing in a position that would have been completely privileged. I was making decent money, I was a White male who appeared to be heterosexual and by all accounts, I should've been living the thing the high life. I mean, I wasn't upper class, but I was doing okay for myself. So, to give all that up to be trans, to be a woman, it must be who I really am (laughter).

The male gaze exists within a gendered society and influences the transition process for transgender women. It involves adjusting to a role that does not afford them the privilege and safety they may have experienced when they were socialized as male. Although they are the same person, people may treat them differently because that is what is expected. These societal expectations influence how they act and appear, as well as how they feel about themselves and experience their bodies. The enforcement of these expectations is exacerbated by the male gaze, which continually evaluates people's bodies.

Male Gaze and Societal Expectations as Influencing (Gender) Dysphoria

As previously mentioned, gender dysphoria is the feeling of disconnect between gender identity and the sex one was assigned at birth, as well as subsequent socialization into that role, and can include body and/or social dysphoria (Parekh, 2016). It often includes being misgendered, and assuming qualities and preferences based on their gender. Hope provided her own account of dysphoria, and stated:

> Your own body becomes your prison. . . . Even in a sense of social and the physical dimensions of your body, and how [they] restrict you and hurt you and [is] one of the things that caused you pain.

Here, she refers to the social and physical components of gender dysphoria, which are influenced by society's restrictive, gendered expectations that prevent people from living authentically.

These situations evoke dysphoria because there is a desire for people to see them for who they are, but others are perceiving them differently. Jocelynn echoed Hope's sentiment:

> I mean, the beauty standard thing with trans people [is] huge. It's kind of hard to say this for sure because you can't tease yourself out of society, but I don't know if my dysphoria would necessarily be as bad as it was if I wasn't getting these messages that this is the standard that I need to be. And I'm sure that's the same with well every woman that I interact with. . . . Like, we spend seven hours looking at clothes because nothing quite makes our body look that ideal because that ideal is flawed.

Jocelynn stated that the societal ideals that exist influence the image of women and, thus, how transgender women feel they may have to look in order for their gender to be valid. Jocelynn expanded on this by stating this occurs for all women, as the ideal is unattainable for the vast majority of the population. Jocelynn also mentioned the difficulty of knowing what is personal and what is societal messaging, and continued this idea by stating, "some of that messaging has . . . made certain parts of my dysphoria infinitely worse." This demonstrates the connection between societal expectations and dysphoria. Furthermore, it highlights the importance of diversity and inclusivity in gender and body messaging, as these messages can and do get internalized. In addition, Dianne expressed a desire to conform to these standards in order to "be more comfortable in my own skin and also to alleviate the self-consciousness and the dysphoria of feeling like I'm a man that's dressing up like a woman, as opposed to just being a woman." Dianne noted a fear of being misgendered in public, which strongly contributes to social dysphoria, and feels pressure to adhere to certain societal standards in order to be correctly gendered and avoid feeling as dysphoric.

In sum, the male gaze can be harmful as it sets out distinct expectations for genders. Participants explored how the societal standards that exist for women have influenced their experiences with dysphoria, both in how they view themselves and how society views them.

This theme reflects how many participants experienced the male gaze in harmful and dehumanizing ways, through simply being visible in society, invalidating their identity, experiencing social disadvantages and marginalization, and sexualization. The next themes describe how this and the male gaze may be internalized.

Internalization of the Male Gaze

Internalization of the male gaze was also a common experience for participants. As previously mentioned, the male gaze can be internalized and lead to self-monitoring or monitoring others (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). The current theme will explore transgender women's: (a) insight into the male gaze, and (b) internalization of ideals and self-monitoring.

Insight into the Male Gaze

Insight into the male gaze refers to the unique perspectives transgender women can offer, having been socialized into a male role and subsequently living in a role in which the male gaze is turned on them. Contrary to the subtheme of adjusting to an underprivileged position, this theme details a positive perspective of having knowledge, understanding, and compassion. Part of this is that they did not, like many people in perceived privileged positions, have to think about the experiences of those who are not privileged, as Jocelynn said:

> I think the problem is most people won't challenge those preconceived notions until we have to because challenging chose things are uncomfortable. Like, even myself, I wouldn't necessarily have had to challenge those things if I was just a cis guy. It wouldn't need to happen because my understanding of where society was comfortable.

> It's a comfort thing. So, I'm not gonna challenge anything, I'm not gonna think about any minority really, not that I was a complete and utter a-hole, but would never think about those things [because] they didn't effect me, so I wasn't as conscious towards them.

However, moving from the role for which she was socialized to her actual gender has provided her with unique insights, which Catherine discussed as, "an active dual role throughout my life." The use of "dual role" refers to playing two roles within a single production. Catherine is thus referring to her socialization into a male role to living as a woman, and viewing this as a positive, insightful experience. Sarah shared the same perspective, and stated that, "I had the privilege of growing up in that male dynamic and understanding that there is no male authority or insight that he has, it's only what his perspective [is] as an individual." Like Catherine, Sarah noted that it is a positive experience and a privilege to have understood, in part, a male role and know that the authority men possess has no merit, but rather has been given to them by a patriarchal society that favours them over others.

Part of earlier socialization for some participants meant exposure to ideals for women and male privilege, and the potential influence that has on them now. Karen stated that she:

> Probably inherited a lot of the male aspects of what does it mean to be pretty, or you know? . . . What's – I wouldn't say expected of you, but what everybody expects from you . . . at least the male population, right?

Karen directly states that the male gaze may have been internalized. Also, Karen used the word "inherited," which, in this case, refers to how the male gaze and societal expectations continually get perpetuated and passed down to the next person. This reflects a need for the disruption of societal norms and socialization so that these harmful ideas do not continue. To further this point, Karen also said, "I just find that, because I had to play that role for so long, right, my brain

is kind of trained to say, 'well this is what's attractive.'" This demonstrates the long-lasting effects of socialization and how that influenced Karen's ideas of what is beautiful. Sarah also raised ideas pertaining to the insights she has into the male gaze:

> And I think the many years I spent pretending to be a guy, and sort of being behind enemy lines if you will, it helped me understand the dynamic, at least of the men that I was around, and some were very socially refined and others were incredibly awkward and inappropriate. And the ones that would sometimes say or act in stupid ways, wasn't always out of a sense of objectifying women but more – there certainly is and was that, but I also saw a lot of poor behaviour out of a sense of lack of self-worth themselves, and being able to see and connect and associate with women as equals of their own sense of lack of self-worth. So, that [discomfort] would lead to them staring at women's breasts and things like that, and so, I think I had an understanding and a sensitivity to that.

Sarah demonstrated empathy and understanding towards men, and feels their gaze, including an objectifying gaze, stems from their own insecurities, feelings of inadequacy, and "sense of bravado," and those subsequently get projected onto women. In addition, Sarah used the phrase, "behind enemy lines" to refer to being socialized into male spaces, and understanding what it is like, in a sense, to be on the other side. Enemy, here, refers to men as the perpetrators of the male gaze, and Sarah having previously been socialized into a male role provided her with some awareness of the perspectives of the "enemy."

This section is of particular interest as it demonstrates the unique insights transgender women may have about the male gaze, and also how the effects of being socialized into a male role persist through being internalized over time.

Internalization of Ideals and "Self-Gazing"

Beauty standards and image of the "ideal" woman can be internalized by women, often to a point where, as Jocelynn stated, it is not always a "cognitive choice" and it is "just the way [we're] taught to think." Jocelynn described them as becoming "learned core beliefs" that become difficult to separate from oneself:

> I've always said my boobs look super weird, they don't look right. That's not coming from me, that's coming from somewhere out there, whether it be, I don't know, something some person said, or whatever the case may be. That's internalizing something that's external again.

Here, Jocelynn stated that the origin of these negative thoughts is not herself, but rather a society that has an unattainable standard for women, and one in turn criticizes their body when they do not fit those standards.

In addition to the internalization of beauty standards, one may also gaze upon themselves in a very literal sense. Sid provided an example of this, stating, "when I see myself in sexual fantasy, it is an out of body experience. What the fuck does that mean for the male gaze? That I can only see myself participating?" This is a very literal internalization of the gaze in which Sid observes herself participating in sexual encounters, rather than imaging them through her own eyes. Sid's experience could also be interpreted as self-objectification, or viewing oneself as an object or positioned for one's desire (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). This occurs through the internalization of objectification, or the objectifying male gaze in this instance, which in turn leads to observing one's own bodies in such a way.

Another factor involved is self-monitoring, or "self-gazing." This could be when someone begins to police and critique themselves in order to "fit" into society's standards, like the external male gaze does. Karen mentions questioning herself in public:

> Am I doing this right? I don't have the female hip sway, right, so you kinda try to invent that a little bit. And you have to be careful there because if you do it the wrong way it really looks like you're trying [too hard], it looks like really goofy.

This was in reference to being gazed upon and interpreting those gazes as a sign that she is not being correctly gendered, or that she was identified as transgender, then monitoring herself to find out why. The internalization of the male gaze and self-monitoring can lead to an inner conflict in deciphering between what are ingrained societal beliefs and what is personal preference. Many participants described trying to decipher, as Sid said, "what parts are actually for me and what [are] parts of the gaze?" Dianne expressed this conflict below:

> I don't know how much of that is just the years of the media that I've consumed, just like, 'oh, women should be, you know, this like tanned hairless, you know, fair skinned goddesses,' that kind of stuff. But I like all of those things . . . those things make me happy to do that. So, I'm not quite sure how much of it is personal bias and how much of that is ingrained knowledge that I might challenge one day.

Dianne expressed liking for herself the standards that exist, which was echoed by Jocelynn. Jocelynn went on to question:

> Why do we enjoy doing it? . . . Is that because we're told we're supposed to and that just becomes part of us? Or, is that just the nature of gender? You will never know that because you can't have a human being that can function in society without society.

Jocelynn highlights the complexity of the issue in that one can never truly separate themselves from society. The way society is structured and what it tells people becomes internalized to a point where it is tied to who one is as a person and challenging that can be confusing and uncomfortable. The pressure to adhere to certain standards and internalization of the gaze often leads to a concern that, as Dianne expressed, she will be dismissed if she does not conform and people might, "write me off as a whole because of my appearance." Hope expressed a similar inner conflict between wanting to be in a place to like and accept her body and who she is.

In sum, the male gaze can be an internalized experience as well as an external experience. Many participants reported having understood the male gaze from their socialization into a male role, and how that continues to influence them through internalization. In addition, they mentioned internalizing societal ideals and how this influences how they view themselves and their bodies.

Male Gaze as Affirming

This theme demonstrates that the experience of transgender women with the male gaze is not universal and not everyone experiences it the same way. Some may have a more positive experience with the male gaze, and so this section explores the male gaze as: (a) validating of one's gender, and (b) a previously denied experience.

Validating Gender

Validating one's gender is important, especially for transgender people. It can be a euphoric feeling because transgender people are being perceived correctly. Runhildr explored this in her comment, "people are realizing that they don't have to struggle in their body everyday because they can make changes and they will be, you know, legitimized in public, that they will be who they are in real life." This quote speaks to eliminating social dysphoria by being

"legitimized" by others. Similarly, Karen stated, "you don't wanna be different. Nobody wants to be different. Everybody just wants to be themselves, to fit in to a group, and have people, you know, [not] treat them any other way than like normal." In addition, because of the euphoria of validation, some participants, including Sarah, would understandably pursue this "affirming attention." The affirmation gave further validity to her gender, and she later described validation from a man she was interested in:

> To have his interest and his desire towards me was the height of validation. So, after that point, I didn't second guess my femininity outwardly, I never second guessed it inwardly, but I always was very cautious of it or scared of expressing it outwardly, and more than he will ever realize gave me validation, and it's a terrible way to say it, but permission to just be expressive in my feminine nature and see that as a positive thing.

Here, Sarah stated she always identified as a woman, and to have her femininity and identity as a woman be affirmed by someone who was important to her was validating. It provided her with encouragement and momentum to continue living as herself. She continued within this vein by saying:

> My decision-making factors weren't based on external expectations. They were based on internal hopes and expectations, and how I internally wanted to be seen within that social dynamic, and then secondarily, how that dynamic received that.

This reinforces Sarah's previous point that much of what drives her is internal, and she has a desire to be perceived in accordance with her internal identity. Karen shared a similar perception in that the experience of male attention and validation of her identity was positive:

> You know what, I actually like when people and men look at me. I know lots of women have a problem with that, but I think it's just because it's so new . . . for me, right? And you know what? It's really super nice when someone genders you properly.

Karen also addressed euphoria from validation and how when men treated her as a woman, it is an indication that people see her for who she is. Also, Karen noted that being the focus of the male gaze is a new experience for her and she views it as part of the experience of being a woman. This attention validates what she has known about herself. She also mentioned that other women might not enjoy the male gaze as much, or at all. This may be because, as Karen stated, it is a new experience for her having been socialized into a male role, but cisgender women, for example, were socialized into a role that automatically opened them up to the male gaze.

Participants also mentioned receiving validating attention from men through gestures. Being treated in accordance with her gender was affirming for Karen, as it was for Monica:

> [When I first lived as myself] what really made me feel good was, I was going to Walmart one day and this guy runs up and grabs the door, and he opens it and says, 'here you go, ma'am!' And I was just like, 'this is nice' you know? . . . I found since living as a female, a lot more guys are trying to open doors and stuff sometimes they even get up to let me have a seat.

Based on Karen and Monica's descriptions, it appears that the impression an interaction leaves depends on the interpretation of the actions. There are some who may find those actions condescending, but for others, like Karen and Monica, it was very validating to be treated in accordance with their gender.

This subtheme represents a positive experience with the male gaze and how receiving it validates their identity as women. The male gaze is associated with being a woman and therefore

experiencing it indicates that their identity has been validated, and they have been correctly gendered.

Male Gaze as a Previously Denied Experience

The male gaze as a denied experience was especially important for Karen and Sarah, and refers to how the male gaze is viewed as an integral part of the experience of being a woman and having this denied from them when they were socialized into a male role. Karen found the experience of male attention to be "nice" because it was "new" for her. Sarah echoed this:

> I think there's the unique position of wishing to be seen as the person I was and being excluded from that for so long. . . . That that male attention, even sometimes if it was a little sleazy or like asshole – well that's not true, I never tolerated that – even if it was not the most refined we'll say, I was often appreciative of it because it was sorely missing in my world.

Sarah mentioned that while male attention was not always given with positive intentions, it was generally a positive experience because it was new to her. She further expressed that it was a "juxtaposition of feeling more objectified and less seen as an equal as a whole. But much of that male attention still being a positive thing because it had been withheld from me for such a long period of time." Again, Sarah stated the attention was not always given with positive intentions, but she received it as such because there was the joy of finally receiving something that she was meant to have and had been denied.

In sum, it is very possible that the male gaze can be a positive and affirming experience for transgender women, particularly when it is viewed as validating their identity and as an essential experience of womanhood that was previously withheld from them.

Absence or Rejection of the Male Gaze

When discussing experiences of the male gaze, it is also important to explore the experiences of participants who did not notice or who rejected the male gaze. Many participants reported experiencing the male gaze, and many of the same participants also highlighted situations in which they do not notice it, or how they overcame it. This superordinate theme has several subthemes: (a) abstention, (b) gender euphoria, (c) personal agency and commitment to the self, and (d) redefining gender and challenging societal norms.

Abstention

Abstention refers to the act or means of keeping away from something undesirable. Avoidance was not chosen as the title for this theme as it has a negative connotation, implying that one is "running away" from something. Based on the accounts of participants, their behaviours were more adaptive rather than avoidant. Also, safety is often a major concern and so participants adjusted their behaviour to remain safe and should, therefore, not be criticized for this. A few participants mentioned choosing not to be in situations with a lot of men, or generally choosing not to stand out. Hope, for example, stated that, "I never felt that I've had that evaluation, critiquing," in reference to the male gaze, because "I don't wanna stand out to people." Her personal choice was to not stand out, whether it be for safety reasons or personal preference, and Hope thus was not as heavily subjected to the male gaze. Bridget shared a similar experience:

> I think being actually aware of the male gaze in real life, not hugely in a very in your face kind of way. For the most part, I don't really notice men noticing me. Which is kind of what I go for (laughter). I try to fit into that middle ground where they don't notice me

> either as being very attractive to their gaze or being very repulsive. I just kind of try and slip through in the middle.

For Bridget, the middle ground is a safe place to exist. As previously mentioned, transgender women can often be subject to harassment for either adhering to societal norms or deviating from them. Therefore, the safest place to exist is in the middle, which does not attract the male gaze for being at either of the two extremes.

Maggie mentioned that she does not "pursue relationships with men" and "I don't interact with men, they're not part of my social environment" nor her "everyday social life," in part due to being in a relationship with a woman. Within her personal relationships, there are fewer interactions with men than there might be "for transwomen, or trans feminine individuals, where men are the natural intimate relationships." For those who seek out relationships with men, particularly romantic and intimate relationships, the male gaze would likely be more prevalent. That is not to say, of course, that those who do not seek relationships with men do not experience the male gaze, nor does it mean that those who do always experience the male gaze or are "choosing" to be subject to the male gaze.

Similarly, Dianne stated that, "for the most part I find that because I have a boyfriend, I've never really got like harassed by any man or woman like looking to quote-unquote 'score'." Being in a relationship with a man, in a sense, was understood as temporarily "protecting" her from the effects of the male gaze (e.g., being harassed). While the male gaze may still have been present, as it is a pervasive phenomenon, the presence of Dianne's boyfriend may have prevented the perpetrator from overtly acting upon the gaze. She continued by saying:

> My experiences might be different than a lot of other transwomen because I am in a relationship. Most of the time that I'm out having conversations with people, I'm with my

> boyfriend. . . . So, I've never really noticed if anybody was expressing desire and wanting to be in a relationship with me or any of that, kind of thing.

The presence of a man has prevented her from being approached by others and being viewed as someone to pursue. This experience was unique to Dianne, and begs the question: does the presence of a man protect women from the male gaze?

Gender Euphoria

Gender euphoria is a concept that was introduced to me by Sid, and refers to the comfort or joy about living, or thought of living, as one's true gender identity (Finch, 2015). Gender euphoria can focus on appearance and finding congruence between physical attributes and personal identity. It can also refer to being gendered correctly by others (Lester, 2004). Catherine stated that "I joined for [lack] of a better term, inner and outer me to be one me," and found an "instant degree of comfort [and] rightness of the intrinsic matching of my exterior and interior self . . . the, I guess, oneness." Both statements represent feelings of gender euphoria, which, for Catherine, stemmed for the congruence between her body and mind. This feeling was also expressed by many participants, and for some, like Catherine, it was protective against noticing the male gaze. Jocelynn explored this:

> I think its kind of a constant journey of having to define your version of self first before you can have that actual self-worth and self-understanding. Even if you're told that you're not what society wants, you don't care because you're grounded enough that it doesn't matter.

Jocelynn explained how understanding and knowing oneself is protective, so that if criticism comes, one has a solid ground or anchoring. It is possible, based on what some participants suggest, that criticism and the male gaze may lose some of its power and some of the negative

effects as one accepts themselves and has confidence in who they are. The male gaze may still be present, but how one interprets or experiences it may be different. Confidence and comfortableness in oneself was identified as a component of gender euphoria that helped to, at least in part, lessen some of the effects of the male gaze. Confidence can also involve the confidence of the other individual, specifically men, as it relates to the male gaze. Monica explored this aspect:

> I'm finding the younger generation that's coming is way different than the generation I'm in. I couldn't find people my age very often who were very accepting that were considered straight. For them, it was almost like they had to acknowledge that they weren't secure in their manhood, which was totally false to the whole thing. But I'm finding with the thirties and younger, that there are quite a few men out there are very secure sexually as to who they are. And those younger guys, very accepting of me.

The responsibility is not just on the participants or the people being gazed upon; it is very much the responsibility of those gazing, or those who tend to gaze. Monica highlighted the generational component, and that the younger generation is generally more accepting and confident in themselves, such that they do not feel the need to gaze upon others in critical or objectifying ways. Having that security in self-identity means the younger generation may not feel superior, or a need to feel superior or dominant over women, and thus view themselves as equals with people of other genders.

Another part of gender euphoria is personal attitude and conceptualization of situations. As Hope stated, "I've never really focused on how other people really relate to [my body]." She does not concern herself with the perspectives of others and so the male gaze is something that has, at times, been below her radar. The male gaze is a phenomenon that often goes unnoticed

due to its pervasiveness and embeddedness in social structures; for many individuals, it may also be "below their radar." In stating this, I do not attempt to say that the male gaze is not present, as it very much may be regardless if the receiver is aware of it or not, but rather that the male gaze may be treated with indifference or viewed as insignificant in daily life. In addition, confidence may also come with a position of authority. As previously mentioned, Maggie typically does not interact with many men, but "they're part of my workplace environment, but there's a professional separation there. . . . They're my customers and in some sense, I'm still in a position of authority." The position of authority she described affords her a certain amount of respect from customers as she is responsible for their care. This authority has acted almost as a temporary "shield" against negative attention and behaviour, and due to her professional position, she has power over others in this particular instance, not the other way around. While the male gaze, power structures, and transphobia are still present, being in a position of authority, at least in a professional setting, may lessen the overt ways (e.g., verbal harassment, violence) in which these discriminatory practices may take place.

As it relates to confidence, "letting go" of the societal standard for women and living authentically is an important component. Hope described "becoming more comfortable with my body," because she "[doesn't] care much about my presentation in terms of conforming to male standards or traditionally female standards." For Hope, her comfortableness and confidence came from not adhering to societal standards, rather than conforming to them. This confidence appears to exist internally, rather than externally or from being celebrated for "fitting" societal norms. Catherine echoed this by saying that the confidence of being authentic helped her realize she did not need to pursue societal ideals. She notes, "now that I get to be me, I didn't feel the need to sort of go down that road as much." She added, "and if I have a choice between not

having the optimal female body that possibly I could have had, or be dead, I think I'll forgo the perfection of that, you know?"

Another component related to gender euphoria, is the feeling that many participants had that being a woman is liberating. Catherine, who mentioned not experiencing the male gaze, explained that her comfort with herself and the joy of being able to live authentically as a woman helped shield her from the male gaze and its influence, "general sum up: the male gaze has been below my radar and I think it's because of the comfortableness of me with me." Karen shared this feeling, as did Sarah:

> To be on the other side of that now is peaceful, is joyful. I don't think about that everyday now, I don't think of my gender identity everyday, I just am in the world, and there's such a profound sense of peace and well-being that comes along with that.

Sarah's account speaks to the euphoria of living authentically, in a gender that feels right, to a point where it is not something that is on her radar and she can exist as she was meant to. There is a sense of freedom associated with being able to appear and live as one wants, and Karen, along with several others, found male standards to be more restrictive. Sarah expressed, "that in a female role, I ended up having more authority and influence to be able to have things go my way." She followed up by saying:

> I would always feel [not right] in a male role, partially because it didn't fit, but people were very speculative, very cautious of men, and I feel I have a lot more unspoken credibility as a woman. An assumption of gentleness, an assumption of insightfulness and of social insightfulness and kindness and nurturing that isn't afforded to men.

The freedom of being gentle, in touch with emotions, and other more "feminine" characteristics, gave Sarah a sense of ease. She also noted that people are generally very cautious around men,

due to the fact that they are not able to be gentle and emotional without facing negative consequences. It also speaks to the harmful nature of enforcing a particular form of masculinity, and how this influences how society views men.

Personal Agency and Commitment to the Self

Personal agency was also an important factor in being able to live authentically and reject the male gaze. Maggie, for instance, stated that, "I don't dress for men. I dress for how I feel comfortable," outright rejecting the male gaze and allowing her life to be guided by her own decisions and preferences. A common experience for many transgender people is being perceived as "offensive" and "wrong." Karen said:

> For somebody to tell you 'how dare you do this? That's totally wrong. You have to somehow get help,' right? And it's that thing, it's like, 'you're wrong.' No, I'm not wrong. Right? It's like, how could it be wrong when I'm myself?

Karen noted the paradoxical nature of telling someone they are wrong for being who they are and living authentically, when that is a goal we all strive for.

Another component of personal agency is related to personal attitude and interpretation of events. Catherine stated, "one thing I learned, I don't even know how far back, is that the likelihood of, regardless of how positive or negative your expectation is, the likelihood of what you're expecting happening? Huge." Here, she references a self-fulfilling prophecy in that sometimes, something may happen or we perceive something to be happening because we expect it. Catherine thus elected not to notice the male gaze. Similarly, Maggie noted that interpretation of events and behaviours is also important, as "it's more how you internalize the experience."

A final point relating to personal agency that was expressed by participants was a commitment to the self. This means that, despite the societal expectations and pressures, one can still pursue authenticity. Jocelynn explored this concept in the statement below:

> At the same time, I'm learning to not listen to those messages because I think one of the great things about being trans is you were given a box and you didn't stay in that box, so why do have to go into the other box? Why don't you just go wherever else?

There is a feeling of empowerment in being transgender as it allows for more openness, diversity, and flexibility because they have pushed past societal expectations and that has opened them to more possibilities. Maggie mentioned reaching that point as well, saying, "I'm going to do what I'm doing no matter how people interact with me," showing that commitment to oneself can overpower societal expectations, rendering the male gaze obsolete.

Redefining Gender and Challenging Societal Norms

As mentioned, some participants found that being transgender is empowering as it breaks down gendered expectations and ideals. There are often expectations for genders that relate to hobbies, interests, career paths, and appearance (Sherman, 2017), and one might not always be aware of this. Hope described having exposure to diverse body types due to her work as helpful in developing confidence and her own personal attitudes about what women should look like:

> I often have very optimistic and less stereotyping views of what a ciswoman can look like. But that might be more deeply tied to popular culture. You can still be a very beautiful woman and the have a strong body, you can be one with the other. And so, I try not to internalize negativity in that area.

Hope's statement also highlights the importance of representation and challenging existing stereotypes and images for women, as these can be harmful for others to internalize. Seeing more

diversity allows for a greater understanding of the variation of body types and, thus, protects against the negative effects of an unattainable ideal. Similarly, Runhildr expressed what being a woman meant to her, in ways that defy societal conceptualizations of womanhood, "it's not about being weak or not in control of your emotions, it's about not being afraid to be emotional and you can still be strong as a woman." Emotions are often viewed as negative and irrational, often because they are associated with femininity and are discouraged in masculinity, and so Runhildr sought to challenge this by reconceptualizing emotions and womanhood. As it relates to personal interests, Jocelynn also challenged societal norms and stated that, "I get to define what's male and female for me . . . I can be wherever I wanna be." Jocelynn rejected the stereotypical interests and occupations for women and elected to follow her own path rather than be restricted by society. Bridget shared a similar sentiment:

> I don't believe that somebody's interests make them a man or a woman or non-binary. In fact, I believe the existence of non-binary people reinforces the idea that somebody's manhood or womanhood or personhood is entirely dependent on the fact that they know that that's how they are. And the attributes that I think of as a woman, I wouldn't enforce those on anyone else.

Bridget made an important point that gender and personality is very independent and unique to a person. How one person defines themselves and their gender can be different from the next, and both are equally valid. Jocelynn expressed a similar feeling, "having that understanding that you are you and you look exactly the way you should look. You just are. And that's kind of redefining that expectation to include yourself." She explored how redefining gender in our own ways allows everyone to be included in those realms, rather than being excluded on the basis of

one's gender or feeling that you are lacking or needing to fix something. Rather, this position holds that everyone is valid exactly how they are.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the findings from the current study were explored. While each of the eleven participants had their own unique and individual experiences with the male gaze, there were certain patterns that emerged from the data that formed the five superordinate themes and subsequent subthemes. Chapter 5 will discuss how the findings relate and add to the existing literature. In addition, the discussion will detail the implications of this research, strengths and limitations, and future directions for research.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Overview

Interpretative phenomenological analysis was used to understand the experiences of transgender women with the male gaze, and how it may have influenced their relationship with their bodies. The current chapter will explore how the literature relates to the findings of this study. Specifically, research on masculinity, objectification theory, gender affirmation, ambivalent sexism, and gender euphoria will be explored. Implications of the current study's findings, as well as recommendations for practice and research will be discussed. In addition, the strengths and limitations of this study will be detailed, and future directions for research will be provided.

Contextualizing Results

Four superordinate themes and several subthemes emerged from the data collected from interviews with eleven transgender women to answer the question: How does the male gaze influence the experiences of transgender women with their body? Participants described the influence of gender expectations, as well as power in gender dynamics, and the significance of affirmation and authenticity. The findings of this study contribute to the existing body of literature on gender and body-related concerns, which will be detailed below.

Superordinate Theme 1: Male Gaze as Potentially Harmful and Dehumanizing

Transgender people, safety, and visibility. In Chapter 2 of this thesis, the literature on the experiences of transgender people with discrimination and violence was explored. The findings of this study further demonstrated the role of visibility (i.e., being identified as transgender) as it relates to safety. In a recent news article, Zacarias (2019) highlighted the struggles faced by transgender people related to visibility and safety and explored the frustrations

of some transgender people with the societal expectation that they be visible. Zacarias mentioned that visibility might subject transgender people, and particularly transgender people of colour, to violence and discrimination. Several participants in the current study also reported experiencing the conflicting feelings regarding visibility and safety. A report on the experiences of transgender people in the United States showed that one in four transgender people have been assaulted, and thus cisgender people, and even other transgender people, should not expect nor compel transgender people to be visible (National Center for Transgender Equality [NCTE], 2016a). Fear surrounding visibility was evident in the interview transcripts from the current study.

A major component of visibility is conformity, and whether transgender people are identified as being transgender in public or not. Beauchamp (2009) described this phenomenon within the context of societal surveillance, which especially relates to the male gaze. Beauchamp stated that, with the rise of surveillance and a need to continually disclose gender, transgender people are forced into visibility and, thus, may feel they have to prove their gender. As it relates to the current study, several participants noted concerns of safety, visibility, and disclosing one's gender to others. They reported an uncertainty as to whether they would be accepted or not. Beauchamp also explored a general, and often implicit, mistrust of transgender people; that people think they are tricking them or attempting to gain something by presenting a certain way (i.e., as a gender that is different from their assigned sex). He also suggests that this may create a pressure to conform, by pursuing medical interventions, and "rid oneself" of any indicators that they are transgender or gender non-conforming. This, therefore, makes one invisible and doing so allows one to be safe by avoiding having their identity questioned and invalidated. Again, this relates to the participants' accounts in several ways. Some participants explored the assumption many people may have that transgender people are being deceptive and tricking others, among

other stereotypes. Also, participants noted the pressure that exists to conform to societal standards as a way to gain acceptance and safety through "invisibility," or not being identified by others as transgender.

Devaluing women and femininity. Several participants explored the devaluation of women and femininity in their experiences. For them, it was difficult to adjust to a position that is afforded less freedom, respect, and privilege. In addition, societal messages regarding women (e.g., lesser, weak, submissive, bad) had become internalized for some, which led to a difficult process of adjusting, unlearning, and challenging these social perspectives. Furthermore, part of what allows the male gaze to exist is the systemic devaluation of women and femininity, and the perspective that they are lesser than men (Waites, 1982). This devaluation subjects women to oppression and discrimination as men are seen as having more authority. In addition, devaluing women also involves focusing on and valuing women for their looks while, in contrast, men are valued for what they do and their success. Several participants noted this as well and explored how there is much more pressure to focus on their appearance compared to when they were socialized into a male role. In addition, many also reported not being taken seriously or valued for their intelligence or successes as women. Jocelynn and Dianne specifically mentioned being automatically dismissed due to being a woman (i.e., being viewed as having less knowledge and competence). Furthermore, the devaluation of women involves the binary view of femininity as bad, and masculinity as good, and occurs for all genders, as was explicitly stated by Bridgette. For example, girls and women who are more "masculine," or "tomboys," are given more respect than "girly girls" (e.g., Davis, 2018; Francis, Archere, Moote, de Witt, & Yeomans, 2016). Francis et al. (2016) found that, in science, "girly girls" were viewed as unintelligent and as "jokes" because they were too feminine to be respected in their field. Consequently, more

"feminine," vulnerable, and emotional boys and men are met with extreme criticism, and viewed as less competent, worthy, and valuable than their more "masculine" counterparts (e.g., Gibson et al., 2018; Mayer, 2018; Rosette et al., 2015). Each of these components was described by participants. The devaluation of women is widespread and occurs in countless areas in our society, including the legal system (Epstein & Goodman, 2018), sports (Burrow, 2016), religion (Manson, 2016), and work (Francis et al., 2016). This systemic devaluation is further exacerbated when race and ethnicity are included (Cooper, 2018; Reid, 1998).

A component of the devaluation of women and femininity is homophobia, and this was also discussed by several participants. Bridgette and Monica specifically highlighted experiencing homophobia through the male gaze, but this was not related to their sexuality. Rather, they noted that men were sometimes hesitant to gaze, or gazed secretly, for fear that they would be viewed as gay. This speaks to several problematic assumptions. The first is that the men gazing do not view transgender women as women, but rather as men and thus gazing upon them would make them gay. Second, this also speaks to the pervasive, internalized homophobia that exists within our society. As it relates to the devaluation of women and femininity, there is a stereotype that gay men are more effeminate and, thus, are viewed as less than because they are associated with femininity (e.g., Clarkson, 2006). Clarkson demonstrated in their discourse analysis of StraightActing.com, a website for non-effeminate gay men, that even gay men may display internalized homophobia through a rejection and devaluation of women and femininity. Homophobia was invalidating for participants as men did not view them as women in that instance and felt uncomfortable gazing upon them for fear that they would be viewed as gay and, thus, more feminine.

Toxic masculinity. As it pertains to safety and the male gaze, toxic masculinity is a relevant component. The term *toxic masculinity* was originally coined by the men's movement in the 1980s in response to the rise of second-wave feminism (Salter, 2019). The term was initially used to explain that men's aggression was a result of "societal feminization" of boys, and the remedy was to reconnect with the "deep masculine," or the protective, warrior version of masculinity. However, as with ambivalent sexism, this perspective of men as protectors of women can also have harmful effects (e.g., Glick, Sakalli-Ugurlu, Ferreira, & de Souza, 2002). In recent years, as sociologist Michael Flood (2018) explained, toxic masculinity has been used to described men who are aggressive, stoic, physically strong, dominant, disrespectful towards women, and entitled, and there is an expectation for all men to behave in this way. Flood stated that toxic masculinity is harmful for men and women, and likely other genders as well, highlighting a critical need to change this culture of toxicity. The aggressive behaviour of traditionally masculine men can also lead to a greater distrust and cautiousness of men more generally. This distrust goes both ways, in that men are taught to be stoic and independent and, thus, distrust others and not seek help (e.g., McCullough, Pedersen, Schroder, Tabak, & Carver, 2013).

In their accounts, several participants explored the male gaze as oppressive and exploitative. Receiving the male gaze, at times, felt dehumanizing as they were treated as objects. The gaze, as was reported, was experienced as coming from a place of privilege and entitlement, and this elicited a sense of fear. The male gaze did, in a sense, embody a feeling of "predator versus prey," leaving participants feeling vulnerable, exposed, and at times, in danger. As it relates to this study, "predatory masculinity," or the objectification of women and promotion of rape culture, has ties to the male gaze. Predatory masculinity gives power to males

and allows them to gaze without consequence, normalizing the objectification of women and rape culture (Tortorici, 2015). Predatory masculinity has major consequences, as sexual violence against women is viewed as a "natural manifestation of male sexual desire" (Tortorici, 2015, p. 1). As it relates to the male gaze, society affords males with power and privilege to behave in certain ways (e.g., gazing, violence), sometimes without consequence. Participants who noted experiencing the male gaze, described it as coming from a place of privilege and in turn, felt powerless and unable to challenge that power dynamic.

In discussions of toxic masculinity and the male gaze, several participants brought up the topic of incels. Incels is short for "involuntary celibates" and refers to a group of people, predominantly white, cisgender men, who are unable to find a romantic or sexual partner and wish to have one. Incels relate to the idea of male entitlement and perceived power and superiority over other genders, particularly women. It allows for misogyny, sexism, and transphobia as these are seen as manifestations of dominant, mainstream masculinity. Jocelynn and Bridgette specifically mentioned incels as a group that often evokes fear due to their sense of entitlement and dominance over women. They were noted as the main perpetrators of the male gaze and they strive for the more extreme forms of masculinity (e.g., aggression, ownership of women) due to insecurity in their masculinity. Sarah also mentioned this experience and added that men's insecurity and a lack of self-worth are often driving forces for transphobia. Incels are part of a form of extremism that targets women, as incels blame women for rejecting them or not wanting to enter into a relationship with them (Lavin, 2018). It is a hate-oriented belief system, that centres on perceived male supremacy and the subordination of women. Incels are also often characterized by low self-esteem and self-pity, misogyny, male entitlement, and being "beta males." "Alpha males" embody toxic masculinity, and beta males strive to be alpha males and

resent society and women for "making" them betas and incels (Ging, 2017). In doing so, they perpetuate toxic masculinity as the ideal and continue to pursue it. Jocelynn also explored how terms such as "alpha" and "beta" are used by incels, and how this reinforces toxic masculinity as "beta" males relentlessly strive to embody the unhealthier forms of masculinity. As it relates to the male gaze, toxic masculinity operates on the basis of power, aggression, entitlement, and control over women. Thus, it is often important to discuss toxic masculinity in conversations about the male gaze, particularly when that gaze is directed towards women in oppressive ways.

Social compliance and conformity. The subtheme of adjustment to an underprivileged position involves several relevant concepts in the literature, including compliance and conformity. The male gaze was noted by participants as part of the adjustment. Participants mentioned experiencing a certain degree of privilege when they were perceived as male (although they may have never identified as such) and noted experiencing a shift as women. Many participants, particularly Jocelynn and Bridgette, reported being dismissed and devalued as women. In addition, many participants explored the pressure for women to focus on their appearance, and engage in certain activities and hobbies (e.g., cooking, stereotypically female jobs). This led to an internal conflict in which they wanted to remain authentic, but also wanted to gain acceptance and safety, often through invisibility, or not being identified as transgender. Thus, this was a major component of adjustment for participants. Part of adjusting to a new position is understanding what is expected of individuals in your new position and conforming to those expectations. Cialdini and Goldstein (2004) outline the importance of compliance and conformity in our society. Compliance refers to a kind of acquiescence, specifically with regards to societal norms. It may not be something we elect to participate in, but the consequences of non-compliance may outweigh the benefits. A major component of this is authority and

obedience. Authority, in this context, refers to the expectations people in Western culture collectively set forth. Many people expect others to be obedient, and thus, individuals are faced with the decision to comply and gain social acceptance, or disobey and face potential negative consequences, such as exclusion or discrimination. Social norms dictate how we should appear and react and serve as a guide to obtain acceptance. This compliance and obedience can also occur in other settings, such as workplaces, education, and one-on-one interactions where one individual is perceived to have more authority than the other. As it pertains to this study, if participants were aware of the presence of the male gaze, they may elect to comply to avoid negative consequences and gain acceptance. Compliance can be a strategy to ensure safety, as being visible as a transgender person and "disobedient," or challenging norms, can subject one to harassment and even violence.

As was discussed by participants, social acceptance and validation are highly important, and thus conforming to social norms may be an important way to access these. Conformity is a similar concept described by Cialdini and Goldstein (2004), which refers to adjusting one's behaviour to align with the expectations of others. Similar to compliance, the goal of conformity is to gain social acceptance from others. Conformity and, thus, social acceptance and approval, aids in enhancing an individual's self-esteem. It is also possible, however, that going against social norms may also enhance an individual's self-esteem by allowing them to feel as though they are unique and "stand-out" (e.g., Blanton & Christie, 2003). It is still important, however, even when deviating from social norms, that one receives some form of acceptance.

Compliance and conformity demonstrate that humans are internally motivated to strive for acceptance from one's community. Humans want to be accepted by others, and sometimes, one of the ways to assure this is to conform to what society expects of us so that we can be

included as part of the group (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004). Exclusion, as was described in the findings, can be a particularly traumatic experience, especially if an individual is already not conforming to societal norms (e.g., Mooren & van Minnen, 2014). Therefore, compliance and conformity are of particular relevance to this study as participants reported a goal of acceptance, and so invalidating one's identity can be particularly traumatic. When the male gaze is invalidating, there may be a greater pressure to strive for conformity and compliance as a way to ensure safety and validation. In addition, when the male gaze is affirming and one's identity is validated, it may be a motivator to continue to conform to consistently be correctly gendered and avoid harm for not conforming. It is also important to mention in this section that sometimes conformity is not a choice; for some people, like transgender individuals, conformity is essential for safety. Therefore, this section is not explored with judgement, as there are many complex and interwoven factors that play a role in how a person appears and behaves in public.

Objectification theory. As was previously described in Chapter 2, objectification theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) posits that girls and women are predominantly objectified by men with their importance and self-worth tied to physical appearance. Objectification theory strongly relates to the male gaze as it involves a focus on an observer, the one who is objectifying, and this gaze evaluates women and girls based on their appearance. Objectification is similar to sexualization and fetishization, which were all experienced by participants. Sexualization is very similar to sexual objectification and refers to the act of making something or someone sexual, and viewing them in a very sexualized way (Merriam-Webster, 2013). Fetishization refers to an individual, or part of an individual (e.g., being transgender, or having a racial identity), being sexualized for this sole part, often reducing the individual to this aspect of themselves (Merriam-

Webster, 2019). This experience can be dehumanizing, and several accounts explore sexualization (e.g., Flores et al., 2018) and fetishization (Serano, 2007) of transgender people.

Objectification of transgender people. The sexualization, fetishization, and objectification of transgender individuals is also particularly important to consider in the context of this study. As mentioned by participants, transgender people may be portrayed in a variety of negative ways in the media, including over-sexualized images. This negative portrayal can result in fear of being treated as objects rather than humans and, thus, the male gaze was sometimes viewed as dangerous by participants. Therefore, many participants reported monitoring and surveilling themselves and their bodies as a way to "fit" societal standards, and also to ensure they did not "stand out" to the gaze and subsequently be objectified. Previous research conducted exploring transgender women's experiences with objectification demonstrated that appearance congruence is negatively associated with body surveillance (Comiskey, Parent, & Tebbe, 2019). In other words, experiencing objectification was related to greater self-surveillance and dysphoria. Research has also shown that transgender people of colour experience racial sexual objectification and fetishization as well as body policing (Flores et al., 2018). Flores et al. (2018) highlighted that self-surveillance and self-objectification may occur was a way to affirm one's identity and ensure safety. These findings bear resemblance to the male gaze, as well as the accounts of many participants with regards to sexualization and objectification. Participants noted "self-gazing" or an internalization of the male gaze as a way to monitor their behaviours and appearances. The purpose was to gain acceptance and have their gender affirmed by others, particularly those with power and authority.

Superordinate Theme 2: Internalization of the Male Gaze

Gender socialization. Gender socialization involves learning which behaviours, roles, and appearances are deemed appropriate for a person based on their assigned sex (Williams, Satterwhite, & Best, 1999). Generally, one is socialized into either feminine or masculine gender roles based on assigned sex, and gender thus becomes a set of learned behaviours and characteristics that exist throughout one's life. Gender socialization operates on the position that gender is a social construction created by society (Lindsey & Christie, 1990). It differs from other positions that suggest gender and gender roles, and thus gender differences, are biological and innate.

Sandra Bem proposed gender schema theory in 1981 as a way to explain the process of gender socialization. The theory focuses on how certain behaviours and characteristics are "sex-typed," and characterised as either male or female. We then absorb this information and incorporate it into our personal schemas. Bem suggests that the gender schemata, and schemata in general, allows one to navigate society and process information quickly. This theory relies on stereotypes and understanding of gender and operates strongly on the gender binary. Schemas often do not allow room for deviations as it suggests one's self-concept is directly tied to gender schemas. One's identity thus becomes fused with societal conceptualizations of gender. As it pertains to this study, people generally have certain assumptions and stereotypes regarding gender, and this informs what transgender individuals may feel pressure to embody. It may then influence experiences of dysphoria, as the images of gender become so ingrained due to the pervasiveness in society. Several participants in this study, including Jocelynn, explored how societal standards negatively influenced her dysphoria. She noted that her dysphoria may not have been as intense if very strict, dichotomous standards did not exist for gender.

Gender performativity. Several participants explored having to "perform" gender in order to gain acceptance. Hope explored performing gender as a way to ensure safety and avoid confrontation. She mentioned not only performing her own gender, but also performing in ways that are considered more "masculine" as a way to obtain respect and safety in situations with a greater male presence. Other participants, including Jocelynn, Karen, and Sarah, explored how they were performing femininity in accordance with societal expectations to be accepted by others and also to be correctly gendered, particularly by strangers. Gender performativity is a theory of gender proposed by Judith Butler in 1990. It refers to how one produces and reproduces gender through how they present, act, and react, often in interactions. Gender performativity suggests that we have to "do" gender; that gender is not something innate, but rather enforced by society and something one has to perform. Those who do not perform in accordance with what is expected of their gender may experience discrimination, exclusion, and aggression (e.g., Klemmer et al., 2018). Specifically, as it relates to this study and the male gaze, gender performativity incorporates a sense of accountability and omnirelevance. Omnirelevance refers to being evaluated, judged, and regulated by what one does and how they perform, or do not perform, their gender. This demonstrates that policing and evaluating others is enmeshed in our society. In performing gender, and performing it "appropriately," our gender thus becomes an "accomplishment" we achieve (West & Zimmerman, 1987).

Unique insights. Little research exists on the insights transgender people can offer about gender as it relates to socialization into differing gender roles, and so this was a unique finding of the current study. Binary transgender people (i.e., transgender women and transgender men) have been exposed to socialization and expectations for men and women. However, this is not claiming they were ever their assigned gender (although, they may have previously identified as

such), but rather that they were socialized into those roles and perceived as such. A news article by *The Times* on the experiences of transgender men with this socialization, reported that there was a stark difference in how the men were treated, compared to how they were treated when they were socialized as women (Alter, n.d.; Bahrampour, 2018). The transgender men interviewed noted that they now experience more cautiousness from others, amplification of their success, minimization of their mistakes, and greater attempts by other men to involve them in sexist comments and behaviours towards and about women. In addition, a belief exists that transgender women possessed "male privilege" when they were socialized into a male role, and several participants noted this, but with that privilege also comes harassment and bullying for experiencing oneself to be female (Tourjée, 2017). This becomes a complicated struggle for many people, particularly cisgender people who do not wish to offend, to find a balance between knowing transgender women as women, and not attempting to dismiss intersectionality and their unique experiences and struggles as transgender people.

Self-objectification and self-surveillance. Objectification theory was described above, and self-objectification is an extension of that theory. Self-objectification is the internalization of the objectifying observer's gaze and viewing oneself as an object (Arroyo, Segrin, & Harwood, 2014). Several participants explored the ways in which they would observe their bodies and behaviours, and compare them to the societal expectations for women. Sid and Karen provided accounts of this self-objectification and self-surveillance. Sid mentioned a very direct internalization and manifestation of the objectification she experienced. She mentioned viewing herself participating in sexual fantasies, rather than living them through her own eyes. Sid explored this as a direct internalization and manifestation of the objectifying male gaze. Karen explored self-surveillance, and mentioned observing her mannerisms in public, as well as how

she walked and interacted with others. She was frequently monitoring herself, her appearance, and her behaviour, so that she would not be misgendered, but rather correctly identified as a woman by others, particularly strangers. Karen's account describes a significant part of self-objectification and the internalization of the gaze, which is policing and monitoring one's body in anticipation of evaluation from others (Tiggemann & Slater, 2001). Self-objectification may be viewed as adaptive, as women are often rewarded for being conventionally attractive (Dellinger & Williams, 1997), and it helps them feel as though they are close to the societal standard (Calogero, Boroughs, & Thompson, 2007). Indeed, women are socialized to focus on their appearance rather than other areas, such as education and career as was previously discussed, and thus the societal perspectives become internalized and women begin to monitor themselves and their bodies. Vaz and Bruno (2003) drew connections between internalization and self-surveillance, and Foucault's conceptualizations of power, surveillance, and panopticism. As described, Foucault explored the panopticon as a metaphor for gazing and surveillance behaviours, with said gaze being a form of power and facilitating discipline. People experience surveillance, not just in the form of objectification, and they internalize this and subsequently monitor themselves in anticipation of a gaze.

Superordinate Theme 3: Male Gaze as Affirming

Gender affirmation. Gender affirmation was particularly relevant to participants in this study and was noted as a major theme. As was previously described, gender affirmation refers to being correctly gendered by others (Bockting, Knudson, & Goldberg, 2006; Nuttbrock et al., 2009). Having one's gender affirmed demonstrates that the individual is being perceived the way they wish to be perceived, and this can be a very rewarding experience, particularly for transgender people who were previously not able to live as their gender (Melendez & Pinto,

2007). *Gender affirmation* is generally the most acceptable term, but other terms include, *identity support* and *transgender/gender identity affirmation*. For some participants, the male gaze was a positive experience as it was a sign that their gender was affirmed and they were being correctly identified as female by men. Although the intent of the male attention may not have been positive, the male gaze was viewed as part of the experience of womanhood and, thus, a clear indicator that their identity had been affirmed. Gender affirmation also has ties to gender socialization (e.g., Bem, 1981) and objectification theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Women may be socialized to believe their identity and appearance are to be defined by others, with their importance and worth directly tied to their appearance and how conventionally attractive they are (Sevelius, 2013). Several participants reported experiencing pressure to focus on their appearance and noted spending more time on their appearance (e.g., clothing, makeup, hair) as it was expected of them. Doing so also served the purpose of being correctly gendered and thus there was high motivation to engage in these practices. Gender affirmation, for transgender women in particular, may be related to this socialization, and thus external validation becomes very rewarding. Sevelius (2013) explored how gender affirmation may be experienced differently by cisgender people as their gender identity may not be questioned:

> The need for gender affirmation is not unique to transgender individuals, but may take on a more prominent role in their lives due to their gender minority status. For non-transgender individuals whose gender identity and expression aligns with the gender they were assigned at birth, gender affirmation may come easily and without much thought, although societal pressures to conform to rigid notions of masculinity and femininity are pervasive and often untenable for many. (p. 2)

While everyone may feel subjected to societal standards, cisgender people are typically not challenged on the basis of their gender and, thus, gender affirmation may not be as relevant for them. Whereas for transgender people, not having their gender affirmed may be distressing as they may have already spent much of their lives being incorrectly gendered. Participants in the current study noted this double standard, where cisgender women may not be challenged on their gender, but transgender women are. The pressure is then greater for transgender women to conform to societal standards for women to avoid having their gender challenged and so that they may be correctly gendered by others. In Sevelius' (2013) study, they explored the experiences of transgender women of colour specifically in relation to gender affirmation and found that gender affirmation was a key source of social support, and that psychological distress, oppression, and threats to one's identity increased the need for affirmation.

Ambivalent sexism. Ambivalent sexism particularly relates to some participants' accounts of the male gaze as validating and affirming. Several participants described instances in which the male gaze of an individual gazer may not have had positive intentions, but the experience of receiving the gaze was positive. The concept of ambivalent sexism can be used to understand these experiences. Ambivalent sexism posits that sexism has two sub-types: hostile sexism and benevolent sexism. Hostile sexism refers to harmful, overt discrimination against and beliefs about women, such as the idea that women are inferior to men (Glick & Fiske, 1997). Benevolent sexism refers to sexist behaviours and beliefs that, on the surface, may be viewed or experienced as positive but may have negative underlying beliefs. It is called "benevolent" because the perpetrator may have positive intentions and hope to offer praise or aid, and they often romanticize women and have a singular view of how they should behave. It generally refers to behaviours that are manifestations of beliefs that may seem harmless, but are in fact

harmful, particularly to women. Benevolent sexism can include beliefs such as that men are to protect women and are thus behaving benevolently when they do so. However, this may also reinforce sexist ideologies, such as women being unable to protect themselves, women as weak and incapable, and men as having more authority and respect. Other examples of benevolent sexism include praising women for being good wives and mothers when they sacrifice their careers to take care of their families so that their husband can work. The intent of these actions may be positive and these actions may be received as such, but underlying these behaviours may be harmful beliefs and cultural and structural systems of power and oppression. Behaviours stemming from benevolent sexism enforce restrictive roles and expectations, and deviations from these norms are met with less than favourable responses. The goal of benevolent sexism is to keep women in subordinate and submissive positions and maintain the gender hierarchy wherein men are viewed as superior and dominant. Benevolent sexism is thus particularly relevant to the current study, but both hostile and benevolent sexism reinforce patriarchy and misogyny, but in different ways (Glick & Fiske, 1997).

A few researchers have examined ambivalent sexism, and benevolent sexism more specifically. Glick et al. (2002) investigated ambivalent sexism in men and women in Turkey and Brazil, specifically with regards to abuse towards women. They found that benevolent sexism portrays a false image of protectiveness, as those who hold benevolent sexist attitudes and beliefs still held abusive attitudes towards women to a point where abuse was legitimized if the wife challenged her husband's authority or challenged gender norms. This demonstrates that underlying the image of benevolence is the belief that women are weak and malleable, and therefore to be controlled by men. Similarly, Viki and Abrams (2002) found that those who scored high in benevolent sexism were more likely to blame victims of rape, particularly in

instances where the woman "violated" traditional gender norms (e.g., when she was unfaithful), despite those same behaviours being acceptable for men. The exploration of ambivalent sexism, and benevolent sexism more specifically, is not to dismiss participants' positive experiences with the male gaze, but rather to explore the possible negative intentions behind the incidents the participants described.

Superordinate Theme 4: Absence or Rejection of the Male Gaze

Contemporary sexism and devaluing women. In the subtheme of abstention, Dianne mentioned not experiencing the male gaze due to the presence of her male partner. At the end of the section, I posed the question: does the presence of a man protect women from the male gaze? One such explanation is contemporary sexism and the devaluation of women and femininity. Contemporary sexism simply refers to sexism in modern times (Jackson, Esses, & Burris, 2001), and a key component is the greater respect that is afforded to men. It has been analyzed in the context of hiring (Jackson et al., 2001), but the principles can be used to explain why the presence of a man influences experiencing, or not experiencing, the male gaze as men may hold a greater respect for each other. Jackson et al.'s (2001) study demonstrated that participants afforded women less respect, as measured by a Likert scale rating to the statement "I respect this applicant", compared to men, indicating a gender bias. To further this point, research exists which demonstrates that women who are "attached" to a male are afforded more respect than women who are single, or "unattached" (Clark, 2018; Gurney, 1985). Those who are unattached are more likely to receive the male gaze and inappropriate attention, or "sexual hustling" as Gurney (1985) referred. Sexual hustling relates to flirting, sexual remarks, or more explicit propositioning, such as what Dianne alluded to.

Gender euphoria. The concept of gender euphoria was introduced to me by one of the participants, Sid, and refers to the contentment with one's gender. More specifically, gender euphoria describes the comfort and freedom of living as one's gender and finding congruence between one's body and gender identity (Finch, 2015). As with dysphoria, euphoria also has a social component and can refer to the elation of being correctly perceived as their gender in public and treated in accordance. This experience was described by several participants, including Catherine and Karen. Catherine noted the comfortableness and joy within herself and her gender and, thus, the male gaze was outside of her awareness. While gender euphoria has been sparsely researched, a few academic articles and news sites have explored this concept. Lester (2004), for example, explored their experiences with euphoria in drag performances, in which they challenged traditional gender stereotypes. In doing so, Lester found a sense of joy and freedom by redefining what gender means to them and choosing their own way to express it. Benestad (2010), a European doctor, therapist, sexologist, and transgender person, explored the importance of having a positive relationship with one's gender. As a therapist, Benestad explored the possibility of therapy centering on empowerment and fostering pride in one's gender when relevant, as the sense of euphoria can be integral to healing.

Online articles published by *The Guardian* (Connor, 2019) and *Everyday Feminism* (Finch, 2015) discussed gender euphoria for transgender people, and reiterates the notions outlined in the research articles above. Connor (2019) described gender euphoria as empowering, and it shifts the focus from a very negative, tragic narrative of transgender people to something positive that demonstrates their strength and victories. Connor continued to describe gender euphoria as "having found something" (p. 1) within themselves that has led to a profound sense of peace and joy. Finch (2015) further explored gender euphoria as an experience that is more

critical and integral to transgender people than gender dysphoria as it demonstrates the positive experience and importance of living authentically.

Self-affirmation. Several participants reported not experiencing the male gaze, or not being influenced by it, as their self-esteem and confidence was protective against it and possible negative effects. Jocelynn in particular explored this experience, and stated that feeling grounded helped her to cope with criticism and judgement from others as she was secure enough in her identity that it did not have as much of an impact. Catherine also mentioned this, and noted her confidence and individuality as protective against the male gaze. As it relates to the final superordinate theme, self-affirmation theory describes the ability to adapt and cope with situations in which one's identity, self-concept, or self-integrity may be challenged or threatened (Steele, 1988). This theory posits that when one's identity or self-concept is threatened (e.g., through criticism), people experience discomfort and seek to alleviate it. One such way is through self-affirmation, which maintains and restores one's global positive self-image, particularly in the face of threats or challenges, by affirming the self, and has been found to be beneficial as an adaptive strategy (McQueen & Klein, 2006). Self-affirmation theory explores the importance of confidence, knowing oneself, and personal values as protective against criticism or potential threats, such as the critical male gaze, to one's identity. With self-affirmation theory, the goal is not to eliminate threats, challenges, or criticism, but to cope with them if they occur. Thus, it was explored as one of the ways in which participants rejected or coped with the male gaze, particularly when the gaze challenged their identity.

Implications and Recommendations

In the current study, eleven transgender women were interviewed about their experiences with the male gaze. Their accounts yielded several themes and subthemes: (a) male gaze as

potentially harmful and dehumanizing (safety and visibility; invalidating identity; adjustment to an underprivileged position; male gaze and societal expectations as influencing dysphoria; and sexualization, fetishization, and objectification), (b) internalization of the male gaze (insight into the male gaze; and internalization of ideals and "self-gazing"), (c) male gaze as affirming (validating gender; and male gaze as a previously denied experience), and (d) absence or rejection of the male gaze (abstention; gender euphoria; personal agency and commitment to the self; and redefining gender and challenging societal norms). These findings inform the implications and recommendations for mental health professionals and society more generally.

General Population

There are several ways the general population and cisgender people can support transgender individuals (e.g., NCTE, 2016a). For cisgender people, it is important to be an ally to transgender individuals. For instance, taking an empathetic and non-judgemental stance is important, as such an approach validates their identity and experiences. In addition, educating oneself is critical; understanding that there is no "right way" to be transgender, and that gender is incredibly broad and diverse (NCTE, 2016a). It is critical that people also use the appropriate language and pronouns, or ask if one is uncertain of what pronouns to use. Being mindful of the questions one asks is also important; many transgender people are asked uncomfortable, intrusive, and personal questions that cisgender people typically are not asked (e.g., interventions, surgeries, genitalia, birth/dead name). A way to understand if questions are inappropriate is to ask oneself, "would I feel comfortable if someone asked these questions of me?" and "would I ask this question of a non-transgender person?" If the answer is "no," it is likely inappropriate to ask a transgender person those questions (NCTE, 2016b). Furthermore, doing your research to understand if companies, organizations, and people are welcoming and

supportive of transgender people are also part of being an ally. Volunteering and participating in advocacy for transgender people's rights is also important (GLAAD, n.d.).

In addition, the general population can work to address the harmful aspects of the male gaze. Although it may seem obvious, not objectifying others, and ourselves, is an important place to start. Instead, valuing a person for the individuality, intelligence, kindness, and other behaviours and personality traits is more appropriate. At the micro level, an example is "girl watching" (Quinn, 2002), typically among groups of men or boys; one or several of the participants, or perpetrators, can challenge this behaviour and encourage less objectifying and dehumanizing ways of treating women. Being aware of our personal biases and attitudes is also an important way to address the male gaze. For example, mandatory training, respectful policies (e.g., in the workplace, educational instructions, etc.), and open discussions in a variety of settings (e.g., work, classrooms) will bring the male gaze and gender biases to the forefront, and allow for discussion and challenging of disrespectful and oppressive behaviours. We may criticize and evaluate others' appearances and have certain judgements about people that we have internalized (e.g., that women are lesser than men). Understanding when these thoughts come up and challenging them is a way to open ourselves to the diversity of experiences and expression (e.g., Carroll, Gilroy, & Ryan, 2002). Being attentive to discrimination and oppression and working to eliminate this through advocacy or personal interactions is important to creating a safer, more welcoming society. At the macro level, this study also highlights the pervasiveness and embedded nature of the male gaze since it is often outside of one's awareness and becomes an engrained part of everyday life. Ideally, positions of power should be occupied by a diverse range of people who can offer a variety of experiences and perspectives. Particularly when decisions are being made about a particular population (e.g., 2SLGBTQ+ individuals), they

need to be directly involved in that process. This can be illustrated through the quote “nothing about me without me” (Peschel & Peschel, 1994). Those who will be affected by laws and policies need to be a part of the discussion in developing said regulations. Due to systemic barriers that often exist and biases of the people in power preventing others from voicing their opinions and experiences, distributing power can be difficult. For there to be social change, power needs to be distributed equally, a diversity of people are represented and given voice.

Counselling Psychologists and Mental Health Professionals

As is with the vast majority of approaches in counselling, the client is viewed as the expert on their experience (e.g., Henkelman & Paulson, 2006), and it is especially important for mental health professionals to acknowledge this with transgender clients. It may be difficult for transgender people to seek mental health supports due to fears of being discriminated against by their counsellor and discussing their gender (Hunt, 2013). Therefore, counsellors and mental health professionals need to create a safe space for their clients, so that they feel validated and affirmed. The American Psychological Association (APA; 2015) set forth several important guidelines for working with transgender and gender nonconforming individuals. These recommendations outline the research, implications, and practical applications to working with transgender individuals.

It is critical that counsellors and mental health professionals do not reinforce and perpetuate the male gaze, through critical evaluations and judgements, biased attitudes towards transgender people, or dismissive and invalidating behaviours. Therefore, engaging in thorough self-reflection, particularly if one is cisgender, is important when working with transgender clients to ensure personal biases do not interfere with their work. Sangganjanavanich and Cavazos (2010) outlined several ways in which counsellors, particularly cisgender counsellors,

can improve their work with transgender individuals. Intended specifically for career counsellors, the articles raise several significant points that can translate to mental health care more broadly. One aspect was self-reflection, which can be done through participating in group discussions, journaling, and reading in order to educate oneself on the experiences of transgender people (Carroll et al., 2002). As part of this self-reflective process, supervision and consultation is critical (Moe, Perera-Diltz, & Sparkman-Key, 2019). Counsellors in training receive frequent supervision from registered psychologists. Therefore, part of this supervision should involve greater discussion and learning about working with transgender clients in order to confront possible biases, as well as to enhance knowledge and competence. Consultation can be sought throughout one's career as a psychologist, counsellor, or mental health professional, and is not limited to students or those in training. Consultation and supervision with regards to the experiences of working with transgender clients are both critical. Part of educating oneself and taking an open-minded stance involves allowing oneself to be affected by their transgender clients, as this facilitates growth and understanding (Ali, 2014). Sangganjanavanich and Cavazos mentioned the critical importance of employing a non-judgemental, empathetic stance as a way to demonstrate that it is a safe space (Hunt, 2013). In addition, APA (2015) states that practitioners should understand that gender is nonbinary, separate from sexual orientation, intersects with other cultural identities, and has important developmental components. Acknowledging and understanding the discrimination and oppression transgender individuals may face, as well as positive aspects such as gender euphoria, will help to validate their experiences if they are discussed in counselling (APA, 2015). It is also important that, as the mental health professional, one communicates knowledge to others and advocates for their client when appropriate. This can also involve participating in activism for the transgender community

to better understand their experiences and advocate for the needs of transgender people (dickey & Sing, 2017). Lastly, the authors also suggested the importance of preparation, both for the counsellor and the client. The counsellor needs to prepare for their work with their clients, which involves educating themselves on the experiences of transgender people. It is also important for mental health professionals to prepare their transgender clients for things such as transitioning, others' responses, and potential barriers and triumphs. Supporting them throughout their transition and encouraging authenticity is critical (Brammer & Ginicola, 2017).

Understanding how the male gaze may play a part in counselling is also important. Clients who are transgender may have concerns relating to societal expectations of their gender, feelings of discomfort or danger in certain situations, and strong power dynamics in certain interactions. Understanding and exploring these instances within their particular context is important. To do this, it may be helpful to, at least in part, employ a feminist and/or social justice approach to counselling and mental health services. Feminist approaches allow for the consideration of context and avoid judgement and victim-blaming. Similarly, social justice-oriented counselling encourages consideration of intersectionality and supporting the mental health of clients (Neufeld, 2014). A social justice lens encourages gender affirmative counselling as it allows for the consideration of intersectionality and integration of other theories in order to address cultural climates and systemic issues (Wada, McGraarty, Tomaro, & Amundson-Dainow, 2019). In addition, these approaches advocate for an egalitarian relationship between professional and client as much as possible, which is particularly important when clients have experiences of discrimination, oppression, and powerlessness, also common experiences among participants in the current study (Enns & Williams, 2013; Evans, Kincade, & Seen, 2011). Furthermore, if counsellors, supervisors, or colleagues notice male gazing behaviour, this needs

to be addressed by bringing it up respectfully with the perpetrator. Engaging in reflection and consultation with the individual is an important way to address this behaviour.

In sum, there are many things people can do to support transgender people to help them feel safer and more supported in our society. We are also able to challenge the male gaze, and in order for society to change, we all need to participate in this challenge.

Study Strengths

The current study had several strengths. Anderson (2010) outlined several general strengths of qualitative research. The experiences of participants can be explored in detail, and the data derived from the study is rich and complex. Participants are able to discuss what is relevant to them, and so this translates to a greater understanding of their authentic experiences. Interviews are generally semi-structured, as in IPA, allowing for participants to speak to what they feel is relevant and important.

Specific to the study, there are several strengths. First, the sample size was favourable with 11 participants. This allowed for a range of experiences and a richness in the data. As will be discussed below, the sample was homogenous in terms of ethnicity, but they did represent diversity in other ways. For example, participants had diverse religious and spiritual backgrounds, education, employment, interests, (dis)abilities, sexual orientations, and perspectives, more generally, about the male gaze and experiencing this phenomenon as a transgender woman. In addition, as was described above, the interviews were semi-structured and participant-lead, which allowed for flexibility and an exploration of significant experiences. As part of the research process, self-reflection played an important part. A detailed explanation of this was provided in Chapter 3. Exploring and challenging personal biases, particularly as a white, cisgender woman, was critical for the research and a strength of this study. In addition,

there are ways in which my identity as a woman, an ally to the transgender community, and a feminist may have been a strength in this study. My intention of researching this topic stemmed from my personal experiences with the male gaze. I noticed, in discussing the male gaze with other women, including a transgender woman for the pilot study, that opening up these discussions fostered a sense of community and connection. I therefore strove to facilitate these discussions and build stronger understanding and connection among all women. In addition, as a feminist, I strive to continue to understand others' experiences, and challenge my personal biases and assumptions. Feminism also encourages the consideration and inclusion of context and intersectionality, which I feel is beneficial in all research, particularly research with minority populations. Perhaps the greatest strength of this study is the voices of the transgender women themselves, who openly and honestly shared their experiences. The accounts of the eleven participants will deepen our understanding of the unique and shared experiences of transgender women with the male gaze. Therefore, it is a great strength to learn directly from transgender women and how, in spite of systemic silencing and social barriers, they voiced their experiences to contribute to greater knowledge and understanding.

Study Limitations

Homogeneous Sample

One main limitation of the study was that the sample was predominantly white, while one of the participants identified as part Indigenous. There are several reasons as to why this may have been the case. Cannon, Higginbotham, and Leung (1988) conducted a study to understand why fewer Black women are represented as research participants. They identified the following concerns, "skepticism about the purpose of the research, worries about protection of anonymity, and structural obstacles, such as less free time" (p. 9). These may have been reasons for

transgender women of colour not participating in the current study. In addition, Cannon et al. noted that white women have less fear of being exploited in research, and a fear that the results will not be representative of their experiences. Reassurance through direct, personal contact was important for participants who were Black to not feel exploited. The authors also explained how research may be inherently classist and may prevent those who do not have flexible schedules or the finances to take time to participate in research, particularly if that research takes place at a university or other location far from their home.

There are other reasons as to why the sample may have been predominantly white. First, the language used in recruitment may have unintentionally appealed to white transgender women and excluded transgender women of colour. For example, as was previously stated, the "male gaze" has been criticized for being a very white concept (hooks, 1992). This was due to media and film being predominantly white, with directors, actors, and celebrities generally being white. Therefore, it is possible that the use of the term "male gaze" may have turned transgender women of colour away from participating. In Clark's (2017; 2018) studies on the male gaze, all participants were white, which may be related to using the term "male gaze." Although the intent of using "male gaze" was to capture the complex gender dynamics and power that exists in this gaze, using other terms such as "societal gaze," "evaluative gaze," or a new term entirely may have attracted more diversity. Another possibility is that the vast majority of participants were recruited from the University of Calgary recruitment website. Many of the participants who accessed this website were white and had attended the University of Calgary, or another post-secondary institution, in the past. While the status of the university is unknown from the 1980s or 1990s, educational institutions have historically not always been welcoming or encouraging of racial or ethnic diversity (Primm, 2018). Snowball sampling also occurred in which participants

shared the study information with their friends and acquaintances, and therefore, data was collected from a subset of individuals who may know each other and attend the same groups.

Another point pertaining to the homogeneity of the sample is the possible colonial nature of the research. Post-secondary education, and North American education in general, has colonial roots and does not address the teachings and histories of Indigenous peoples (Roy, 2018). The structure of the education, content, grading, teaching methods, and capitalist, hierarchical nature of many universities does not take into consideration Indigenous peoples and their priorities (Cote-Meek, 2014). In addition, the research was conducted using a Western qualitative methodology that may not have been as considerate of the ways in which Indigenous peoples and people of colour communicate their experiences. Therefore, it is possible that transgender women of colour may not have had an interest in participating in the current study or may not have seen the study information.

As the study progressed, there was a growing concern about the representation of transgender women's experiences, particularly with regards to intersectionality. While the intent of IPA, and qualitative methodologies more generally, is not to generalize results, acknowledging a variety of experiences is important. Therefore, a question arose in conducting the analysis and writing this thesis: How do I accurately reflect the participants' experiences, and incorporate intersectionality and racial issues when the sample was quite homogeneous and predominantly white? The thesis intends to explore the experiences of participants, but it would be problematic to dismiss or ignore the experiences of transgender women of colour.

General Limitations Pertaining to Qualitative Research

While qualitative research certainly has many strengths, there are a few limitations that may have been influential in the current study. Anderson (2010), in addition to exploring the

strengths of qualitative research, also identified some potential limitations. They noted that qualitative research is more subjected to the personal attitudes and biases of the researcher, and this may potentially influence the research and analysis. To address this limitation, I engaged in extensive self-reflection detailed in Chapter 3, but it is still entirely possible that my biases may have influenced my findings as it is impossible to separate myself from my identity and the research. It is also possible that my presence and identity as a cisgender woman may have influenced the participants' responses and the information they provided. In addition, while most participants expressed not feeling concerned about anonymity and confidentiality, these can understandably be influential in disclosing information. While this is an important consideration in virtually all research studies, it may be more pronounced in qualitative research methods.

Future Research Directions

The current research illuminated several areas that are of interest and importance for future study. As was mentioned, the sample was predominantly white, and so research with a more diverse sample is encouraged. Research has demonstrated that the experiences of transgender women of colour represent unique challenges that require investigation and attention (e.g., Flores et al., 2018; Sevelius, 2013). In addition, diversity in sample with regards to (dis)ability, ethnicity, religious background, and other gender identities is important to add depth to the existing literature. This will allow for a truly intersectional perspective by exploring the complexities of identities and experiences. A potential way to do this is to have intersectionality and cultural diversity be at the forefront of the research.

Another potential direction is to address the "source" and investigate the experiences of the perpetrators of the male gaze. This research would likely be conducted with men to explore potential reasons for why the male gaze exists and how it is perpetuated. In addition,

understanding the socialization into this privilege and gazing behaviour is important in challenging it. Research tends to focus on those who experience certain phenomena, such as the male gaze and discrimination, and conducting research with perpetrators can often be uncomfortable. It can also be complicated if abuse is disclosed, in which case the researcher would have to report this (Guttmann, Shouldice, & Levin, 2018). However, in order to challenge certain societal problems, we need to understand from the perspective of the perpetrator. This would help in prevention and intervention, to ensure that the cycle of abuse, oppression, or discrimination is not repeated.

As it relates to the male gaze, it would also be interesting for research to explore the instances when people, specifically women, do not experience it. Some participants alluded to this in the interviews, and it would be interesting to have a more in-depth exploration as to what may be protective factors against the male gaze based on their observations and experiences. Research in this area would also allow for a better understanding of prevention and interventions. Looking for the exceptions in research is also important as it helps to illuminate previously unknown experiences and allows for new ways of understanding a phenomenon.

Lastly, a new concept was introduced to me during the interviews that may be of interest for future research. Gender euphoria is a concept that I was not aware of previously, and little research has been conducted in this area (e.g., Benestad, 2010; Lester, 2004). A few news articles have explored personal experiences with gender euphoria (e.g., Connor, 2019; Finch, 2015), but more research is needed in this area. Gender euphoria sheds light on a positive experience of being transgender, and exploration of this area will challenge existing stereotypes that being transgender is solely negative. Exploring gender euphoria as a positive experience will allow for more depth and diversity in the research on transgender people.

Conclusion

The current study explored the experiences of transgender women with the male gaze, specifically with regards to how this has influenced their relationship with their bodies. The goal was to answer the research question: How does the male gaze influence the experiences of transgender women with their body? IPA was used to analyze the data, which yielded four superordinate themes: (a) male gaze as potentially harmful and dehumanizing, (b) internalization of the male gaze, (c) male gaze as affirming, and (d) absence or rejection of the male gaze. Each superordinate theme had two to five subthemes, and the findings demonstrated a range of perspectives and experiences. Participants explored the influence of societal expectations on their perceptions of themselves, with some describing internalization and impact on their self-concept. Others also described positive experiences with the male gaze, with it being affirming and validating as it was a sign of womanhood. Some reported instances in which they rejected or did not notice the male gaze. All experiences are valid and equally significant.

The current research was significant for several reasons. It investigated an area that was previously unexplored in the research and demonstrated the influence of the male gaze on participants. The findings explored the range of experiences, which is important for future researchers, mental health professionals, and the general population to consider and understand. Every individual is different in how they experience and navigate the world, and this study illuminated that. It is therefore important that we understand that there is much diversity in the transgender community, and gender more broadly, and it is critical that we allow for this. In order for our society to be truly welcoming and supportive, we need to understand and know the beauty in diversity, and encourage self-expression, authenticity, and harmony.

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Appendix A – Recruitment Listings

Recruitment Contacts

For Contacting Centres:

To whom it may concern,

My name is Danielle and I am an MSc student in Counselling Psychology at the University of Calgary. I am currently conducting my thesis project under the supervision of Dr. Shelly Russell-Mayhew as part of my graduate program. My project focuses on the experiences of adult (18 years and over) transgender women with their bodies, specifically in relation to the male gaze (i.e., the Western, male-dictated and enforced standards of beauty for women).

I was wondering if you would be able to pass this information along? Or if I would be able to put up posters (attached) in the centre or on your Facebook page for those who are interested? Participants who are interested would be asked to answer questions about their experiences with their body, specifically in terms of the feelings of objectification or evaluation they may experience from men and society in general. The interviews should take around 1-2 hours at the University of Calgary or another public, but private, agreed upon location, or by phone or Skype if necessary, and will be audiotaped for me to review and analyze later. Participants will receive a $25 gift card for their participation. Pseudonyms will be used to ensure privacy and confidentiality throughout the course of the study. This study has been approved by CFREB, the University of Calgary ethics board (REB18-1677).

Please let me know if this would be a possibility or if you have any questions about my research.

Thank you for your time!

Sincerely,
Danielle Lefebvre, B.A. (Honours)
University of Calgary, Werklund School of Education

Study Description for Facebook or Reddit Posts:

My name is Danielle and I am an MSc student in Counselling Psychology at the University of Calgary. I am currently conducting my thesis project under the supervision of Dr. Shelly Russell-Mayhew as part of my graduate program. My research project focuses on the experiences of adult (18 years and over) transgender women with their bodies, specifically in relation to the male gaze (i.e., the Western, male-dictated and enforced standards of beauty for women).

Participants who are interested would be asked to answer questions about their experiences with your body, specifically in terms of the feelings of objectification or evaluation they may experience from men and society in general. The interviews should take around 1-2 hours at the University of Calgary or another public, but private, agreed upon location, or by phone or Skype if necessary, and will be audiotaped for me to review and analyze later. Participants will receive a $25 gift card for their participation. Pseudonyms will be used to ensure privacy and confidentiality throughout the course of the study. This study has been approved by CFREB, the University of Calgary ethics board (REB18-1677).

Please email me (dclefebv@ucalgary.ca) if you have any questions about my research or are interested in participating. Please note that contacting me directly by email is a way to protect your privacy if you wish to participate.

Thank you for your time!

Sincerely,
Danielle Lefebvre, B.A. (Honours)
dclefebv@ucalgary.ca
University of Calgary, Werklund School of Education

Appendix B – Recruitment Posters

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

Research Participants Needed!

Are you **over 18?** Do you identify as a **transgender woman?**

Have you felt **objectified** by men or felt **pressured** to look a certain way to satisfy men?

Are you **comfortable** talking about your experiences with your body?

If you answered "yes" to the above questions, you are invited to volunteer in this study looking at the experiences of transgender women with **"the male gaze" =** the privileging of men's opinions, and the feeling of being evaluated and objectified by men.

What does it involve?

- Interview (1-2 hours) with a researcher at the University of Calgary to discuss your experiences with your **body**, **the male gaze**, and the pressure of society's **beauty standards for women**.
- $25 gift card to a place of your choice (e.g., Starbucks, Indigo) as compensation.

If you are **interested in participating** in this study or for more information, please contact:

Danielle Lefebvre, B.A. (Honours)
dclefebv@ucalgary.ca

This research study has been reviewed and approved by the University of Calgary Research Ethics Board: REB18-1677

Appendix C – Email Scripts and Screening

Dear [Participant],

Thank you for your email and for your interest in the study.

Before we begin, I just need to determine if you are eligible for the study:

1. Are you over the age of 18?
2. Do you identify as a transgender woman (i.e., do you currently identify as a woman and were you assigned a different sex at birth?)
3. Would you feel comfortable talking about your experiences with your body and how the pressure to conform to male-dictated beauty ideals may have influenced it? This is to ensure that you will feel comfortable during the interview and that it will not be too distressing to talk about.

If you are eligible and are interested in participating, then we can begin to discuss the interview process. You will be asked to answer questions about their experiences with your body, specifically in terms of the feelings of objectification or evaluation they may experience from men and society in general.

The interviews should take around 1-2 hours at the University of Calgary or another public, but private, agreed upon location, or by phone or Skype if necessary, and will be audiotaped for me to review and analyze later. You will receive a $25 gift card to one of several places for your participation. Pseudonyms will be used to ensure privacy and confidentiality throughout the course of the study. This study has been approved by CFREB, the University of Calgary ethics board (REB18-1677). A list of resources will also be provided to you during the interview.

If you are interested in participating, please let me know of your availability and we will arrange a time for the interview.

Thank you for your time!

Sincerely,
Danielle Lefebvre, B.A. (Honours)
dclefebv@ucalgary.ca
University of Calgary, Werklund School of Education

Appendix D – Gift Card Form

Dear Participant,

Thank you for taking part in our research study. Your participation is greatly appreciated, and we hope to gain valuable information from this study.

As mentioned, you will receive a $25 gift card of your choice. Please choose one of the following for your gift card:

- ☐ Indigo
- ☐ Starbucks
- ☐ Safeway
- ☐ iTunes
- ☐ Bon Appetit (can be used at: Swiss Chalet, Harvey's, Kelsey's, Montana's, or Milestone's)

Your gift card will be sent to you as soon as possible. If you do not receive it within 5 business, please contact the researcher.

Please fill in the following information so we may send you your gift card (please print clearly):

Name:_____

Email:_____

Address:_____

Signature:_____

Appendix E – Consent Form

Name of Researcher, Faculty, Department, Telephone & Email:
Danielle C. Lefebvre, B.A. Psychology (Honours)
Werklund School of Education, Faculty of Graduate Studies
dclefebv@ucalgary.ca
Supervisor:
Shelly Russell-Mayhew, PhD., R, Psych.
Title of Project:
Transgender women and the male gaze: Gender, the body, and the pressure to conform

This consent form, a copy of which has been given to you, is only part of the process of informed consent. If you want more details about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

The University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board has approved this research study. Participation is completely voluntary and information will be kept confidential. You are free to discontinue participation at any time during the study.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of transgender women with the male gaze (i.e., the policing of women's bodies through men's evaluative watching) and their bodies. The influence of this on your relationship with your body will be explored. We aim to better understand the pressure of beauty standards and evaluation by men of transgender women, in addition to the discrimination and oppression you may have faced.

What Will I Be Asked To Do?

In this study, you will be asked to participate in an interview about your experiences with the male gaze and its influence on your relationship with your body. Questions such as, "What have been your experiences with your body?", "How has your relationship with your body changed over time?", and "What are your experiences with the male gaze and how might this have influenced your relationship with your body?" You may be asked to elaborate on your answers, but only talk as much or as little as your feel comfortable. These questions may feel personal and may be difficult to answer if they approach a sensitive topic for you. You are free to decline to answer any questions and withdraw at any time without penalty. The interview will take around 1-2 hours to complete.

The interviews will also be audio-taped. This is so that we are able to listen to the interviews afterwards and examine them for patterns. Interviews conducted over Skype are encrypted (to ensure privacy), however it is important to note that Microsoft and government agencies do have the ability to monitor Skype sessions. In addition, Skype sessions conducted by phone or mobile are not completely encrypted.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You can refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss of benefits. You can also decline to answer any questions you do not feel comfortable answering.

What Type of Personal Information Will Be Collected?

Personal information will be collected for the purposes of contacting you and providing your gift card, and will not be used in any other part of this study. In addition, all information will remain confidential. Pseudonyms (only a first name, no last name) will be used in the interviews, and in the analysis and presentation of the data. If you do not wish to use a pseudonym, you are free to use your first name. No last names will be collected/created.

Should you agree to participate, you will be asked to provide your gender, age, ethnicity, race, educational background, and employment status. The researcher, study team, and principle investigator will have access to the audiotapes. The recordings will not be available to the public.

By signing this consent form I agree:

- To be audiotaped
- To be referred to by a pseudonym (or my first name)
  - ☐ The pseudonym I choose for myself is _____
  - ☐ You may choose a pseudonym for me
- To be quoted and use my pseudonym/first name

Are there Risks or Benefits if I Participate?

There is a possibility that you may feel distressed, upset, or uncomfortable due to the sensitive topics of questions discussed. If this is the case, you are able to decline to answer certain questions and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. A list of resources will be provided to you in the instance that you require additional aid. This handout will be provided with your copy of the consent form.

Additionally, this study may take up your time, effort, and finances (e.g., for travel costs). To compensate you for the time and effort this study requires of you, you will be given a $25 gift card to the place of your choice.

What Happens to the Information I Provide?

The researchers and principle investigator will have access to your information, but this will not be released or seen by anyone else. The researchers and principle investigator will also have access to the interviews and notes, but all identifying information will be removed before reviewing it. This is to ensure that the analysis of the data is accurate, appropriate, and representative of the data.

Pseudonyms will be used in this study to maintain privacy and confidentiality. Your information will be kept in a password protected file, and all hard copies will be kept in a locked cabinet, both of which only the researchers and the principle investigator will have access to. If you choose to withdraw from the study, your data will be destroyed. You will have until the end of May 2019 to request to have your data removed from the analysis.

No one except the researchers and principle investigator will be allowed to see or hear any of the data or the interview tape. There are no names associated with the interview and a pseudonym will always be used in the collection, analysis, and presentation of the data. Quotes from this interview may be included in publications or presentations, but no personal identifiers will be included. The questionnaires are kept in a locked cabinet only accessible by the researchers and the study supervisor. The data will be stored for five years on a computer disk and in a locked cabinet, at which time, it will be permanently erased. Data collected may be used by graduate students to complete the thesis/dissertation portion of their degree requirements.

Please also note that if you disclose intent to harm yourself or others, or if there is suspected or actual abuse of a minor, it is the duty of the researcher to report. Other illegal activities (e.g., drug use, etc.) do not warrant reporting. In additions, efforts will be made (e.g., using pseudonyms) to ensure your privacy and confidentiality.

Would you like to receive a summary of the study's results? Yes: ___ No: ___

If yes, please provide your contact information (e-mail address, or phone number)

_____

_____

Signatures

Your signature on this form indicates that 1) you understand to your satisfaction the information provided to you about your participation in this research project, and 2) you agree to participate in the research project.

In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the investigators, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from this research project at any time. You should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

Participant's Name: (please print) _____

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher's Name: (please print) _____

Researcher's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Questions/Concerns

If you have any further questions or want clarification regarding this research and/or your participation, please contact:

Danielle Lefebvre
Werklund School of Education, University of Calgary
dclefebv@ucalgary.ca

Dr. Shelly Russell-Mayhew,
Werklund School of Education, University of Calgary
1 (403)-220-8375, mkrussel@ucalgary.ca

If you have any concerns about the way you have been treated as a participant, please contact the Research Ethics Analyst, Research Services, University of Calgary at 403.220.6289 or 403.220.8640; e-mail cfreb@ucalgary.ca. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference. The investigator has kept a copy of the consent form.

List of Resources

Distress Centre Calgary
Suite 300, 1010 – 8th Avenue SW, Calgary, AB T2P 1J2
Online chat, 24-hour support, counselling
http://www.distresscentre.com/
(403) 266-4357
help@distresscentre.com

Calgary Outlink
Unit 103 – 223 12 Ave SW
Resources for LGBT2Q+ folks
https://www.calgaryoutlink.ca/
(403) 234-8973
info@calgaryoutlink.ca

Women's Centre of Calgary
39-4th Street NE
Resources for women
http://www.womenscentrecalgary.org/
(403) 264-1155
info@womenscentrecalgary.org

Calgary TransHub
Resources for the transgender community in Calgary
http://www.calgarytranshub.com/

Trans Equality Society of Alberta (TESA)
Resources for transgender individuals in Alberta
tesaonline.org
info@tesaonline.org

Positive Space Network
Resources and crisis line
https://www.positivespacenetwork.ca/
905-878-9785
psncoordinator@rockonline.ca

TransPulse Resource List
Resources for transgender individuals across Canada, listed by province
http://transpulseproject.ca/resources/resource-guide/
PFLAG Canada Resource List
Resources for LGBT2Q+ folks across Canada
https://pflagcanada.ca/resources/

The Lifeline Canada Foundation Resources
Resources for LGBT2Q+ folks across Canada
https://thelifelinecanada.ca/resources/lgbtq/

Appendix F – Interview Guide

Interview Script

The purpose of this research is to better understand your experiences with your body and the pressure you may experience to conform to the male-dictated beauty standards for women. This is termed "the male gaze" and is rooted in patriarchy and the prioritizing of men's opinions over women's. I want to be able to understand what this has been like for you to, if you have had the feeling of being evaluated and pressured to conform to what society deems acceptable for women. This can be through men's or society's policing of women's bodies, in terms of reinforcing societal expectations for women. It may bring up feelings of insecurity, shame, anxiety, and so on. Feel free to mention anything that you think is relevant, these questions are more of a guideline for the interview. Is there anything you want to ask me before we get started?

Before we start on the main interview questions, I just wanted to gather some basic information about you:
How old are you?

_____

What is your ethnicity/race?

_____

What is your educational background?

_____

What is your current employment status?

_____

Now I would like to move into the interview questions.

(**Overarching question**: What are your experiences with your body and the male gaze?)

I want to start by getting to know you a little. Tell me a little bit about yourself.

- Who inspires you? Why?
- Do you have any favourite authors or artists who have been influential to you?

What are some assumptions you have found that people have about transgender folks?

- How has this impacted you? The community?
- Where do you think these assumptions come from?
- How do you think we could do better? What would you like people to know?

In your opinion, what does it mean to be a woman? Where/who did you learn this from?

What pressures have you experienced in terms of the male-dictated cultural expectations that exist for women?

What have been your experiences with body image?

How would you describe your relationship with your body?

- How has this changed over time?
- What, if anything, would you like to change about your relationship with your body?
- What has impacted this relationship?
    - Positives? Barriers/negative messaging?

A lot of attention has been paid to pop culture and media on body image, particularly of women. What is your experience with this?

What impact, if any, have Western, male-dictated beauty ideals for women had on you and your perceptions of yourself?

- Explain the male gaze – what is your experience of that? How has this impacted you?
- Are your interactions influenced based on if you're interacting with a man, woman, or someone who identifies as non-binary?

How do you think this experience might be different for transgender women? As a transgender woman, and also compared to other transgender women?

Is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix G – Table 2: Occurrence of themes in participant accounts

Themes	Bridget	Catherine	Dianne	Hope	Jocelynn	Karen	Maggie	Monica	Runhildr	Sarah	Sid
1. Male gaze as potentially harmful and dehumanizing	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
A. Safety and visibility	✓		✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
B. Invalidating of identity	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
C. Adjustment to an underprivileged position	✓		✓		✓				✓	✓	
D. Male gaze and societal expectations as influencing (gender) dysphoria	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓			✓		
2. Internalization of the male gaze	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓
A. Insight into the male gaze		✓		✓	✓	✓				✓	✓
B. Internalization of ideals and "self-gazing"	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓					✓
3. Male gaze as affirming		✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
A. Validating gender		✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
B. Male gaze as a previously denied experience						✓				✓	
4. Absence or rejection of the male gaze	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
A. Abstention	✓			✓			✓				
B. Gender euphoria		✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
C. Personal agency and commitment to the self		✓			✓		✓				
D. Redefining gender and challenging societal norms	✓				✓				✓		