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# Queer and Political: Exploring Transgender Resistance

Dolcecore, Susan

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UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

Queer and Political: Exploring Transgender Resistance

by

Susan Dolcecore

A THESIS

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## **Abstract**

This qualitative study investigated forms of oppression and resistance among transgender individuals. This constructivist grounded theory study answered these research questions: (1) how does oppression affect self-identified transgender individual's performance of gender, and (2) how does gender performance illustrate collective and individual forms of resistance? The author interviewed 14 transgender individuals living in Canada about their lived experiences with oppression and resistance. The exploration of this phenomenon was encompassed human experience, social environments, and the complexity of life illustrated by those directly experiencing oppression as transgender individuals. The performance of gender describes the use masculine, feminine and gender neutral qualities to express identity. This study suggests that transgender resistance is a method for overcoming one's vulnerability related to traditional gender discourses. The use of resistance provides a way for radical self-determination, one that helps in promoting authenticity and solidarity with others in the trans and queer community.

## **Preface**

In order to honor the identities of the participants in this study, this document uses gender-neutral pronouns such as they or their, instead of traditional he/she or his/her. For the purposes of this study the term queer will be used to describe the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, 2-spirited, queer, questing, intersex and asexual (LGBT2QQIA) community. There are two reasons for this: to use queer as an umbrella term in a manner that helps recognize the diversity within this population, and to draw from queer theory, which was the philosophical lens for this project. Queer describes those who are not willing to fit into traditional categories and who desire to change attitudes towards gender and sex that cause different forms of discrimination. Queer identity does incorporate a political silver lining, which supports the desire to change the roots of oppression affecting diverse sexualities and genders. Furthermore, using the word queer is a form of reclaiming derogatory terminology, and acknowledging a history that demonstrates the ongoing battle of surviving and fighting oppression.

## Acknowledgements

Before all else, I want to acknowledge all the participants who volunteered for this study. I would also like to acknowledge as a white transman, able-bodied, educated, and middle class citizen, I am privileged and aspire to use these social locations for the better good. The acknowledgement of my social positions is crucial to the nature of this study.

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*To my Grandmother, Sousanna Pandermali, thank you for checking beneath the bed for monsters before and after every bedtime story. Your patience and unconditional love raised me to become as passionate as the hero's in your stories: "If you're angry then yell, if you're happy then laugh, if you're sad then cry. Whatever you do, just be authentic, genuine, and you" Sousanna Pandermali (in loving memory 1920 - 2007).*

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## **Epigraph**

I believe that telling our stories, first to ourselves and then to one another and the world, is a revolutionary act. It is an act that can be met with hostility, exclusion, and violence. It can also lead to love, understanding, transcendence, and community (Janet Mock, 2014).

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### **Purpose, Research Questions, and Definitions**

The purpose of this study is to investigate how forms of oppression have affected transgender individuals' ability to express and perform their gender, and to explore how forms of resistance have supported these individuals throughout their lives. Specifically, the purpose of this study is to answer the two research questions: 1) how does oppression affect self-identified transgender individual's performance of gender, and 2) how does gender performance illustrate collective and individual forms of resistance? This thesis uses gender-neutral pronouns instead of traditional he/she or his/her, in order to honor the fluidity of gender and gender-neutral identity.

The first step to uncovering the answers to these questions is to comprehend both oppression and resistance. Social categories including: class, race, gender, sexual orientation, age, religion, culture, language, and ability, define an individual's position in society and can cause immense variations in equality (Bishop, 2002; McCall, 2005). Historically, literature exploring identities of: white, cisgender, male, hyper-masculine, middle class, able-bodied, English speaking, heterosexual, and slim figured, were associated with privilege in society (Bishop, 2002; McCall, 2005). Accordingly, those falling outside these categories have been excluded from privileged statuses that provide more opportunity and accessibility to needs, such as employment, healthcare, and education (Campbell, Klei, Hodges, Fisman, Kitto, 2010; Mullaly, 2002). Transgender, or trans, individuals are most at risk of facing oppression as it relates to: sex, sexual orientation, and gender discourses (Markman, 2011; Smith, Shin, & Officer, 2012;

Stryker, 2008).

The above-mentioned discourses are socially constructed based on: dominant narratives, customs, and social practices (Butler, 1990; Crenshaw, 2002; Mullaly, 2002). In counseling literature that explores oppression, resilience is most commonly referred to when discussing one's ability to cope with discrimination and prejudice (Campbell, Klei, Hodges, Fishman, Kitto, 2010). In transgender literature however, resistance is used instead to bring a more progressive approach to counseling (Alderson, 2012; Gagne, Tweskbury, 1998). Resilience could be a method of coping or navigating through oppressing circumstances (Kitto, 2010); resistance challenges oppression, which describes one's ability to resist oppression and contest normative conformity (Stryker, 2008). This introduction chapter will define and elaborate upon key terminology that will be used throughout this thesis document.

**Oppression.** Oppression is the exploitation of at least one social category by the dominant social group (Bishop, 2002). It exists on three different levels: personal, cultural, and structural (Bishop, 2002). Using these three levels helps us understand the different forms of oppression that exist within our society and how they affect those who identify within the transgender spectrum of identity. Bishop (2002) explained that a macro view could help us to identify systematic forms of oppression; while a micro view can help to identify how discrimination and prejudice manifest through social customs, personal belief, and attitudes. In a mezzo view, oppression can be examined through customs and practices that separate one group from the dominant group (Bishop, 2002).

Dominant social groups exploit differences to maintain power and privilege

(Mullaly, 2002). Oppression is based on exploitation of differences. Because privilege is based on social power, both oppression and privilege can be unintentional and invisible to the conscious mind (Bishop, 2002). If the act of oppression is viewed in terms of these differences instead of as the consequence of an oppressor's behavior, it can be identified more clearly because it is dissociated from personal action (Bishop, 2002). However, if the action of an oppressor is viewed from a larger perspective, it avoids blaming an individual for their oppressive behavior, and reveals the source of this behavior. Thus examination at the cultural level can help identify the factors that contribute to oppressive behavior and attitudes, such as cultural customs that devalue certain identities.

The highest level of oppression is manifested structurally in institutions such as the government, which regulate legislation and policies that influences bodies such as the justice, educational, and health care systems (Bishop, 2002). These structures create discourses surrounding morals, customs, social practices, and health. Potter and Wetherell (1990) describe a discourse as “a vehicle in which the world is articulated and its meaning is constructed materially and rhetorically through dominant institutions” (p.208). Dominant systems such as these hold power over the morals and norms, which govern societal order (Huffer, 2012).

Variations in equality can result in discrimination and prejudice, but also affect how individuals perceive themselves in comparison with others (Crenshaw, 1991). A person's social locations can play a large part in their experience with privilege and oppression because of their position in history and society (Bishop, 2002). According to Bishop (2002) all people have social locations that are defined by: gender, race, social class, age, ability, religion, sexual orientation, and geographic location. The relationship

amongst these social categories also affects one's experience of privilege or oppression due to the intersection of multiple identities in different environments (Bowleg, 2008). Oppression occurs interchangeably with privilege; an individual can experience oppression in some environments and circumstances, while being privileged in others (Crenshaw, 1991).

The following section introduces concepts that are the foundation of understanding transgender oppression and resistance: the difference between sex and gender, sexual marginalization, the fluidity of gender and sexuality, including the identification of the trans spectrum of identity, and the difference between resilience and resistance. Following this section, the researcher's perspectives are given to describe the researcher's social locations and multiple identities in the research, and to clarify the researcher's potential influence on the data.

**Sex and Gender.** Sex is defined as the biological body given at birth, while gender represents the performance of masculine and feminine characteristics based on social and cultural customs, attitudes, and beliefs (Butler, 1988). Although a person's sex can be determined at the time of birth, it can also be confirmed post-transition when an individual has taken measures to transform their given body to a body they find more suitable (Stryker, 2008). Gender is a product of individuality as well as outside factors including: culture, societal structures, belief systems, and relationships with friends and intimate partners (Butler, 1999). The level of acceptance of diverse gender and sexual identities varies depending on the environment and setting. This affects how people develop their identity and personality traits, especially if the environment restricts one's ability to explore his/her gender and sexuality (Diamond & Butterworth, 2008). Isolation

of one's identity can be associated with the level of comfort and the degree of safety one feels within different settings (Bowleg, 2008).

The dominant perspective on gender presumes that all males should express masculinity and all females, femininity (Butler, 1999). Butler (1999) argued that a normal and appropriate gender is based on socially constructed gender roles of masculinity and femininity; these are referred to as cis-gender expression (Tilsen & Nylund, 2010). A cis-gendered individual is one who is privileged to have their gender match the culturally appropriate sexuality (Butler, 1999). A cis-gendered individual, for example, is a person born female who identifies as female and expresses her gender as feminine. Those who have held privilege due to their gender identity have manufactured the discourse of gender (Bishop, 2002), such as binary gender categories (Butler, 1999). This discourse strengthens the social acceptance of only two genders, and thus those who do not fall into these two categories lose privilege (Butler, 1990). This explains why men strive to maintain a masculine identity, which offers them power and assertiveness (Christensen, 2013).

**Sexual Marginalization.** Sexually marginalized populations are those who do not fit into dominant roles. Bishop (2002) describes the consequences of oppression as the “othering” of individuals, groups, and communities. Othering of trans individuals results from promoting the dominant group (cis-gendered and heterosexual), while considering those who fall outside of these identities as unequal or of lesser value (Dogra, Reitmanova, & Carter-Pokras, 2010). Cis-normativity is a term, which describes the expectation that people should fit into binary gender categories (Tilsen & Nylund, 2010). Binary gender refers to the traditional societal expectations of all men being masculine

and all women being feminine (Butler, 1999). Sexual marginalization of transgender individuals is embedded within the constructs of cis-normativity, gender binaries, and heterosexism (Stryker, 2008). Heterosexism is any form of discrimination or prejudice where heterosexual identity is referred to as normal or excludes the existence of other sexual identities (Butler, 1999).

An example of cis-normative frameworks was identified by Spicer (2010), who explored the transgender homeless population and found alarmingly high rates of gender prejudice among those attempting to access shelter services and being denied to use of proper gender pronouns and gender appropriate rooming. This example can also illustrate heterosexism, where individuals were referred to as “gay” or “lesbian” just because an individual identifies as transgender (Spicer, 2010). This assumption demonstrates how individuals automatically exclude transgender people from identifying as male or female. Those who violate social-institutional rules of gender and sexuality are excluded and may even be punished for their identities by experiencing discrimination and prejudice (Mullaly, 2002). Cis-normative practices are pervasive in our society; social customs reinforce a dominant way of acting and behaving, such that the oppression is often unrecognizable (Bishop, 2002).

Sexually-marginalized populations struggle to fit into binary gender roles. This affects many parts of an individual’s life including: childhood development, securing career placements, safety in social settings, healthy transition through life milestones and intimacy or healthy relationships, among others (Adam, 2004; Bilodeau & Renn, 2005; Diamond & Butterworth, 2008; Wilson, 2009). Trans individuals struggle for recognition by the government systems such as education and healthcare, authority figures, media,



politicians, and within informal practices (Sevelius, 2012). Informal practices are those social and cultural customs of behaving that represent the ‘normal’ way of acting and being (Butler, 1988).

An informal practice for example, is one that presumes that people are heterosexual, and all other sexual identities are seen in a negative light. Heterosexism is a dominant informal practice, which causes difficulties for those with diverse gender or sexual identities. Bowleg (2008) describes how heterosexism causes tension and inequality for those who are different. This also causes diverse identities to have to ‘come out’ (Hanley-Hackenbruck, 1988), an act which exposes them to possible prejudice and discrimination. Consequently, individuals who do not identify as heterosexual are made to feel unsafe or uncomfortable in environments that devalue their identities (Embaye, 2006).

**Gender and Sexual Fluidity.** Society has strong beliefs about the appropriate representations of gender, thereby creating discriminatory attitudes for those who are gender non-conforming and/or transgender (Butler, 1999). Individuals who express femininity or masculinity in contrast to their perceived gender identity are shamed (Butler, 2006). Two empty boxes can illustrate gender: one filled with socially constructed descriptors of “masculine”, the other “feminine” characteristics. These two boxes create a hyper-masculine and hyper-feminine expectation of male and female genders, respectively. Sexual oppression is the result of individuals rejecting or being rejected from these boxes. Notions of hyper-masculinity and hyper-femininity deny individual agency and force individuals to adopt a representation of gender that is based on socially dominated definitions of gender (Embaye, 2006).

The spectrum of gender identity represents a flexible range of gender expression, with hyper-femininity and hyper-masculinity being extreme polar opposites (Butler, 1999). In the middle of the spectrum rests gender neutrality or androgyny. A gender-neutral individual presents a mixture of typical feminine and masculine characteristics, but does not associate with a male or female identity. Androgynous individuals also present a mixture of gender, but may represent themselves as male or female (Clarke, Hayfield & Huxley, 2012). Gender neutrality describes a personal or political expression and language, which de-emphasizes the priority of gender roles and categories (Diamond & Butterworth, 2008). If we view gender on a spectrum, rather than being limited to binary categories, individuals are better able to develop unique and authentic identities (Butler, 1999).

**Transgender Spectrum of Identity.** A transgender individual can be situated anywhere along the transgender identity spectrum. The spectrum does not restrict gender identity to two options, nor does it refer to the medical and physical treatment involved in transition (Stryker, 2008). Being a transgender individual does not mean one has to transition from one sex into another; instead it can mean a process of self-discovery, which does not always refer to physical and medical changes (Gressgard, 2010). The spectrum is also inclusive of individuals who were born a particular sex who cross-dress as the opposite sex without undergoing the process of medical transition, or a person who goes through multiple variations of gender throughout their lifetime (Stryker, 2008). Within this spectrum of transgender identity are those who are gender neutral or “genderqueer” (Butler, 1988). A genderqueer individual has a neutral gender and sexual identity, they may shift between expressions of femininity and masculinity while never

identifying as male or female. The difference between identifying as a transgender or a genderqueer individual refers to the process of transition. A genderqueer individual may also be who does not wish to go through certain processes of medical transition, such as taking hormones or proceeding with reconstructive surgeries, but still identifies with one sex over the other (Stryker, 2008).

**Queer and Trans Definition.** Although some transgender individuals identify with the heterosexual community, others associate themselves in the queer community. Regardless of orientation, all individuals can find identification within the spectrum of gender and sexuality. In contrast to the dominant perspective that people are either heterosexual or homosexual, both gender and sexual orientation are fluid.

For the purposes of this study the term queer will be used to describe the: lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, 2-spirited, queer, queering, intersex, and asexual (LGBT2QQIA) community. This is for two reasons. The first is to use queer as an umbrella term in a manner that helps recognize the diversity within this population. The second is to draw from queer theory, which is the philosophical lens for this project. Queer describes those whom are not willing to fit into traditional categories and who desire to change attitudes towards gender and sex that cause different forms of discrimination. Queer identity does incorporate a political silver lining, which supports the desire to change the roots of oppression impacting diverse sexualities and genders. Furthermore, using the word queer is a form of reclaiming derogatory terminology, and acknowledging a history that demonstrates the ongoing battle of surviving and fighting oppression.

Transgender is defined as any person with a gender identity that is different from their birth sex or who expresses their gender in ways that do not conform to traditional societal expectations for their gender. This umbrella term, which covers the transgender spectrum includes: transgender, cross dressers, drag kings or queens, female to male (FtMs), male to female (MtFs), transmasculine-identified people, transfeminine-identified people, transsexuals, people who are androgynous, two-spirit people, and people who are bi-gender or multi-gender, as well as people who post-transition identify as cis-gender and heterosexual.

The transgender spectrum of identity incorporates individuals who cross dress (cosplay) either secretly or openly, for social events or for regular day gender expression. The term drag refers to an individual who cross dresses for the purpose of performance. Other transgender individuals may identify their gender by identifying, which gender qualities (masculine or feminine) are performed more in their expression. There are individuals that have multiple genders and individuals whose gender fluctuates based on various reasons. For further clarity these definitions, Appendix A defines various identities. Instead of a static classification of transgender, the spectrum highlights the fluidity of gender and sexuality. Within this spectrum, a person does not have to choose between binary gender categories and can express gender identity in diverse ways. This research focuses on the spectrum of gender and sexuality, instead of solely on the traditional static definition of transgender.

**Resilience.** Resilience has been described as a form of adaptation to adversity, or internal coping with trauma or stress in a manner that returns an individual to their functional state (Newcomb & Mustanski, 2010). In transgender individuals, resiliency

can be compromised by internalizing the discourses of prejudice, discrimination, and oppression (Embaye, 2006). Internalization is the long-term process of embedding beliefs, attitudes, and values, and having these influence our identity (Newcomb & Mustanski, 2010). Newcomb and Mustanski, (2010) note that internalization is a common result of the oppression that sexual minorities face. Internalized homophobia or transphobia can result in a fear of exposing one's true identity. Transgender individuals who expose their identity face: loss of employment, loss of status, loss of friendships, and the disapproval from loved ones (Newcomb & Mustanski, 2010). The opposite of internalization is externalization, which is the projection of internal beliefs, attitudes and values (Newcomb & Mustanski, 2010). Externalization can be illustrated through homophobic and transphobic beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors.

A phobia is a clinical diagnosis; it is an irrational fear of an object or situation, causing a great deal of distress to the individual (Balzer, Hutta, Adrian, Hyndal, and Stryker, 2012). The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Health Disorders has termed homophobia and transphobia as conditions where an individual fears someone or a group of homosexuals, or fears the act of homosexuality (including transgender individuals) (4th ed., text rev.; *DSM-IV-TR*; American Psychiatric Association, 2000). However, using the term "phobia" to describe intolerance towards those with diverse sexualities and genders does not recognize the oppressive nature of the word. Phobia or the fear of diverse genders and sexualities is a product of negative internalized beliefs, attitudes, and values that are projected through oppressive behaviors (Butler, 1999). It is more productive to say someone is anti-gay or anti-transgender, because these terms clearly articulate the intolerance towards sexual minorities and can help explore how and

why the intolerance exists (Stryker, 2008).

The existence of these negative stigma's and stereotypes also affects how an individual reflects on their own diverse gender and sexuality. Internalized anti-gay and anti-trans discourses may result in depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, addiction or misuse of substances, and poor coping strategies (Grossman, D'Augelli, & Salter, 2008). Transgender individuals face the risk of internalizing discourses because oppression has created a distinct difference between cis-gender and transgender (Shidlo & Gregory, 1994). This means that the impact of living in environments where transgender identity has negative stereotypes restrict one's ability to see positivity within their own identity. Cultural customs have created a dominant belief that all individuals who fail to conform to cis-normative practices are not equal to the dominant group and thus create hostile environments (Butler, 2006). Butler (2006) noted that those who are different than the dominant group become hyper-sensitive to their environments and are aware of how to "navigate themselves" in order to avoid hostility or violence. Navigating one's self has been described as a form of resilience, where an individual experiences stress, but maintains the ability to function (Newcomb & Mustanski, 2010).

**Resistance.** Resilience is described as an effective tool against oppression when the possibility of change is perceived as unachievable, whereas, resistance is a strategy used when change is thought to be possible (Newcomb & Mustanski, 2010). For the transgender community, resilience can be thought of as absorbing forms of discrimination and prejudice in order to avoid hostility and violence, whereas resistance can be thought of as resisting the urge to conform in order to empower themselves and their community

(Tilsen & Nylund, 2010). Resilience for transgender individuals may be a strategy to use when there are perceived threats or concerns for safety (Embaye, 2006).

Little is known about the shift in strategy used by the transgender community between absorbing and resisting oppressive forces. One's resilience to discrimination is different from one's ability to resist it. Over the years, the transgender community has stopped accepting the inequality imposed on them as a consequence of their minority status, thus resisting socially ascribed social locations (Jasper, 2005).

There are two major forms of resistance, subjective and collective (Stryker, 2008). Simply stated, resistance is standing in opposition to power (Butler, 2004). A broad definition of resistance is acting in opposition to structural, cultural, and personal forms of oppression, which reinforce gender binary categories, gender roles, sexual orientation, and power relationships (Domosh, 1998). A simple way of understanding subjective resistance is to portray authenticity in one's presentation of gender regardless of how severe their experiences of discrimination and oppression have been. The queer community resists forms of oppression in several different ways, using both independent and collective methods. Subjective, or individual, resistance is based entirely on how an individual nurtures their identity in different, unequal, and multiple power relationships (Butler, 2004). Subjective resistance can be best described as an individual's way of no longer adapting to societal discourses aligned with cis-gendered expectations. Resistance to cis-gender expectations can take the form of gender expressions that have been considered taboo, inappropriate, or wrong, such as cross-dressing (Carlson, 2010). Subjective resistance can be seen as a form of preparedness, which can involve informal support systems such as those found in queer social groups, or professional support

systems in the community (Stryker, 2008). Subjective resistance can also be one's visibility or openness about one's transgender identity (Carlon, 2010). Having connections to a supportive community within which a person's identity and lifestyle is validated and normalized can mitigate multiple forms of oppression faced by members of the transgender community. Resistance involves being prepared to deal with forms of discrimination in a plethora of ways, such as the ability to not be affected by bigotry offenses (Jasper, 2005). Bigotry offenses are attitudes that demonstrate intolerance towards a minority group and can be both violent and aggressive in nature (Bishop, 2002).

Collective resistance for transgender individuals refers to a group of individuals attempting to gather and empower each other, while taking action against forms of anti-transgender oppression (Samuel, 2013). Collective organized resistance for political and social equality began with the homophile movement of the 1960s in the United States. It served to cultivate a general queer culture and was successful in creating queer positive discourse (Huffer, 2012). When a group of individuals are marginalized or experience segregation, the act of community engagement can help manifest a unique culture within the group (Brace-Govan & de Burgh-Woodman, 2008). Language became the strongest tool used by the queer community to define and empower their culture (Diamond & Butterworth, 2008). Words used as insults such as 'fag' and 'dyke' were reclaimed in the second wave of queer collective movements of the 1980s and 1990s, the post-homophile movements. The gay liberation movement of the 1990s began to focus more on promoting pride for queer identity, as opposed to previous strategies of political rallying (Huffer, 2012). Furthermore, queer movements created space for subcultures to be



formed and collectively redefined unique identities such as ‘dykes’ ‘femmes’ ‘drag queens’ ‘bisexuals’ and the transgender community (Christensen, 2013). The opportunity for these diverse identities was created from collective forms of resistance, which in turn offered a sense of pride in diverse identities. Resistance then became a way of collectively fighting against forms of domination that excluded minorities including queers (Tilsen & Nylund, 2010).

### **Researcher’s Perspective**

In order to respect the participants of this study, the transgender community, and the readers of this thesis it is important to note the use of neutral pronouns within this document. Neutral pronouns such as “their” and “they” were used throughout this thesis and while not always grammatically correct, it attempts to balance queer politics and the transgender community. As this thesis project follows the guidelines of grounded theory presented by Charmaz (2006), it is important to highlight where the researcher is located in this study. It is crucial to acknowledge the author’s perspectives and biases; these are associated with the researcher’s genderqueer identity, membership within the queer community, and role as an academic and social justice activist.

As a member of the queer community and an openly genderqueer individual, the researcher is well acquainted with oppression and its relationship to the development of identity. The researcher is aware of their privilege as a masculine queer individual and how this identity has created opportunity and status within the queer community. This privilege is further associated with ability, economic status, dominant racial background, age, use of language, level of education, employment status, and access to resources. In

stating this, the researcher is also aware that their lived experiences may influence the data including the choice of the data collection process and analysis and may also bias the interpretation of participants' experiences, and possibly project self-perspectives or narratives onto the findings of this research.

In order to avoid the risk of influencing the data the researcher took steps suggested by grounded theorists Glaser (1992) and Charmaz (2006). One step in the process of data collection is memo writing (Glaser, 1992), a type of journaling about the researcher's experiences throughout the study. Memos were written as a stream of consciousness (Charmaz, 2006) — freestyle writing that allows for honesty and spontaneous impressions. This writing helped highlight and examine the various interpretations of the data, allowing the researcher to become aware of any potential forcing of interpretation. Memos also helped the researcher become aware of potential areas for further clarification with participants.

Another step taken by the researcher was the use of reconceptualization before proposing potential causal mechanisms to explain phenomena (Oliver, 2011). This process involves reflexivity about theoretical positioning and evidence (collected data). It helped the researcher become aware of pre-existing theoretical knowledge post-data-collection, and helped avoid influencing the analysis of data by exhausting all possibilities until the evidence confirmed a hypothesis.

Unfortunately, the researcher already had an in-depth theoretical knowledge of gender and sexuality, but avoided drawing upon this knowledge during the process of interviewing, transcribing, and analysis. As noted above, the researcher compared their

accumulated findings to current theoretical knowledge post-data-collection in order to identify new knowledge and gaps within the literature. This aided the grounded theory approach, since it allowed for critical transparency of the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The conceptualization of the data was linked entirely back to the evidence produced post-analysis. It is never guaranteed that the researcher is completely removed from the study. This researcher investigated the phenomena of transgender resistance with good and genuine intent to illustrate how a marginalized group of people can educate others on how to be resistant to dominant discourses.

### **Chapters at a Glance**

Chapter two is a literature review that begins by exploring the shift from resilience to resistance of Canadian queers over the years. There follows a discussion of queer theory as it relates to political activism, gender identity, and sexual identity as well as understanding resistance as a portion of human identity. The last section will examine theories of subjectivity and resistance.

Chapter three outlines methodology, introducing and elaborating on grounded theory. Queer theory is described and reasons given for its use in this study. Queer theory and grounded theory are then discussed together to defend the mix of this methodological approach and philosophical lens. Social work and grounded theory are also discussed. Details of the methodology: who the participants were, how they were recruited and sampled, data collection and analysis, and so on, are outlined. The chapter ends with a discussion of the trustworthiness of the results and ethical considerations.

Chapter four discusses the key findings of this study. The findings are categorized into pre and post-transitional phases – identified as discovering transgender identity and maintaining transgender identity. The chapter describes participants' experiences of oppression and the methods of resistance that supported them through these situations. The chapter includes a discussion of how vulnerability as a means of resistance supported the discovery and maintenance of gender identity.

Chapter five introduces the discussion of vulnerability as a method of transgender resistance. This chapter will go through an overview of discovering and maintaining transgender identity, and provide a more in-depth discussion surrounding the mechanisms of resistance through gender liberation, independence, finding community, and boundary setting. Lastly, this chapter will make suggestions for professionals working with transgender individuals, discuss the limitations of this research study, and make suggestions for future research.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to follow grounded theory guidelines (Charmaz, 2006), this literature review focuses on providing enough context to receive ethics approval, while being cautious not to uncover the substantive area related to this study (Dunne, 2011). A literature review was conducted to explore queer culture where resistance was born instead of exploring transgender culture. This provides the context and rationale for this study, while confirming that this study's motives have not been completed previously in other research. This chapter also helps to contextualize and organize information in order to guide the reader into a better understanding of queer history and context.

### **What is Queer?**

The term queer indicates much more than simply the 1980s appropriation of a highly prejudicial term used for homosexuals (Sedgwick, 1990). Queer can be explained as a socially constructed identity, an academic lens for inquiry, and a political ideology (Cohen, 2011). All three of these follow an opposition to power or dominant customs that marginalize, segregate, or cause identities to become invisible (Butler, 1990). A queer lens focuses on: whose voices are not being heard, why this happens, and how this can be changed. Since homosexuality was illegal and socially unacceptable, terms of hostility were used to discriminate against those who were gay or lesbian (Eve, 2004). Many homosexuals started reclaiming the term queer to disarm their oppressors of the ability to verbally insult them (Halberstam, 2003). It is still believed that reclaiming derogatory terms can help in demonstrating positive connotations with identities that are considered negative (Eve, 2004). Queer identity includes the concepts of: homo-normativity (Butler,

1988), subjectivity (Caton, 1973), and identity politics (Crenshaw, 1991) each of which helps to explain the importance of opposing power.

**Homo-normativity.** Queer can be used politically to reference the radical position in favor of opposing dominant social customs that default normal and abnormal identities (Nash & Bain, 2007). Homonormative, as defined by Butler (1988), is the assimilation of heterosexual normalities, or the constructs given to gender and sexual appropriation. Homo-normativity was used in the early 1990s as an attempt to articulate the double sense of marginalization and displacement experienced within the queer political community (Nash & Bain, 2007). The political and queer community rebelled against any law or custom that separated individuals into categories of privileged and oppressed based on identity (Huffer, 2012). Homo-normativity was a mode of collective resistance that is still associated with building political community and pursuing political equality.

The queer movement that revolutionized Canada began in 1971 when We Demand, a grassroots activist group, began political protests in Ottawa. (Adam, Duyvendak, & Krouwel, 1999). Adopting similar political strategies as activists in America, Canadian protestors formalized a liberation movement within two years of their first protest. Homo-nationalism described the collective energy of a political movement towards equality for queers and other minority populations that coexisted (Butler, 2006).

Homo-normativity created a culture that unified queers and helped create customs that reinforced identities and supplied a source of strength (Nash & Bain, 2007). It helped unify the community through language, attitude, physical appearance and cultural

customs. This queer culture adopted unique customs, such as tagging (Haslop, Hill, & Schmidt, 1998). Tagging is sometimes the use of specific decorative flowers made from handkerchiefs with colors that illustrate sexual preferences. Certain colored handkerchiefs placed in certain pant pockets became a way for gay males to identify sexual preferences (Schofield & Schmidt, 2005). A feminine form of tagging is painting the ring fingernail an opposite color from the rest of a woman's nails. More masculine ways of performing queer identity are breast binding to eliminate the appearance of breasts and packing (inserting an artificial penis in the underwear) (Eves, 2004).

A more gender-neutral appearance became a strong custom in the queer community. Androgynous hairstyles and physical appearance that bent the rules of gender roles became forms of queer identity (Penaloza, 1996). Drag performers had customs to unify their specific community within the larger queer community, including hyper-emphasizing gender roles (Halberstam, 2003). Drag kings and queens over-emphasized cultural stereotypes of gender during performances expressing a hegemonic and hyper-heterosexual gender identity (Rupp, Taylor, & Shapiro, 2010). The transgender culture began in the drag scene, but it eventually became an entity of its own (Stryker, 2008). There is a gap in literature that focuses on the process of transgender community building, specifically the creation of culture and customs.

According to Eve (2004), the most powerful mode of collective resistance by early queer activists was to adopt a radical approach to community development by empowering these sub-cultures and recognizing diverse identities. As the queer community strengthened its culture and empowered diverse identities, more radical coalition groups pushed for political recognition. Earlier queer movements focused on

gaining civil rights and battling social oppression. These movements, Butler (1997) suggested, were based on paying attention to hierarchies of responsibility. Butler (1999) explained that sexually oppressed individuals learn how to move through overlapping structures of violence, power and control. She is referring to the ability of oppressed individuals to navigate through social and systematic obstacles that create marginalization. This movement was later described as resistance, which is to challenge oppressive forces.

The systems affecting transgender individuals are those that create structures that regulate gender and reinforce gender appropriation (Markman, 2011). Gender appropriation describes instances where a dominant and/or majority group takes up some tangible or intangible aspect of a marginalized and/or minority community. Sometimes it is the marginalized/minority group's identity that gets appropriated. For instance, members of the dominant/majority group may claim that identity for themselves, or create their own depictions of members of that group (which typically resemble the dominant/majority group's assumptions and stereotypes rather than the marginalized/minority group's lived realities). In terms of gender, the dominant cis-normative (male's are masculine and females are feminine) create the stereotypes that depict only the dominant group's assumptions of gender.

Other times, it is the minority group's culture (e.g., their language, art, beliefs, religions, traditions, rituals, and fashions) that gets appropriated. For instance, culturally appropriating gay man characteristics in social media (Demetriou, 2001). Demetriou argues that the incorporation of acceptable gay man presence in social media is a new or reborn form of patriarchy. He goes on to describe that lesbian or masculine female



presence in social media is not as acceptable as the presence of the gay man. This illustrates how culture maintains the aspect of dominance; especially in terms of which gender possess more control and power over the other.

Butler (1997) argued that social segregation was perpetuating hierarchies of dominance. Those who were not conforming to the social expectations of gender and sexuality are separated from experiencing forms of privilege, such as political recognition, civil rights, and social inclusion (Butler, 1997). Early queer political movements focused on illustrating the reality of difference between the dominant majority and minorities, and these demonstrations focused on highlighting the violence associated with oppression (Nash & Bain, 2007).

As the queer community grew, so did the progression of civil and legal rights, allowing more queer individuals in Canada to gain access to privileged statuses including: marriage, child-bearing, child adoption, owning a house jointly with a partner, and legislation regarding divorce and separation (Nash & Bain, 2007). Progress in Canada does not reflect the ongoing prejudice, discrimination, and oppression towards queers internationally (Blazer, Hutta, Andrian, & Hyndal, 2012).

Increasing equality for the queer community in Western society is believed by some, as responsible for silencing the oppression felt by transgender individuals (Nash & Bain, 2007). Canada is recognized internationally for legalizing gay marriage and providing health care funding for transition medical services. However, Canadian equality for sexual minorities is not without its flaws. Individuals who possess privilege within this paradigm, such as two married men, creates an essentialist argument bringing

those who occupy privilege to the fore and silencing those who do not. As noted previously, those who have privilege in some social locations may face oppression in others (Mullaly, 2002). For example, a transgender male has privilege when his male identity is validated, but faces oppression when his transgender identity is devalued. Furthermore, although the progress is evident in new equality legislation, queer individuals are over-represented in groups with low socio-economic status, lower levels of education, sex work, substance abuse, psychological disorders, and unemployment (Blazer, Hutta, Adrian, & Hyndal, 2012).

Over the years, the goals of queer activism have evolved. By the 1990s, queer movements were creating more space for diverse identities and continued to build political strength for civil rights. Earlier queer activists were more radical and needed to stop larger structural forms of oppression such as the criminalization of homosexuality (Gamson, 1995). As they progressed and achieved more forms of equality, activists became more liberal and political tactics changed to address more micro-forms of oppression such as allowing gay marriage (Butler, 1999). Today queer activism is on a spectrum where many communities are divided by radical and liberal political beliefs. Liberal queer activists fight for equal rights without emphasizing the need to be separate from heterosexuals. While radical queer activists continuously refer to levels of oppression and privilege within intersecting social locations. This means radical queer activists are dedicated to addressing larger structural causes of oppression prior to addressing more micro issues. The greatest difference between radical and liberal queer activists is the idea that gaining privilege can cause another group to experience oppression (Cohen, 2011).

Differences between radical and liberal queer activists has created a split in the community, dividing them into two groups (D'Emilio, 2012). The liberal group was more focused on equality and freedom to conform, but faced the risk of lateral oppression from the larger radical queer community. The split within the political queer community also transformed customs and culture. As Weiner and Young (2011) explain, the pattern of queers creating regimes and customs to reinforce their identity is connected to the need to resist anti-gay discrimination and prejudice. There is a gap in the literature, however, regarding how queers resist lateral oppression. Weiner and Young (2011) argued that the more discrimination and prejudice one experiences, the greater the desire to join the more radical queer community in order to find membership and belonging.

Radical queer activists argued that gaining certain privileges, such as marriage, would only continue the cycle of oppression by avoiding the more important issues (Duggan, 2002). For instance, marriage is a union that requires individuals to possess privilege such as, affording the legal marriage. The larger issues should be to aid the inequality of socioeconomic status between sexual and gender diverse populations and cis-gender and heterosexual counterparts. Radicals believe activists should target the more imperative issues before the less pressing concerns. The cycle of oppression (Bishop, 2002) states institutionalized mechanisms provide the dominant group (heterosexuals) unearned privileges (marriage) while creating barriers and disadvantages for subordinate groups (queers). Early queer social activists argued joining the dominant group through the institution of marriage creates privileged outcomes such as social benefits, a fact that can create attitudes of inferiority or superiority (Duggan, 2002). The cycle causes the subordinate group to be excluded from the social benefits provided to the

dominant group.

The transgender population fell between the two queer groups, some desiring to conform to traditional and dominant roles, but never finding security within the radical queer community, or commonality with liberal queers (Stryker, 2008). Transgender individuals are a prime example of how one's multiple identities can clash, creating tension and struggles. An individual's multiple identities results in their experience of fluctuating levels of oppression and privilege depending on circumstances and environments (Bishop, 2002). Transgender individuals may hide their transgender identity in cis-gendered environments in order to gain privilege, avoid the possibility of prejudice and discrimination, or even to validate their identity as either man or woman (Stryker, 2008). Consequently, within the queer community, transgender individuals may not be fully validated as a member due to their perceived privileged status within the cis-gender community (Stryker, 2008). Furthermore, a transgender individual may have to leave membership within certain groups (racial/ethnic) or family (Stryker, 2008) due to the lack of acceptance of transgender identity (Crenshaw, 1991). Other identities that conflict may include: membership in religious institutions, cultural communities, and even sports communities (Grossmas, D'Augelli, & Salter, 2008).

In summary, homo-normativity offered a foundation to build both a political and social community (Duggan, 2002). The queer community was founded on activism that promoted the greater good of the diverse queer community. It also emphasized building a unified and empowering social community where specific customs helped empower the diverse identities within the larger queer community. Unfortunately, homo-normativity also promoted lateral oppression causing a clash to emerge between radical and liberal

queers causing tension within the queer community and its sub-cultures.

**Subjectivity.** Subjectivity refers to the cultural, social, political, and psychological processes that shape and determine identity and how one is situated in the world (Huffer, 2012). One's subjectivity is affected by: perspectives, experiences, beliefs, desires, and the relationship between privilege and oppression that influences our judgments about who we are (Grosz, 2012). A person's perspectives are associated with their personal development, the influence of one's environment, and larger cultural and structural influences that situate one's identity in society (Crenshaw, 1991). As Crenshaw (1991) explains, one's identity or social location is affected by the hierarchy of privilege - which identities are valued over others. Subjectivity is the theoretical discussion of an individual's self-development (Grosz, 2012). In terms of queer identity, the subjective self relates to the development of gender and sexuality (Hanley-Hackenbruck, 1988). Gender and sexuality are two identities closely related to queer liberation or the liberation of the individual self, because these two identities have been the target of oppression for centuries (Butler, 1993).

Subjectivity is a foundation for understanding queer identity, used by queer theory pioneers. In the *History of Sexuality* Michael Foucault (1980) described sexuality as stabilization through a means of secular knowledge, self-representation, and liberation. He argued that an individual who expresses their sexuality or who does not suppress their sexual desire would liberate themselves from psychological stress (Huffer, 2012). Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's (1980) *Between Men*, incorporated a deeper feminist analysis in gay studies examining commonalities with: straightness, masculinity, and the dynamics of dominance. Sedgwick provided an enriched understanding as to why individuals desire

to conform to the dominant constructions of gender and sexuality. She argued that an individual was able to gain power and a more privileged social location by conforming to the dominant gender roles associated with heterosexuality and masculinity. Lastly, Judith Butler (1988) introduced the concept of gender performance in *Gender Trouble*, combining both phenomenology and Pierre Bourdieu's (1977) practice theory.

Practice theory, according to Bourdieu (1977), asserted that structures created predispositions that affect how individuals behave, but it is also used to analyze how individuals navigate through systems. According to Butler (1988), human beings are assigned to constructed gender roles, and only through liberation and transformation can one begin to deviate from these restrictive categories. While the theories that Butler (1999) used dissected how systems are created and recreated affecting individual's agency, she was more interested in developing an analysis of a queer individual as the agent of their own identity. Her argument focused on gender being an authentic addition to one's identity once it is liberated, expressed through performance, and repeated. According to the key queer scholars, subjectivity explains gender and sexuality as a core priority to one's personal liberation (Butler, 1999).

In order to achieve personal liberation an individual should be able to express and perform their multiple identities such as race, gender, and abilities (Sedgwick, 1980). Individuals who experience oppression may consciously limit their performance in different places, circumstances, and situations, which they deem unsafe (Jagose, 1996). Whenever oppression occurs, an individual will create reasons for this negative experience, which in turn, will affect their personal perceptions of their identity (Embaye, 2006). A person's multifaceted identity is thus shaped by personal narratives based on the

experience of privilege and oppression (Mullaly, 2002). The self is not stable or static, but is transformed by relationships with others and by societal, cultural, and personal influences (Bishop, 2002).

A person's subjectivity can be greatly affected by how they understand the relationship between their identity (such as sexuality) and the conditions that create meaning or value for these identities within society (Crenshaw, 1991). However, a person does not have to be fully conscious of the power dynamics between their social location and dominant systems; perspectives of self are greatly affected by experiences that are positive or negative (Crenshaw, 1991). One's experiences of privilege and oppression will influence and shape how one presents their identities to the world (Mullaly, 2002). Sedgwick's (1990) explanation of adhering to dominant constructs explains why certain queers decide to keep their sexuality hidden and thus to avoid negative experiences that arise from discrimination and prejudice. Huffer (2012) acknowledges Foucault's main argument that proposed an individual's liberation of sexual identity could prevent severe psychological distress, but also recognized the hardships associated with liberating gender identity. Those who are marginalized and face forms of oppression are aware of the ongoing risk of discrimination, a situation that affects one's desire to express their identities visibly (Bishop, 2002).

Eve (2004) suggested that an individual finds ways, regardless of negative experience, to defeat the interpretive repertoires that recreate discourse. Potter, Wetherell, Gill, and Edwards (1990) introduced the theoretical concept of interpretive repertoires as constructs (such as language) that give meaning. For example, when individuals are asked to describe transphobia, there are certain linguistic terms that they draw upon to

convey stereotypes. They go on to suggest that these discourses strengthen oppression by allowing agents to continue conveying negativity towards marginalized groups through language (Potter, Wetherell, Gill, and Edwards, 1990). Certain environments, such as traditional religious discourses that promote the relationship between heterosexuality and morality have a history of transphobia due to the power of discourses on sexuality and gender. Other environments, such as universities that provide more radical discourses supporting gender-neutral policies, may provide safer spaces due to positive discourses on sexuality and gender. One's subjectivity is always adapting and being fractured by experiences at various points to create space for alternative constructions of self (Butler, 1990). When considering transgender individuals, self-growth and discovery of one's identity is affected by discourses, which reject diverse gender and sexual identities (Carlson, 2010).

Contemporary concepts of subjectivity underscore how psychological and social processes shape the subjective self (Burke, 2011). For example, in Freudian psychoanalysis, subjectivity is a process governed by what lies outside the control of the individual, namely by impulses of the unconscious that need to be validated and associated with one's whole identity (Singh, Hays & Watson, 2009). Psychoanalysis maintains that an individual is fully knowable and therefore, controllable (Hansbury & Bennett, 2014). When a person is unable to express their identity, they are experiencing a form of psychological stress (Hansbury & Bennet, 2014). In essence, if an individual believes there is a possible risk in expressing their identity (transgender), they may use various methods to eliminate the risk, including conforming to heterosexual and traditional binary gender categories through the use of language, behavior, and physical



appearance (Clark, Hayfield & Huxley, 2012). In this sense, subjectivity is the product of cultural and structural discourse. What psychoanalysis teaches us is that the need for a unified self is the most important yet most difficult task a resilient and resistant individual can master. It also teaches us that developing a healthy and empowered subjective identity can alleviate psychological stress (Burke, 2011).

Radical changes are needed in counseling and therapeutic settings in terms of interacting, understanding, and addressing their clients who identify within the transgender spectrum (Asta & Vacha-Haase, 2012). Social workers, counselors and other professionals working with and within the queer community lack interventions and approaches that incorporate a multifaceted framework derived from transgender-specific research (Embaye, 2006; Johnson, 2012). Transgender individuals who are seeking professional support are still subjected to oppressive counseling discourses such as demographic information sheets lacking transgender identity options (Smith, Shin & Officer, 2012). The lack of inclusive practices in counseling settings also decreases the value of having counselors educated on transgender issues such as transitioning, procedures and medical processes (Stryker, 2008). When counselors are not aware of diverse sexual identities they may not be capable of understanding a client's anxieties with body image, low self-esteem and depression (Sing, Hays, & Watson, 2011).

As research surrounding identity and sexuality expands, so does the need to address the traditional clinical approaches that do not reflect gender neutrality and transgender clients (Singh, Hays, & Watson, 2011). It may be helpful to incorporate concepts such as resistance, into therapeutic approaches. As resistance has been a longstanding form of empowerment, collectivity, and personal liberation for the queer

community, those working within the community can find ways to encourage subjective resistance for queer identified individuals. The first step in creating a more inclusive therapeutic practice is to understand and validate transgender and queer identity and the expression of this identity in numerous environments.

**Identity Politics.** As early as 1979, the term identity politics, was used to refer to activism by people with disabilities to transform both self and societal conceptions of people with different forms of ability (Bernstein, 2005). Identity politics refers to the political motion of a particular group to move forward, build alliances, and break away from traditional placement of people in a hierarchy of power (Bernstein, 2005). It also describes the social locations given to marginalized populations that cause inequality, differences, and affect power dynamics (Benstein, 2005). For queers, identity politics describes the cultural and structural restrictions put on diverse gender and sexual identities, and the ability to express these identities without discrimination and prejudice (Crenshaw, 1991). In the decade following the introduction of identity politics, the literature was using the term in conjunction with intersectionality, a theory that focuses on an individual's multiple identities (Crenshaw, 1991).

The concept of intersectionality grew from a critique of theories exploring inequality and how institutions operate in layered or additive ways (Benstein, 2005). Intersectionality focuses on how an individual navigates multiple identities within different environments (Crenshaw, 1991). For transgender individuals, the notion of multiple identities is crucial to understanding the complexity of identity. As Hancock (2007) mentioned, analyses of internal group diversity is important in order to fully understand the complexity of privilege and oppression. The transgender community has

engaged in community development and has brought their own political motives to the effort (Meyer, 2012). This movement, according to intersectionality and identity politics, introduces the idea of body-centered practices (Meyer, 2012). Meyer (2012) suggests body-centered practices enhance self-awareness and allow for a deeper level of self connection and acceptance through the embodiment and integration of active energetics on both the physical and emotional level. For transgender political communities, strong emphasis is placed on how one's privilege and oppression relate to the status (Stryker, 2008).

Marxist theory has helped develop greater understanding of the necessity for political change (Bernstein, 2005). Politics associated with gender, sexuality, and the body, have become central topics in queer political communities (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005). The notion of body-centered politics gives way to a form of resistance that locates sexual subjectivities. Sexual subjectivity raises awareness of issues that discriminate based on diverse body images and physical appearance (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005). Merry (2009) discussed the need for law to recognize gender-focused violence, illustrating how violence towards women and men is different. One argument Merry (2009) raised focuses on the promotion of sexual violence towards femininity, and how social practices over-sexualize women, a fact that normalizes certain forms of sexual abuse. According to the literature on transgender violence, trans-women face higher risks of sexualized violence, whereas trans-men face higher risk of physical violence (Lambardi, Wilchins, Priesing, & Malouf, 2002).

Sexuality, as a category of analysis, has been cast from neo-Marxism as part of a body of politics that ensures the real work of activism (Butler, 1990). Global and political

change is not possible when sexuality and gender are singular items in research that do not relate to broader identity concerns (Burke, 2011). The relationship between larger structural and cultural forms of oppression and personal levels of oppression should be the focus, as they all relate back to identity. Furthermore, professionals supporting transgender individuals can incorporate practices that motivate clients to resist oppressive practices that hinder sexual and gender identity development.

Identity in terms of gender can be illustrated as a moving pendulum, which constantly transforms meaning based on time, place, status, and the discourses that construct beliefs and attitudes (Butler, 1993). Gender is not static and can easily move back and forth between masculine and feminine qualities. It is not imperative that an individual only perform their gender identity in one way, especially considering the severity and frequency of social, cultural and environmental influences. This means there are institutional powers, as well as informal practices, within our culture and society that socialize dominant behaviours, attitudes, and beliefs (Butler, 1989; Gregoriou, 2013). These institutional powers can be best defined by who has dominance within society, and who influences or shapes what customs and beliefs society values (Nagoshi & Burzuzy, 2010). According to Butler (1990), gender is an active and changing dimension of identity, and the performance of one's gender brings agency and stability. Through repeated gestures and actions one's gender is produced (Butler, 1999). Butler also asserts that there is no real gender and therefore, no real normal gender. The oppression felt by individuals who are not gender-conforming is an issue not well voiced, arising from the dominant discourse which evokes the belief that gender neutrality and transgender identity are mental health concerns (Embaye, 2006).

It is imperative to understand that the meanings of identities have changed, been adapted, and have expanded over time. In regards to queer identity, the influence of community development and activist groups has created change in both the political and social sectors (D'Emilio, 2012). For instance, the queer liberation movement in Canada has paved the way for governments' more progressive thinking leading to greater social acceptance, recognition and support. These changes have influenced the discourses associated with diverse identities. For the transgender community, community development helped break down cultural taboos regarding gender by providing transgender education (Burke, 2011). Research has begun to consider multiple forms of identity and has begun representing people and oppression as multi-faceted (Brah & Phoenix, 2013). Thus, identity development has become the domain for agency and freedom (D'Emilio, 2012), but also reflects the constant transformation of identity based on environment, social location, and personal experiences of privilege and oppression (Crenshaw, 1991).

Central to queer theory (Butler, 1989) is the notion that all categories of identity depend on culture and history for their meaning (Nagoshi & Burzuzy, 2010). For example, the meanings of 'woman' or 'transwoman' are dependent on the dominant structures that influence how we value these identities (Crenshaw, 1991). According to the dominant discourses of gender hierarchy, femininity is less than masculinity because of cultural favoritism (Merry, 2009). Gender is also dependent on the individual's perspective of themselves and how their environment accepts or rejects their authentic self, but these perspectives are greatly influenced by experiences of privilege and oppression (Butler, 1989). Grossman, D'Augelli and Salter (2008) found that oppression

of transgender individuals affected their overall perception self. They shared common experiences of discrimination and prejudice such as severe forms of verbal, physical, and sexual abuse in their lifetime (Grossman, D'Augelli & Salter, 2008). These forms of oppression were also experienced by transgender females, who adopted negative coping strategies such as substance use, unprotected and/or promiscuous sexual behaviour, and engagement in sex work (Sevelius, 2012).

The inability of transgender individuals to fully explore their gender and identity causes psychological distress, anxiety, depression (Embaye, 2006), and restricts the development of an authentic and autonomous self (Butler, 2004). When transgender individuals are given the opportunity to explore their identity, a journey of self-discovery begins (Gressgard, 2010). Self-development requires understanding and exploring gender and sexuality (Embaye, 2006). Sexual self-discovery is most commonly linked to puberty; typically queer individuals experience this process of self-discovery later than their heterosexual peers due to the cultural customs that prevent children from learning about diverse genders and sexual identities (Jeltova & Fish, 2005). Kosenko (2011) described gender and sexual development for transgender individuals and identified the common experience of a second puberty. A second puberty was explained as a secondary process of discovery whereby trans individuals are able to explore gender and sex without the restrictions commonly found in cis-gender and heterosexual spaces (Kosenko, 2011).

It is during this journey of self-discovery that gender and sexual expression are redefined repeatedly until individuals become comfortable with how they wish to perform their identity (Butler, 2004). This process also highlights that gender identity is a

constant repetition of behavior and action before an individual secures a state of authenticity (Butler, 2004). In order for individuals to explore their identity, they will need a space that offers security, limited risk of discrimination, and the available resources (Gagne & Tewksbury, 1998). Without these resources, an individual may never be exposed to the existence of diverse identities and genders. During this process, forms of resistance are undertaken (Butler, 1990; Gagne & Tewksbury, 1998). Examples of resistance can be observed in reclaiming derogatory phrases, dressing or enacting in manners that are considered inappropriate, exploring authentic forms of gender expression, and repetition of gender performance (Butler, 1999).

### **Trans Oppression in Canada**

Although the queer community has achieved success with social justice initiatives, the trans community has been largely excluded from these gains (Blazer, Dutta, Andrian, & Hyndal, 2012). Lesbian and gay rights have become recognized in Canadian legislation and the Canadian Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms; however, it does not specifically recognize transgender individuals and the discrimination they face in Canada (Wun Ho Tam, 2013). Discrimination on the basis of sex or sexual orientation is illegal in Canada (Canadian Criminal Code, 2007). This protection however, does not recognize the transgender community; transgender individuals suffer from inequality and have a lack of social and political recognition in Canada (Carlson, 2010). Transgender individuals seeking protection under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms will be restricted to matters that fall under the protection of disability, sexual orientation and sex (Erni, 2013), but these do not specifically protect against transgender

oppression (Wun Hu Tam, 2013).

Transgender protection under the sexual orientation clause discriminates against certain members of the transgender community. If transgender rights were explicitly recognized in the legislation, the transgender movement would experience political mobility (Wun Hu Tam, 2013). Courts and legislation would recognize gender as a legitimate and healthy expression of identity, instead of seeing gender as a medical or psychological construct. Gender equality, according to Canadian law, is seen as equality under binary sex categories (Wun Hu Tam, 2013), thus promoting the discourse of binary gender categories. Transgender individuals can fall victim to further discrimination due to this discourse, as many fall outside the gender binary norm (Stryker, 2008).

Arkles (2009) connected current regulations of detention and penitentiaries in the United States to the poor conditions protecting the physical and psychological wellbeing of transgender individuals in the justice system. Mann (2006) compared prisons in Australia, Canada and the United States finding similarities of exclusive practices that did not protect the rights of transgender people. These exclusive practices included only providing binary gender categories, forcing transgender individuals to identify with a gender that is incorrect, holding transgender individuals in cells with inmates that are making sexual and physical threats, and not providing proper medical attention and treatment (Mann, 2006). The Canadian Human Rights Tribunal has allowed transgender individuals to be housed in gender appropriate cells since 2003, but there are however restrictions and loopholes affecting whether individuals are recognized as transgender (Erni, 2013). In 2003, the Canadian Correctional Counsel stated that any inmate who had had reassignment surgery could be placed in appropriate gender cells, although this was



denied to those who had not undergone medical transition (Erni, 2013).

The Canadian Correctional Counsel legislation does not protect those who fall in the transgender spectrum of identity and is oppressive to those who are gender-neutral, genderqueer, or who have not yet gone through medical transition (Mann, 2006). Canada has allowed certain inmates to apply through correctional health plans for reassignment surgery (including hormone therapy); however, no inmates in Canada, to date, have had reassignment surgery while in prison (Erni, 2013). To be eligible an inmate must be examined and referred by correctional medical personnel, but due to the risk of violence from other inmates, transgender individuals are unable to voice their medical concerns to healthcare professionals (Erni, 2013).

The denial of services affects numerous transgender people, including those who have rely on social services. For instance, prisoners who require hormone treatment can be denied estrogen or testosterone (Wun Hu Tam, 2013), but their gender performance in this environment can be in response to prisoner discrimination, abuse and violence (Erni, 2013). Life experiences of transgender people can be hostile and negative, so that some need psychological support to overcome trauma, anxiety, depression and other mental health concerns (Embaye, 2006). However, mental health services including counseling are not entirely covered by health care insurance in Canada (Ontario Health Insurance Program, 2008). This limitation excludes those who are gender nonconforming seeking counseling services and are not seeking reassignment surgery or hormonal treatments (OHIP, 2008). This means that without the diagnosis and coverage from the disability clause, gender non-conforming and transgender individuals who are still questioning are excluded from benefits (Wun Hu Tam, 2013).

The Canadian government's inclusion of transgender individuals under the umbrella of disability provokes a mental health discourse. Transgender individuals benefit from this clause when they seek access to mental health services, specifically when seeking a medical diagnosis (Wun Ho Tam, 2013). Only those individuals who have been diagnosed by a physician can have a portion of costs covered for their reassignment surgery and hormone treatments (Ontario Health Insurance Plan [OHIP], 2008). This diagnosis comes after extensive medical and psychological evidence demonstrating that the individual meets the norms needed to live in their preferred gender (Wun Ho Tam, 2013). This means transgender individuals undergo years of surveillance by psychological and medical professions who are determining the performance of one's gender (Wun Ho Tam, 2013). Any variation of gender norms, according to these professionals, can be seen as unnatural or fraudulent (Wun Ho Tam, 2013). If professionals are not inclusive in their ideas on the diversity of gender, they may wrongfully deny a transgender individual their right to medical services.

In most Canadian jurisdictions, sex reassignment surgery is covered by health care insurance when professional recommendations are made (OHIP, 2008), but not all jurisdictions offer the health care services needed by the community (Wun Hu Tam, 2013). Some services in Canada are devoted to gender identity clients; these clinics provide a number of services including referral for medical treatments. There is still a high rejection rate of individuals who have gone through years of professional support, including accessing Gender Identity Clinics (Wun Hu Tam, 2013). According to the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) there is a 90% rejection rate for approval of sex reassignment surgeries, which cost between \$10,000 and \$20,000 (Wun

Hu Tam, 2013). Some transgender individuals may not have the funds for a clinical referral, thus denying them the opportunity to access services (Wun Hu Tam, 2013). In summary, disability rights do not protect those who are gender non-conforming, low income, intersex (and refusing corrective surgery), gender queer, who are not seeking hormonal treatments, and who are unable to physically modify their body.

Two elements to the current Canadian health system raise concern for trans individuals, specifically, and the queer community at large. Firstly, the designation of transgender clients as a population of special interest in the health care system results in a system that sees transgender patients as an anomaly (Flores, Gee, & Kastner, 2009). Secondly, many health care centers are not a space where trans individuals are recognized, and as a consequence they are forced to identify as either male or female. This causes transgender individuals to seek professionals who specialize in servicing the queer community, thus causing further scarcity of resources, prolonged waiting times, and travelling outside city limits to find particular medical specialists (Kastner, 2009).

Structural oppression is also a product of educational institutions. Buzuvis (2011) elaborates upon the exclusion and discrimination faced by students who identify as transgender or gender non-conforming. Individuals who are gender non-conforming face high risks of violence and bullying, leading to depression, anxiety, and trauma (Buzuvis, 2011). Inequity and segregation are evidenced by the absence of inclusive language in documentation that uses binary categories, without acknowledging transgender identity. Students who are gender non-conforming or transgender do not always have the option of using gender-neutral bathrooms, identifying as transgender on statistical documents, or having educators who acknowledge and support a safe space (Buzuvis, 2011).

Educational systems have been criticized for not providing in K-12 school programming that focuses on gender neutrality, the fluidity of gender expression, gender binary categories and gender roles. (Buzuvis, 2011; D'Emilio, 2012).

Wun Hu Tam (2013) recognizes the vast difference between the experiences of male-to-female and female-to-male transgender individuals. He states that the ongoing refusal of transgender rights is based on demonizing misogynistic insults that include accusing transwomen of being pedophiles and sexual offenders. The argument that Canadian law has progressed in recognizing and protecting the rights of queer individuals is an essentialist argument. Those who hold privilege within the queer community may find more protection than those who face multiple forms of marginalization.

According to Bowleg (2008), lesbians who face multiple forms of marginalization such as race and sexual orientation, experience higher forms of oppression. Bowleg (2008) argues that differences exist for women of colour who also identify as lesbian both within the queer community and outside of it. Queer environments that are racially dominated by white individuals can cast out racial minorities (Bowleg, 2008), which affects a queer's ability to find membership and acceptance. The same individual can experience further racial and sexual orientation marginalization outside of the queer community (Bowleg, 2008). Sexton, Jenness and Summer (2010) discussed the fact that transgender individuals have higher rates of multiple forms of marginalization compared to lesbian, gays and cis-gender individuals, but also higher rates of engaging in criminality. They also found that transgender individuals have higher rates of illegal substance use and of engaging in illegal sex work. They further identified that those who have been arrested and sentenced to prison have a tremendous loss of privilege, and that

prison poses much higher risks of violence, abuse, and coercive atmospheres (Sexton, Jenness, & Summer, 2010).

## **Conclusion**

To improve the quality of life for transgender individuals in various environments, the expression of identity must become less restricted and more liberated. School environments must become more open to individual gender expression; this will provide a safe space for those who are gender non-conforming and transgender. Educational policies must acknowledge transgender identity, offer educational support for teachers, including diverse gender and sexual awareness and acceptance, and provide competent counseling for queer individuals (Jetlova & Fish, 2005). Jetlova and Fish (2005) encourage school systems to break the gender dichotomy and to offer an inclusive environment for the queer community, such as revamping school curricula on gender fluidity and diverse sexual orientations to break stigmas and reduce prejudice and discrimination.

Systematic and structural influences, such as dominant cultural customs and governing bodies, have power over judgments that create prejudice and discrimination against minorities and hinder the equality and status of trans individuals. Health care policies that do not incorporate gender-neutral options or acknowledge the existence and presence of transgender individuals are dominant examples of systematic oppression (Spicer, 2010).

Social practices oppress queers and transgender individuals. The bigoted, hegemonic, and oppressive attitudes in our systems are fueled by pervasive cultural

negative beliefs about transgender individuals (Markman, 2011). Transgender individuals should not be tolerated, but rather accepted; this is the definition of equality. Hegemonic attitudes promote oppression, because those who hold dominant position and privilege may feel their social locations threatened (Bishop, 2002; Mullaly, 2002). Markman (2011) elaborates on misogynistic attitudes that perpetuate the higher prevalence of oppression towards transwoman and attitudes that grant privilege to masculinity and male status within our society. Jeltova and Fish (2005) found that transgender individuals have an increased risk of violence and severe hate crimes compared with their cis-gender and heterosexual counterparts.

### CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This chapter explains why constructivist grounded theory was chosen as the methodological approach. It introduces the queer theory paradigm and how this lens reflects the researcher's investigative approach. The application of constructivist grounded theory methodology on participant recruitment, data collection and analysis is discussed, as well as issues faced by the researcher, points of tension, and the various researcher's choices for the study.

#### **What is Grounded Theory?**

In 1967, Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss published *Discovery of Grounded Theory*, which, introduced a systematic procedure for the generation of theory from qualitative data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). These two scholars deviated from quantitative research by adding qualitative approaches as a means to achieve new knowledge. They argued that the flexible use of data helps researchers explore theory generation from both a qualitative and quantitative approach. They argued that qualitative research “provides and supports explanations of social phenomenon by truly encompassing human experiences, social environments, and the complexity of life that could not be fully illustrated by numbers and quantifiable research approaches” (Hall & Callery, 2001, p. 260).

Grounded theory has become a popular method for qualitative researchers in social work (Miller & Fredricks, 1999). Glaser and Strauss (1967) suggests that grounded theory should be used by researchers who aspire to generate theory through comparative

analysis. The use of constant comparison helps to avoid the preconceived notions of the researcher, which are highly influential on the direction, interpretation, and analysis of the research. Constant comparison of multiple sources of data is also said to enhance the researcher's rigor and trustworthiness (Hall & Callery, 2001). Data in this method can arise from multiple sources such as interviews, memos, and field notes (Charmaz, 2006). According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), generating a formal theory is possible once the highest level of scope and abstraction is achieved. A substantive theory focuses more on population and specific context (Creswell, 2007; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). A benefit of using grounded theory is the potential of generating and discovering unprecedented theories, as opposed to confirming existing ones (Annells, 1996). Alternatively, if grounded theory is not used to develop a theory, it can be used as a set of procedures for the researcher to analyze data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Glaser and Strauss (1967) argued one of the common pitfalls of grounded theorists is the use of assumptions during the process of analysis. They stated that these preconceived notions force the data to elaborate an explanation that does not truly reflect the data. From their perspective, research using this preconceived notion was serving the researcher's own ideas or theories. In contrast, they asserted everything the researcher needs is the data itself. Glaser and Strauss (1967) argued that qualitative research that focused solely on the collected data and was not influenced by the researcher's assumptions could generate far more enriched explanations of social phenomena.

Grounded theory, helps make sense of the world: the processes of people, behaviour, and experiences (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). It also provides recommendations to direct the research process through the provision of a heuristic form of data analysis



and interpretation (Mills & Huberman, 1994). A heuristic form of data analysis enables the researcher to understand the raw data and to discover its meaning on their own. A critique of the original method of grounded theory was the lack of specific practical application advice provided by its creators. Although researchers are to be completely entrenched in the data without outside interference, little guidance is provided on the procedures needed to for this to happen. Furthermore, the strict protocol for analysis requires a researcher to dedicate many hours, which can increase the cost of the research endeavor. This is especially the case for novice researchers and those new to grounded theory.

Regardless of the level of structure, it is imperative to note that all researchers are at risk of imposing assumptions on the data. As grounded theory is a process in which the researcher joins similar pieces of the data into groups or categories, there is a risk of imposing inaccurate categories (Charmaz, 2006). Glaser (1992) recommended that researchers avoid this by using only the data to justify the interpretation of categories. However, the same qualitative data can be conceptualized differently based on the lens of the researcher. Charmaz (2006) stated that the “point of departure” (p. 18) of a researcher considers the disciplinary stance of the researcher. Forcing the data can be avoided when a researcher truly reflects and exhausts all possible explanations through a process of empirical inquiry. Charmaz (2006) also stressed the importance of reflexivity in order to ensure that the analysis of data reflects the collected data, instead of reflecting the preconceived notions and unexamined biases of the researcher.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) failed to be novice-friendly in their explanations of how to apply grounded theory methods practically in the discovery of theory. For example, in

describing constant comparative methods, they explain that researchers should begin to code the data and then put it into emergent categories. That is, from the collected data the researcher will begin by coding the data, the codes are then grouped into similar concepts allowing the researcher to form categories. However, the examples they supplied may not be sufficient to provide clarity for an inexperienced researcher and may lead the novice researcher to fall into common mistakes including: prematurely closing analytic categories; having redundant categories; over-reliance on overt statements; failing to empirically check categories or failing to exhaust the process of saturation; or having unfocused or unspecified categories (Charmaz, 2006). Saturation is the result of continued sampling and analyzing data until no new data appears and all concepts in the theory are well-developed (Charmaz, 2006).

Strauss and Corbin's, 1998 publication, *Basics of Qualitative Research*, was critiqued as being overly focused on procedure. The excessive coding was likened to a method of quantification which consequently, was similar to quantitative methods in capturing human experiences (Glaser, 1992; Goulding, 1998). Further, axial coding was thought to be a controversial tool for analyzing collected data (Kendall, 1999) as it involves connecting titles to data and codes with predetermined characteristics such as time, actors, or locations (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). While this step introduces macro considerations into theory generation (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), it has also been said to impose categories onto data (Glaser, 1992).

More recently, Charmaz (2004) introduced a constructivist approach to grounded theory with social justice at the core of its methodology. Her approach addresses many of the criticisms of earlier versions, such as maintaining a structure to promote focus and

address concerns about the researcher's preconceived notions and background experience as well as analytic choices.

### **Constructivist Grounded Theory**

Charmaz (2006) invites researchers to follow the basic steps of grounded theory within an interpretive approach, while focusing on interpretations of a studied world, not a depiction of an exact picture of reality. This approach describes how researchers construct interpretations through the study of people and places, and the relationship between the two. Charmaz's (2006) main argument is that theory or explanation of phenomena is not discovered, but interpreted. Charmaz (2006) suggests that this methodology "enhance(s) possibilities for you to transform knowledge" (p. 185), as opposed to discovering new knowledge. Although acknowledging the past four decades of theoretical and methodological developments, Charmaz (2006) views grounded theory as a flexible set of principles and practices. Unlike the original version of grounded theory, she provides clear steps for researchers to follow regarding coding, memo writing and theoretical sampling, providing examples of these for the novice researchers.

### **Critical Worldview**

Qualitative research is based on paradigms or world-views, which underlie attitudes towards understanding how the world works (Creswell, 2007). Paradigms exist within the researcher and the method of inquiry (Annells, 1996) and dictate how a researcher chooses to observe or approach an area of study using a theoretical stance (Cutcliffe, 2005). All researchers have their own disciplinary background, which

influences their perspectives and knowledge surrounding any phenomenon. Grounded theory stresses that the researcher avoid empirical inquiry prior to investigation, so that the researcher will not test existing theories, but uncover new ones (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). By avoiding examining the literature, the researcher reduces the risk of entering the field of study with preconceived notions, insights, and hypotheses (Hall & Callery, 2001). This poses challenges for topics with a large empirical base such as the study of gender and sexuality. Empirical and theoretical literature regarding lesbian and gay issues including resistance is extensive however; there is a gap in the literature surrounding resistance specifically within the transgender community. For this project, the researcher was very familiar with literature surrounding resistance in sexual minorities, but was unaware of literature specific to resistance in the transgender community, the focus of this inquiry.

Prior to this investigation, the researcher used memo writing to encourage reflexivity and aide in the discovery of any prior beliefs, opinions, and knowledge surrounding the phenomenon of interest. The first memo written for this project involved analyzing queer theory and coming to terms with how this theory has influenced the researcher. Queer theory became a point of departure for the researcher, because it introduced resistance as an empowering mode of identity development.

### **Queer Theory**

In the 1990s, queer theory divorced itself from critical theory under the influence of feminist, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender studies (Jagose, 1996). Building upon fourth-wave feminist perspectives, queer theory provoked the examination of socially-

constructed sexual behaviour and identities (Halperin, 2003). There are two predominant streams of queer theory: 1) radical deconstructionism of identity categories and sexual orientations; 2) radical subversion and disruptions of normalized tendencies within the dominant sexual order. The radical deconstruction of identities refers to political resistance to the dominant order of gender and sexuality (Butler, 1999). The second stream identifies the foundations of resistance.

In order to deconstruct a category such as gender, one must first recognize that gender has been socially constructed (Butler, 1999) and critically explore the discourses, rules, regulations, cultural practices, and dominant structures that support this construction (Bishop, 1999). In terms of investigating gender and sexuality, the socio-historical components of both are examined by answering how heterosexuality became defined and asserted (Butler, 1999). A second step is to examine the discourses of heterosexuality, how these are produced, and how they continue to maintain power (Butler, 1999). Queer theory specifically explores not only the discourses that promote dominant social groups maintaining privilege, but also how these discourses create sexual and gender-based marginalization for diverse identities (Butler, 1999).

Queer theory teaches us that the development of diverse identities is a phenomenon worthy of being investigated (Butler, 1999). It is crucial to explore the contexts that have influenced and shaped gender identity (Stryker, 2008). It is critical for researchers to acknowledge and understand the existence of multiple diverse identities and explore theories of how these identities have been influenced by dominant structures. Instead of viewing transgender identity as an individual who has moved from one gender to another, in this theoretical orientation transgender identity is deemed as its own

category of gender (Stryker, 2008). The existence of this identity is not questioned; instead there is an acknowledgement of the identity's right to exist.

**Queer theory and constructivism.** Identity can be explored within different levels of knowledge: the transitive, the actual, and the empirical. Critical theory asserts that reality exists regardless of an individual's consciousness (Norrie, 2013). For example, structural oppression in the form of anti-gay laws exists whether or not a person is conscious of them (Diamond & Butterworth, 2008). This reality is transitive knowledge and can be greatly influenced by the structures and powers that cause events and discourses to unfold (Norrie, 2013). The empirical domain is comprised of what we experience directly or indirectly; empirical reality is dependent on the other two domains and is the conscious awareness of why and how experiences unfold for different identities (Sayer, 2000).

A constructivist would argue that reality is a product of human activity and is socially constructed, but it is based on a person's interpretation and understanding of reality (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Queer theory furthers this notion by arguing that a person who has minority status does not necessarily have to experience the reality of oppression in order to know it exists (D'Emilio, 2012). For example, one may be aware of transphobia in the school system by being consciously aware of prejudice towards diverse sexuality without experiencing direct forms of discrimination (Watson, 2005). Empirical knowledge exists, when a person can express not only the possibility of an experiencing discrimination, but also is able to comprehend the sources of its existence. D'Emilio (2012) argues that minorities are aware of oppression, regardless of their experience of it, because oppression is the consequence of the power relationships

between dominant and subordinate groups.

A constructivist would further argue that subjectivity relies on the discourses that affect the status of our identities and our knowledge of these discourses (Bergin, Wells, & Owen, 2008). This means that our identities are a product of social construction and our understanding of self-worth and place in society is a reflection of this construction. Queer theory clarifies that those who are marginalized have empirical truths regarding oppression, without necessarily having actual knowledge of oppression (Green, 2002). This means oppression exists within many different realms, which affect marginalized populations through multiple contexts (Bishop, 2002). Having empirical knowledge of oppression helps explore the mechanisms that influence its existence (Bishop, 2002). The discrimination and prejudice against transgender individuals exists to maintain heterosexual privilege (Bishop, 2002), maintain social order (Factor & Rothblum, 2008), or due to a fear of changing dominant social practices (Stryker, 2008).

A social world is influenced by structures and systems existing outside of one's independent thinking (Sayer, 2000). When investigating the study of gender and sexuality, queer theory views the complex relations between the three domains of reality and the potential impact they may have on subjectivity (Halperin, 2003). The researcher accepts a constructivist argument by adopting the ideology of queer theory, which states that gender is socially created and thus, the inequalities and discourses of gender are also socially created (Butler, 1999, Creswell, 2007). A constructivist would argue the relationship between subject and discourse is a constructed reality based on one's interpretation of experience (Creswell, 2007). Queer theory extends the investigation of oppression by validating the idea of multiple realities and depending on an individual's

perspective, oppression will affect everyone differently. For instance, a transman may experience privilege in the same environment in which a transwoman may experience oppression, and they may or may not be aware how patriarchy influences them differently (Stryker, 2008). Queer theories push for subjects to become critical of their realities due to the strong political stance embedded in the theory (Green, 2012).

According to Butler, (1999) although gender and sexuality exist simultaneously, both objectively and subjectively, there are key differences between them. Adopting an objective view of sex and gender, human beings would be considered sexually dimorphic, female and male (Butler, 1999). This dimorphic difference is active, powerful, and enabling discourse to be produced. A subjective view on sex and gender recognizes that both identities are reproduced through sexual possibilities, pleasures, and most importantly through ruling out the binary categories (Butler, 1999). Butler's (2004) illustration of how babies with ambiguous genitalia are surgically reconstructed to fit socialized gender requirements brings to question the power of gender discourse, and the conceptualization of objective realities. Butler (2004) argues that anyone who is non-conforming causes moral panic and our society is structured to 'fix' individuals who are considered problematic. If human beings were treated subjectively there would be less moral panic and a greater chance for individuals to develop diverse identities.

Butler's (1993) discussion solidifies social practices that further the conclusion that sex differences are merely conceptual. Although she uses a subjective foundation of understanding, her argument is objective in nature. For her attempts to describe gender characteristics is a discussion of social constructions of what bodies claim to represent. In other words, babies will become children and will present their bodies based on the social



constructions regulating gender. The development of self-identity is a product of constant reconstruction and children will naturally go through a process of reconstructing their identities (Butler, 1999). The process of discovering one's identity does not always relate to the macro influences of structures and systems, but are also influenced by micro forces such as intimate relationships, family and personal beliefs (Butler, 1999).

**Queer theory and identity.** Identity construction is objective to Butler (1993) who argues that the personal is political. A critical worldview argues subjective meaning coexists with objective meaning, because there is context within the interrelationships of people and multiple structures or systems (Bhaskar, 1989; Butler, 2004). Reality is stratified; reality has levels and both people and systems are placed in a hierarchal manner (Bhaskar, 1998). This affects someone's social positions, which goes on to affect internal perspectives pending on the status of this position. Exploring identity becomes a question of how one validates their multiple identities, whether or not their identity is validated by higher structures and systems, and how one balances the two realities. For example, socioeconomic disparities still exist for transgender individuals who experience higher poverty rates (Gressgard, 2010). This incites questions such as: Does this reality affect a subject's self-worth or image of self? Does this subject prevail regardless of experiencing lower socioeconomic status? and Does the subject have a conscious awareness of transphobia that exists within their society? Queer theory explores the difference between the subject and structural discourses and investigates how these affect subjectivity.

When studying people, emergent properties should be investigated and how these properties are affected by generating mechanisms that control the discourses which affect

who we are and who the world has predetermined us of being (Butler, 2004). People cannot be understood by isolating single properties such as their physical, biological, psychological, or social being. All of these properties exist simultaneously in a relationship that affects and reconstructs one another (Crenshaw, 1991). Queer theory isolates the reality of gender, such as the performance of hyper-masculinity, and breaks down the properties of this reality in order to understand it (Butler, 1999). The first property would be the human body as a biological existence, then the properties associated with the psychological and social self (Butler, 1999). The psychological and social properties would then be investigated by understanding how these two have been affected by external structures. Butler (1999) argued over time the human body is affected by the societal diachronic processes (binary gender categories) of development, which affects the performance gender.

### **Social Work and Grounded Theory**

Methods guided by social justice initiatives are an essential way of ensuring authenticity in the collected data. An interviewer must be dedicated to the study and understanding the stories shared by participants. Guba and Lincoln (2005) emphasize that control is deeply embedded in the questioning of participants' voices. Since researchers guide the process, voices of privilege may over power other voices in need of being heard (Charmaz, 2006). Considering the population of this study is marginalized, issues of hearing authentic voices are crucial. Guba and Lincoln (2005) argue against the assumption that through rigorous methods assumed biases are self-correcting. Furthermore, Rennie (2000) suggests rigorous methods may ignore the need to check in

with research participants about adequacy of interpretation. As Charmaz (2006) recommends, after interviewing participants the researcher can ask for a secondary interview or even ask participants to clarify the information provided from the original interview. Only the latter suggestion by Charmaz (2006) has been applied to this research project. Participants were willing to clarify or share further thoughts during the interviewing process as a process of member checking. Charmaz (2006) provides the most suitable approach to research methods for this social work study because the researcher finds substantial links between Social Work Code of Ethics (Canadian Association of Social Workers, 2005) and Charmaz's (2006) stance to research processes. Charmaz (2004) states, "no analysis is neutral" (p. 510) and thus "locating oneself in realities" (p. 509) is crucial in the adopted methodological framework. Constructivist grounded theory encourages member checking and for reflexivity to be a crucial part of the researching process, which concurs with the practice reflexivity inherent in social work practice (CASW, 2005).

Kendal (1999) illustrates that implementing a grounded theory approach made it easy to lose perspective and fall into a world of procedures. She explains that becoming "too distracted by working the model to its natural conclusion" (p.17) stopped the process of analyzing the data in regard to answering the intended research questions. To avoid this challenge, constructive grounded theory methods allows for researchers to stay dedicated to reflexivity, member checking, and thorough empirical inquiry. These tools help researchers stay focused with the experiences of participants, instead of being distracted by personal assumptions and hunches. Furthermore, choosing a constructivist grounded theory approach helps implement the consideration of the social worker and

participant relationship. As Hall and Callery (2001) stated, some research methods ignore this relationship and thus, ignore the process of understanding informants constructing realities in the wholeness and perspective of the participants and their community.

In addition, the researcher chose to emphasize social justice to encourage social workers and other professionals to revisit the relationship of power and authority and how it affects our clients and participants, particularly those who are transgender. Furthermore, professional mandates remind us that the use of power as professionals should always be avoided as it hinders the growth and development of clients (CASW, 2005). The project's aspiration is to encourage fellow professionals and researchers to remember the importance of social justice research as a priority and not an addition to research considerations (Charmaz, 2004). In choosing constructivist grounded theory, it is appropriate for the researcher to locate themselves within the research and grounded theory emphasizes the importance of doing so (Charmaz, 2004).

### **Research Participants**

This research project recruited 14 participants across Canada who self-identified within the transgender spectrum of identity, transgender, gender-neutral, or gender-queer, to illustrate the diversity among the transgender community. Offering gender-neutral/genderqueer identities gave the sample a variety that is most often overlooked within transgender research projects (Brown, 2012; Moon, 2014). Huffer (2012) argues genderqueer identities are most commonly ignored due to a lack of recognition and knowledge surrounding gender diversity. Stryker (2008) explained the phenomenon as a consequence of society's need for gender appropriation. In this research study,

transgender identity is entirely based on individualistic expression of a gender that is both fluid and evolving. It recognizes the diversity of gender identity and the uniqueness of gender expression. Transgender identity is therefore not limited to one's use of chemical, physical, or medical procedures. By including these identities within the sample of participants, I aim to resist the binary categories of gender that have been socially constructed in our culture (Butler, 1989). This supports theoretical sampling by keeping theoretical development the motive, as opposed to making the four sampling mistakes Charmaz (2006) warns against: sampling to address initial research questions; to reflect population distributions; to find negative cases; or to sample until no new data emerges.

### **Recruitment and Theoretical Sampling**

The researcher embarked on initial sampling by emailing study information handouts to agencies and organizations across Canada whom provide services specifically for the queer community (Appendix B). Agencies and organizations were found through extensive Google searches and examined more thoroughly on social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter. These agencies were selected because they were active in their local area and community and were using social media sites regularly to promote community engagement. In accordance to Charmaz's (2006) suggestions regarding gathering data, I explored avenues that would promote the richest sources of data, focusing on agencies and organizations that illustrated collective resistance through community engagement, such as hosting social support groups, peer counseling, and community activism.

Charmaz (2006) defines theoretical sampling as a process that elaborates and

refines categories as they emerge in the research process. This means participants were selected sequentially, allowing time for transcription, analysis, memo writing and reflection over the course of the recruitment phase. The researcher attempted to have one participant from each province, but this was not a main priority. As a homogenous sample would limit the diversity of the findings, recruiting a sample from across Canada served to reduce this possibility. In addition, as there is a scarcity of transgender communities across Canada (Blazer, Dutta, Adrian, & Hyndal, 2012), a nationwide recruitment strategy allowed for a reasonable number of participants to be involved. The sample of participants was diverse, with a wide variety in demographic characteristics such as age, identity within the transgender spectrum, economic status and geographic location. To improve interpretation a diverse sample created variation in the data, which is suggested by Morse (2010). Morse (2010) advises that one select one homogenous category when dealing with a diverse sample size; that category was transgender identity.

During recruitment there were two individuals who stated they would not participate in the study if they had to identify as transgender, because at the time of the study they were in the post-transition phase and had eliminated any previous connections to their pre-transition identity. This provided a new direction for theoretical development. Singh, Hays and Watson (2011) discussed that a form of resistance is the rejection of conforming to traditional gender roles and being open with their transgender identity. Therefore only individuals who were willing to identify within the transgender spectrum of identity were asked for an interview. Participants were recruited between March 11 and April 1, 2014. A total of 14 participants were enrolled when a point of data saturation was reached. Saturation, according to Charmaz (2006), is a process in which no new

properties in the categories emerge.

Theoretical sampling chooses participants based on their fit with the hypothesis of the researcher and is a guideline in all three versions of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). I started the investigation with memo writing and explored the possibilities of asking questions such as, how do transgender people perform their gender? Memo writing allowed me to define the core category under investigation, to list everything I knew regarding gender identity, performance, and resistance, allowing me to become consciously aware of any biases that I held. This exercise also allowed me to create more in-depth questions for exploration and focus my intent in interviewing. After the first interview was complete, I compared the transcribed data to my first memo. Two ideas emerged: gender is a process highly affected by social relationships (school/friends), and intimate relationships affect the perspectives (subjectivity) on one's gender performance. A question for further investigation was, how did transgender individuals explore their identity after experiencing social exclusion and familial disapproval? As categories emerged, memos became a way for me to check the relevance of emerging categories (Charmaz, 2006). The ideas, which emerged through the process of constant comparison, shaped the questions for future interviews. Memos also allowed the researcher to check the relationship between core categories and the data as suggested by Charmaz (2006).

Another priority was to collect sufficient data in order to gain as many different perspectives as possible. In order to do this, I followed Charmaz's (2006) seven suggestions for reaching quality. Collection of data did not cease until enough background data about persons, processes, and settings was collected to "understand and

portray the full range of contexts of the study” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 18). I gained detailed descriptions of resistance from a range of participants who sometimes offered unique forms of subjective resistance. After constant comparisons, the data revealed information that Charmaz (2006) would describe as “beneath the surface” (p. 18). The data was sufficient to reveal changes in the process of interviewing one participant to the next. I felt that I gained multiple views from a diverse sample of participants who offered a range of contexts.

Once the first interview was completed, a transcript of the auto recording was made and then coded following the guidelines provided by Charmaz (2006). I compared memos and transcripts throughout the process of coding. This process allowed for categories to emerge, for relationships between categories to become apparent, and for empirical inquiry to take place. During this process, I was able to gather similar categories together and create concepts. Once again, this process was constantly compared to other forms of data such as memos.

Charmaz (2006) stated, “adductive reasoning starts with the data and subsequently moves towards hypothesis formation” (p. 103). Adductive reasoning allowed for consideration of all possible explanations when analyzing the data. It also allowed the data to be the source of theoretical categories instead of drawing from empirical knowledge. Variation, according to Charmaz (2006), occurs when a researcher is selective about their participants and chooses them by focusing on experiences or specific events. Theoretical sampling helped refine the analysis to focus more thoroughly on the complexity of gender performance. This entire process enabled memo writing to become more precise and analytic, compared with the first few that were broad and



explorative in nature. Empirical inquiry also became more precise after exhausting possible explanations and creating connections between subcategories.

Another concern and point of tension was the obstacle of feeling blind, as a common experience for novice researchers (Hall & Callery, 2001). I attempted to allow the process of collecting data to determine the direction of this. This meant entering the first interview with a blank slate, so that the focus of the interview was broad. In contrast, the last interview was quite specific. As the number of interviews increased, the questions changed to investigate emerging leads and hunches from previous interviews. The field guide was under constant reconstruction as theoretical insight became more incisive and the investigation began to focus on core categories.

The researcher stopped interviewing when saturation was reached. Charmaz (2006) states a point of saturation is reached when categories no longer spark theoretical insights, nor reveal any additions to core theoretical categories. Hall and Callery (2001) further describe saturation as the process of constant comparison yielding interchangeability of indicators or incidents, which the researcher was investigating. Saturation does not mean repetition of similar events, and Charmaz (2006) warns researchers not to confuse saturation with repetition of described events. Saturation was confirmed when no new patterns emerged from the data, incidents no longer formed new hunches and the process of conceptualizing of patterns yielded no new ideas.

**Theoretical sorting.** Charmaz (2006) describes sorting as the logic for organizing a researcher's analysis and a way of creating theoretical links to make comparisons between categories. Sorting prompted categories to be compared on a more abstract level.

Once interviews were concluded, the researcher began to sort them in a process that Charmaz (2006) describes as “creating integration” (p. 135). In this process the researcher, allowing for a greater visualization of the data, sorted memos by hand and categories were compared carefully, considering the order of incidents as presented by participants. This visualization helped balance the experiences of participants, categories, and empirical inquiry, as suggested by Charmaz (2006), by catering to my preference to learning visually.

It became apparent that certain events in the lives of the participants were not only common; these events were described as milestones in participants’ gender identity development. The researcher treated these milestones as major categories because they shaped the meanings associated with identity and resistance. For example, all of the participants spoke about their *second* puberty, explaining this experience as the journey into discovering and constructing their sexuality and gender outside of binary categories. Participants discussed that this journey was crucial as it was the moment in which they began to discover the diversity of gender and sexual identity aiding their process with self-discovery.

In terms of resistance, the participants’ stories were probed for mechanisms that supported their gender presentation and their identity as transgender. Mechanisms discussed included cross dressing, departing from traditional binary gender norms, wearing chest binders or certain articles of clothing, adjusting voice and tone, and adjusting their body language to emphasize specific gender characteristics.

**Theoretical sensitivity.** It is always important for a researcher to be reflective of

their position, their work, and how both will benefit the community that they study (Charmaz, 2006). The goal of this project was to illustrate the empowerment of a marginalized population, and thus it was crucial for me to understand the role I play as a researcher, a member of this marginalized population, and as a graduate student. Reflexivity supplements theoretical sensitivity by uncovering the researcher's assumptions before they influence the data (Hall & Callery, 1998). Becoming reflexive also helps form constructive questions to investigate emerging ideas and (Charmaz, 2006). Silverman (1998) notes that being reflexive supplements the process of transcribing and interviewing, promoting rigor through the use of precision. Shatzman and Strauss (1973) argued that reflexivity cautions the researcher to be aware of the nonverbal gestures that shape the interview. Reflexivity was a priority for this research project in order to achieve the best quality and precision possible.

To engage with this marginalized group, I first questioned the fluidity of identity in a commitment to reflect on any internalized biases I may have. As a researcher, it is important to develop self-awareness in order to fully explore and understand concepts of sex, sexuality, gender, and diversity (Huffer, 2012). I became aware of my personal biases on gender that followed postmodern theories such as social construction (Butler, 1999) and how my privilege has protected my personal experiences with gender development. In order to place these biases aside, I had to be conscious of them, and enter interviews without preconceived ideas in order to not force the direction of data collection. Charmaz (2006) suggests every researcher go through a process of reflexivity, where any ideas and concepts a researcher may have regarding a phenomena be recorded in order to gain a better awareness. To take her suggestion seriously, I made an effort to

place my theoretical knowledge aside when interviewing participants. Allowing the interviewing process to naturally develop allowed collected data to speak for itself and not have my preconceived notions interfere.

As Pillow (2003) stated using reflexivity as a methodological tool in qualitative research is one of the most significant trends in exploring questions and representing marginalized groups. In terms of knowledge, I entered the field of study with a thorough understanding of queer resistance, but was not entrenched in transgender research exploring resistance. I had to disregard the assumptions and preconceived notions that transgender individuals shared the same experiences as others in the queer community. For instance, the process of writing my first memo outlined personal assumptions that played as a hypothesis. It was crucial to disregard this knowledge and allow participants to create the data needed in order to proceed with this investigation. Another conflict was avoiding an explicit research problem to investigate. Instead of exploring a problem, I choose to explore the topic of resistance not knowing where this exploration might lead me. After concluding the interviews, I realized there were concerns that presented themselves in the data, including internalized transphobia. This new idea emerged and guided my investigation to explore how resistance helps transgender individuals understand and overcome internalized transphobia. As Alderson (2012) explained, “transphobia is the fear, dislike, and/or intolerance of transgender individuals” (p. 151). He further explained the internalization of transphobia is the externalization of what we dislike about ourselves.

## **Genderqueer Identity**

Complete exposure of identity was decided upon for two reasons. The first was to demonstrate daily resistance and to show both political and social activism against discrimination. I believe that I hold a privileged status in numerous social locations that reduces the risk of experiencing severe forms of discrimination. For this reason, I believe that exposure of identity opens space and builds awareness. Another reason for this openness of identity was to create rapport with those who decided to participate in the study. As discussed by Jagose (1996), it is very important for a researcher to demonstrate their dedication to producing academic literature that will validate queer identity and queer communities. I wanted participants to know their stories would be validated and heard with empathy.

## **Semi-Structured Interviews**

According to Charmaz (2006) intensive interviewing provides an in-depth exploration of a particular subject or experience and can be a useful method of interpretive inquiry. Hoping to extract unique and authentic forms of resistance, I asked transgender individuals specifically about their performance of gender in various contexts (Butler, 1999). Using a semi-structured questioning approach helped ensure that material regarding both resistance and performativity were captured.

As a novice researcher, the structure of this approach provided reassurance and simplified the process of interviewing for me. In contrast, this structure limited the interview process; at times the questions posed more of a distraction than a benefit when

probing for richer contexts. Charmaz (2006) suggested that during transcribing and coding, a researcher will uncover different hunches and can easily explore a topic more in depth with a second interview. Due to time restraints, no second interviews were conducted in my study. Another option provided by Charmaz (2006) was to explore the topic more in depth with the next interviewee, which is the strategy I decided to use. This also became a learning experience for me as I entered other interviews. Memo writing also provided a space to explore ways to slow down interviews and learn to take more time exploring experiences with participants. Taking more time to process and reflect during an interview allowed me to gain a more empathic understanding of the experiences being shared by participants (Suddaby, 2006) and offered the space and time for me to probe emerging hunches during an interview in a process of member checking.

**Memo writing.** Memo writing captured restrictions, points of interests, and new questions to be investigated. Specifically, it allowed for clarification and a better understanding of emerging ideas to guide future questioning in interviews with new participants, during which I could explore the hunches I had in more depth. Memo writing also provided grounds to gain theoretical insight and to challenge assumptions, preconceived notions, and pre-existing ideas (Charmaz, 2006). I became aware of numerous preconceived notions and quickly attempted to eliminate them by using only the raw data to move forward with hunches. Charmaz (2006) warns that interpretations can never be objective in nature, because “what we define as data and how we look at them matters because these acts shape what we can see and learn” (p. 132).

Paying close attention to Charmaz’s (2006) advice to recognize the complexities that exist in multiple realities, memo writing also allowed the space to address the

variations within the data as it was collected from a diverse population. As ideas emerged, I went through a process of empirical inquiry, constantly comparing emerging hunches to theoretical knowledge. Whenever I felt a new idea presented itself during an interview, transcription, or memo writing, it was compared to theoretical knowledge. Whenever these hunches were not linked to theoretical knowledge, codes emerged. These codes were further explored with future participants in the process of saturation.

**Questions.** Questions were constructed prior to the first interview in order to investigate how privilege and oppression affect developing gender and sexual identity. Throughout the process of interviewing, questions were reconstructed in order to gather information about the participants' experiences of resistance. A field guide was created to assure that the researcher was staying on track (see Appendix C). As the process of interviewing participants progressed, questions became less broad and more focused. Initial questions asked participants how they identify, how long they have identified as such, and explored with the participants their process of understanding their gender identity. The field guide did not change for the initial interviews and all participants began their interviews with these questions. These initial questions helped the researcher build rapport and gain an understanding of the participant's identity (Elliot, Fischer, & Rennie, 1999).

Later a question was formatted as "How does your identity (as stated by participant) affect the way you present/express your gender?". Questions that followed focused on whether their presentation changed in different environments such as at work or school. Questions investigated how these individuals maintained the authenticity of their gender in different environments that were discriminatory and prejudicial, or unsafe.

Participants were also asked to explore how their gender performance changed in spaces and environments that were safe, queer-focused, and transgender inclusive. As common themes arose after the first few interviews, the field guide questions were then adapted accordingly. Participants were asked to share their experiences developing their identity and the relationship this process had with their peers and their family. These issues were probed with participants giving their perceptions of self as they went through different milestones in their life such as: graduating high school, first job, first queer community exposure, and queer relationships. The frequency of probing hunches increased as the number of interviews progressed in order to investigate and clarify emerging themes.

Participants were told about emerging themes that had arisen during previous interviews and were asked to comment as a form of member checking. Member checking allowed participants to become aware of forms of privilege and oppression they have experienced in different environments. Multiple identities and the relationship these have with developing transgender identity was one such emerging theme that participants were asked to further discuss. They were able to elaborate in rich detail their multiple identities in multiple environments and contexts. These stories opened discussions to the relationship different identities have in different spaces, including the status these identities have in society. These conversations allowed the researcher to become more aware of how privilege and oppression are tightly interwoven in various environments and how these participants utilized multiple forms of resistance to navigate various spaces.

Due to the sensitivity of the subject, I valued informants' comfort level over gaining data. Charmaz (2006) suggests that interviewers pay close attention as to when it



is appropriate and safe to probe informants. Validation, empathy, active listening, and positive responses can help during these moments (Charmaz, 2006). My professional experience working as a director of queer activist groups and also as a counselor in mental health settings helped during moments where participants needed support. I attempted to identify moments when the informant should be given time to reflect and regain themselves, instead of ignoring the painful experiences that questions may trigger. As Creswell (2007) stated, grounded theory allows the researcher to adjust questions in order to cater to the needs of each individual. As Charmaz (2006) stated, rapport building allowed for conversations to become more personal, emotional-based, and allowed a safe space for story-telling. This flexibility allowed for secondary questions to be less structured and more open based on the information shared by the participant. Secondary questions were constructed as a result of the material gathered from the first open-ended questions. Charmaz (2006) describes these questions as intermediate, and should be used to elaborate on informants' personal experiences. For example, "What helps you manage the experience of (oppression associated with being transgender) on a daily basis?" is an intermediate question. The goal of the interviews was to gain informants' descriptions without placing their stories in preconceived categories. A list of possible questions can be found in Appendix D.

### **Data Analysis**

According to constructivist grounded theory, the researcher becomes the most used tool of analysis throughout the project, consequently the researcher's creativity and preferences set the limits (Charmaz, 2006). For example, during memo writing, I became

more aware of the experiences of participants and how these realities lead to various answers to the research questions (Suddaby, 2006). I became increasingly involved in the process of this research as I drew upon multiple sources of data including memo writing, reviewing transcripts, and the process of empirical inquiry. The interviews with participants were transcribed immediately after the interview, as suggested by Charmaz (2006). I then reviewed the transcriptions, conducted line-by-line coding and highlighted incidents in chronological order. Using this method of interpretation, the researcher was able to extract insights by organizing categories. Charmaz (2006) explains that if the comparisons can happen smoothly throughout multiple parts of the data, then the researcher can demonstrate the trustworthiness of their codes.

Theoretical insights began to emerge as participants shared experiences surrounding the topics of: internalized transphobia, assimilation, and the relationship among their multiple identities. After the first few interviews, I became aware of patterns associated with the development of gender identity, including common experiences that participants shared. These themes were elaborated upon during memo writing where a process theoretical investigation took place to answer questions such as: What categories do these incidents indicate? and What is actually happening in the data? Categories became more concise through the constant comparison of data and as interviews progressed.

**Coding.** For coding, I decided to code by hand, which Charmaz (2006) offers as an option for researchers so that they can directly see their codes. Coding became more apparent for me as I colour coded, cut out written text, and visually made connections among themes, concepts and categories. As a visual learner, coding by hand also allowed

for me to make further theoretical connections. One difficulty was finding in-vivo codes drawn from participants' own words. The use of in-vivo codes summarized participants' meanings and offered a way for me to deconstruct larger themes into more specific ones. Although locating in-vivo codes caused me to spend more time with the data, the process served to further familiarize me with the data. To avoid compromising trustworthiness, I did not overuse in-vivo codes and chose them only when relative frequency was shown throughout the data as recommended by King (2008). King argued that in-vivo coding could cause issues of trustworthiness in the later stages of the research process because it generalizes from case to case.

After this initial step, I began comparing the collected themes to uncover similarities and differences. This step helped move data analysis into focused coding where larger themes were generated based on high frequencies and their importance in understanding participants' experiences (Charmaz, 2006). All interviews that followed the initial ones were similarly coded, however, the focused codes were carried from interview to interview. Less frequent codes generated from initial coding were compared to the codes developed later in the research process. This process helped to develop new codes and allowed me to make additional comparisons, as a requisite for theoretical analysis. Focused coding helped me collapse initial codes into appropriate macro themes; these then were compared retrospectively across previous interviews. If any new codes emerged in later interviews I re-read previous transcripts to re-conceptualize themes and codes if necessary.

As mentioned previously, memos were free style writing techniques that recorded in detail reflections of the interview process and gathered material. Charmaz (2006)

recommended a researcher write in any style, so long as it elaborates in tandem with each level of coding and data collection. My memos provided a paper trail of how I began to interpret the data and undergo an analysis process. Memos reflected thoughts and ideas that were tentative, but provided evidence as to the change process. Memos written during the interview provided ideas for further clarification or themes of interest. Sometimes these jotted notes were shared with the participants in order to gain clarification or to see if participants agreed. During the process of coding, I continued with memo writing, which was reflected my thought process. Memos also offered grounds to connect emerging themes of the data to existing literature in a process of theoretical analysis (Charmaz, 2006). Data analysis lasted eight weeks and was completed on May 27, 2014.

### **Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness in qualitative research is critical; researchers should not expect others to accept their work at face value (Charmaz, 2006). Trustworthiness for qualitative research depends on the credibility of the researcher(s), accuracy of representation, and authority of the writer (Krefting, 1991). As Guba and Lincoln (2005) stated, qualitative researchers should have confidence in their findings as long as these findings shape practical decisions and changes. A researcher has an obligation to consider and check issues of triangulation, relationships, and the impact of the research on the community being studied (Creswell, 2009).

In order to maintain trustworthiness, I used member checking as suggested by Creswell (2009) and Charmaz (2006). Member checking examines the truth-value of the

research and allows researchers to feel confident that findings are based on the context introduced by the informants. Member checking is one way of determining truth value. In this project, member checking was done during the interview. Throughout the interview, I would paraphrase their stories and ask if I was fully capturing the messages they were conveying. Participants were emailed a copy of their summarized transcripts with notes marking various themes and interpretations. I made sure to ask participants if they felt the final product illustrated an authentic interpretation of their experiences (Creswell, 2009). The participants that chose to respond agreed to the interpretations and did not provide any further comments or concerns. All participants were given two weeks to reply to the email and provide any further comments. There were no participants that emailed after two weeks.

This research produced findings that arose entirely from the data collected, with each participant's reality being defined as a unique example of resistance. The findings aim to provide sufficient descriptive data, which would be available for comparison to a similar context. Another method to establish trustworthiness, requires the researcher to constantly compare different sources of data during analysis (Creswell, 2006). For this project, this process involved comparing different types of data including transcripts, memos, and journals, which outlined my reconceptualization process, and demonstrated my attempt at neutrality while analyzing the data to ensure findings were free from bias. As suggested by Creswell (2006), this allowed me to explain and elaborate themes and perspectives in a manner that is truly connected with the participants' stories.

As a social work student, I aimed to promote social fairness and have ethical responsibility to incorporate reflexivity (CASW, 2005). Reflexivity enriches practice and

allows for any and all consequences of research to be acknowledged (Coyle & Williams, 2000). Challenges exist in the implementation of social justice research. Social workers may face the competing demands of professionalism and generating new knowledge to address the demands of the academy. The greatest challenge for me was dedicating the time needed to analyze the data well. I gave all my participants the ability to have open conversations regarding the information shared, how I would interpret it, and what they wished to convey to readers of this thesis. This meant dedicating more time than anticipated so that all the participants had an opportunity to share their thoughts post interview. There were three participants who contacted me post interview asking for resources and contact information for transgender support networks, but none replied specifically regarding the transcripts.

This leads to the question as to whether rigorous research and dissemination of findings are more important than social justice and supporting participant-driven credibility (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). For example, it is more important to me as a researcher to place the needs of others above self-interest, and to act in a professional capacity. The participants disclosed incidents of discrimination and inequality that lead to a lack of opportunity in many different realms including: education, employment, and access to healthcare. Participants trusted me enough to disclose this information and in return, I made reflectivity a priority. If I attempted to interpret their stories without knowing my own privilege, I would not be able to see their experiences with clarity. I hold privilege as an academic student and thus am aware of social justice diligence. A secondary consideration was that as a member of the queer community I am driven to avoid negative circumstances arising from conducting this research.

## **Ethics**

The Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board at the University of Calgary approved the study (a copy of this certificate is found in Appendix E). Initial contact was made with agencies and organizations serving the queer community in different areas around Canada. A poster detailing the information for this study was emailed to queer agencies across Canada (see Appendix D). These agencies were asked to post this poster where it would be visible to their community, but it was also spread around social media like Facebook. Participants that were interested, emailed me to inquire about participating in the study.

During initial contact participants were given information about the study, ethical considerations were thoroughly discussed and they were able to ask questions about the study until they were satisfied with the information provided. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study or to decline answering any questions. They were made aware that once the interview was finished, it would be transcribed and analyzed. After two weeks, the material provided by them would be integrated into the analysis and would not be able to be withdrawn. If participants expressed their wish to withdraw from the study prior to their data being incorporated into the group analysis, their data would be destroyed. If participants were interested a consent form was emailed to them (a copy of the consent form can be found in Appendix F). The participants faxed or emailed a completed form prior to the interview taking place. There were five individuals that did not return the consent forms. These individuals were not interviewed and were not included in this study.

Maintaining anonymity of data is a critical in research. Anonymity protects participants from negative consequences resulting from their participation. For this project, participants were informed that the researcher would protect their privacy and results would be reported only in the aggregate unless an individual's quotation was included in the manuscript. The majority of participants did not want to remain anonymous and gave consent to have their identity shared within this study. All participants who asked to remain anonymous were kept anonymous by using an alias name. The alias name helped organize the participants and keep the process of analysis in order. Additionally, participants were informed that only the researcher and supervisor would have access to the raw data and audiotapes. All electronic data files will be kept in a password protected computer and will be retained for five years, at which time files will be destroyed. No hardcopies of audio recordings were made. All other information, including printed transcripts and memos, were stored together in files. These files will also be shredded.

No reasonably foreseeable risk to participants was associated with this study; all planned questions were similar to those they could encounter in their everyday lives. Furthermore, if after participating in this study participants wished to discuss their emotions or experiences further, information about available services was provided in the consent form.



## CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Fourteen participants were interviewed for the study, all of whom identified within the transgender spectrum of identity. Two participants identified as genderqueer, 6 as MtF transgender and 6 FtM transgender. The age range of participants was 23 to 57, with a median age of 32. Five participants were recruited from Alberta, two from British Columbia and one from each of the other provinces. It was difficult to recruit individuals from the various provinces and a large number of individuals volunteered from Alberta. This resulted in a disproportionate number of participants from Alberta. At least one participant was recruited from each Canadian province; none were recruited from the Northwest Territories, the Yukon or Nunavut. The majority of participants were English speaking; one participant's first language was French and another's was Tagalog. The majority of participants identified as White and Canadian. Two identified as Aboriginal, and there was one participant that identified as each of the following: Black Canadian, French Canadian and Filipino.

The findings of this study will be presented by introducing the overarching theme — *vulnerability* — and the two key categories: *discovering transgender identity*; and *maintaining transgender identity*. The two key categories separate the lives of participants before and after transition and each participant elaborated on the significant differences between these two phases. Three sub-categories were identified for each key category. These sub-categories described the frequency and significance of resistant mechanisms as reported by the participants. Finally, themes indicating the forms of oppression that tested the participants' ability to be resistant were extracted from the data under these subcategories. The findings will be elaborated upon using illustrative quotes

from the data with participants identified by their name or as anonymous, their identity (MtF, FtM or genderqueer), their age and the city in which they currently reside. Figure 1 provides a schematic illustrating the findings of this study (see Appendix G).

### **Interconnection Between Vulnerability and Resistance**

This study has introduced the concept of vulnerable resistance. Both masculinity and femininity are mere vocabularies that we fit in, conform to, or contest to (Butler, 2011). For instance, gender binaries are assigned to us at birth, but many genderqueer and transgender people refuse to fall into these categories. By using mechanisms of resistance, such as queer liberation, visibility, and connection, the participants in this study were able to liberate their identity. The use of resistance provides a means of radical self-determination, one that helps in solidarity with others in the trans and queer community. Alone, vulnerability could be defined as an inability to cope with, or contest, forces that marginalize transgender individuals. By adding resistant mechanisms to vulnerability, the qualities that are attacked by oppressive forces can be honored, while challenging oppression. An example of this for transgender individuals is assimilating from gender normativity, visibly presenting as a transgender person, and participating in trans political movements.

Each participant mentioned vulnerability in a positive manner, stating the ability to be vulnerable was “empowering” (Nolan, FtM, 26, Calgary). Being vulnerable as a transgender individual required the participants to “be aware of how oppression affects trans identity and no longer feel threatened by these reasons” (Jared, FtM, 29, Halifax). Vulnerability was noted as a “strength” (James, FtM, 24, Calgary) that helped empower

the participants by “increasing self compassion” (Neil, genderqueer, 38, Winnipeg). Resistance was used by participants in this study to meet and overcome discrimination and prejudice. Despite being marginalized, by being vulnerable, the participants were able to strengthen their autonomy and agency. Being vulnerable meant the participants were not conforming, or attempting to change, in order to avoid experiencing oppressive circumstances. Self compassion and self determination allowed the participants to be vulnerable. Vulnerability was therefore characterized as being authentic and resisting the forces of oppression that discourage trans identity. As Jared said:

I was taught to always have thick skin — I had to be fearless. In my household crying and being sad was wrong, because it’s seen as a weakness. Growing up and knowing that I was trans caused me to feel super isolated. I struggled coping, because I wasn’t allowed to cry or be sad. I was told to conform and be like the other kids. After I came out as trans I realized that conforming was one of the biggest causes of my depression. Conforming caused me to lose focus of who I really was and what I needed in order to be happy. Coming out was a way I finally demonstrating that I do love myself (FtM, 29 Halifax).

Resistance was documented in the data when participants mentioned they were able to overcome oppression. All participants agreed that oppression affected their identity and offered numerous examples of individual and systemic forms of discrimination and prejudice. The attitudes, thoughts and behaviours used by the participants during these oppressive circumstances demonstrated the interconnection between resistance and vulnerability. Being vulnerable was most commonly described as “exposing trans identity” (Theo, FtM, 24, Ottawa). Participants acknowledged that they

were susceptible to oppression, because they possess qualities, which make them “targets for discrimination and prejudice” (George, FtM, 29, Montreal). By capitalizing on their vulnerability, all the participants used resistance to overcome their experiences with oppression. This process was described as “becoming aware of what doesn’t support transgender identity and finding ways to stay strong” (James, FtM, 24, Calgary). As Kevin elaborated:

Once I became aware of why oppression exists it was easier to deal with everything. I don’t see myself as ‘resistant’, I see myself as vulnerable. I have to cope with a lot of discrimination and prejudice... I know that it’s not my fault — there are still people who don’t accept me or other trans folks. I used to walk with my head down until I started changing my perspectives. People don’t hate me; they judge me. I am capable of changing their minds if they get a chance to know me. They judge because they don’t know me. People are plagued with stereotypes (FtM, 32, Vancouver).

Participants also described vulnerability as “the source for empowerment” (Dez, 38, MtF, Moncton). In order for participants to feel empowered they had to “let go of things that held [them] back from being [transgender]” (Anonymous, MtF, 27, Regina). Being vulnerable enabled participants to exert various forms of resistance and thus discover their true identity. As one participant said:

There’s a sense of vulnerability in admitting that you’re different. Telling yourself that you are not like the rest takes a toll on your psyche. When I first started to realize I was different, I felt really sad and alone. The whole experience is so

isolating, because even if there were others who were questioning their genders I would never know. No one wants to be different as a kid; as a kid I just wanted to be accepted and have fun. There came a time in my life that I just couldn't have fun anymore, because try as I might, I was unhappy failing at fitting in as a boy (Shay, MtF, 56, Victoria).

Once participants realized they felt different from their peers, a process of discovery was initiated. All of the participants spontaneously described, “the moment [they] realized [their] identity was masked in the wrong body” (George, FtM, 29, Montreal). As participants started to become curious of their apparent difference, they explored gender identity in more depth — the process of self discovery. The process of self discovery was documented as a mechanism of resistance, because each participant found the strength to overcome oppressive forces that didn't support gender diversity.

### **Discovering Transgender Identity**

Discovering transgender identity depicts the pre-transitional phase for participants in the study and illustrates the process participants went through to uncover their unique gender identity. During this phase, participants described a time when they did not identify as transgender, but were aware of their gender and sexual differences. This then led them to question their identity, reflect on how their gender differences affected them, and come to enact a more authentic gender performance. This process was described as a resistance to oppressive forces that assigned gender into binary categories. For instance, by questioning diverse gender identity participants were rebelling against the dominant gender customs that separated boys from girls and men from women. Within discovering

transgender, three forms of resistance were found: questioning; reflecting; and enacting. Each of these, sub-category introduces the forms of oppression that hindered participants' opportunity and ability to discover their transgender identity.

**Questioning.** Questioning transgender identity was best described as the process of “self exploring gender in order to figure out who you really are” (Shay, MtF, 56, Victoria). Participants discussed this process as “imagining life as the other sex” (Nolan, genderqueer, 23, Calgary) and “desiring to experience life as that sex” (George, FtM, 29, Montreal). The majority of participants described themselves as possessing gender schematic thinking during the phase of discovery. That is, prior to knowing about diverse gender identities, these participants held strong binary gender stereotypes. Participants began to question their own behaviours and attitudes, while attempting to understand why their presentation of gender was different from that of their peers. As one participant said:

I would imagine starting life over again, right from the moment of my birth. I'd wish I'd wake up a girl... At home I was always told to toughen up and be a big boy. That always left me feeling disgusted, but I never really knew why until after I transitioned. Before I knew about transgender identities I always thought boys were boys and girls were girls. There was no other option so I would just imagine [transitioning]. I'd question my identity as a boy and wonder if maybe there was a mistake during my birth (Leslie, MtF, 57, Edmonton).

During this phase, participants shared that they were accused of dressing or behaving as “the opposite or wrong sex” (Jared, FtM, 29, Halifax), which reinforced the notion of binary gender categories. Some participants stated that at the time they were

unaware of how they were not following traditional gender presentation, while other participants were very conscious of breaking binary gender customs. Whether they were conscious of their gender presentation differences during this phase, all participants reported experiencing different forms of discrimination and prejudice for their differences. These experiences were described as “overwhelming” (Anonymous, MtF, 27, Regina) or “embarrassing” (George, FtM, 29, Montreal). Another participant elaborated on these feelings:

As a kid I didn't know anything about transgender identity. I knew about homosexuality and about being gay, but I never felt like that identity suited me. Everyone thought I was gay and would guess that to be my reason for acting so feminine. My parents would always point out my feminine features and tell me to correct them, to be more masculine. At school I was called a fairy, but I'd always wonder why it was such a horrible thing to be feminine? Sometimes I'd watch my girlfriends do things that I wanted to do and would become so angry that I couldn't. I wanted to put on makeup and wear sexy dresses, to flirt with men and go out. I never did those things because it was wrong. I believed back then that I was really messed up for wanting those things and that I needed to be okay with being a boy (Anonymous, MtF, 27, Regina).

All the participants questioned their identity at a very young age and identified being greatly affected by individual forms of oppression such as the binary gender roles and gender presentation rules that had to be followed at school in order to fit in. Most participants said they learned how to navigate in their environments in order to survive or avoid being bullied. This gender navigation was a form of resilience, as it demonstrated

the individual's ability to avoid negative consequences. Their first step in becoming resistant was raising the possibility of having a diverse gender identity, which opposed the customs and rules that enforced gender conformity. The two forms of oppression, which affected these individuals' ability to question and be resistant were: gender appropriation and performance denigration.

***Gender appropriation and performance denigration.*** The most common form of oppression experienced by participants involved gender appropriation and performance denigration. Gender appropriation was described by the participants as, “the pressure to conform to the dominant gender expectations” (James, FtM, 24, Calgary) as influenced by systems and structures, including “family, school, work, social circles and mostly the media” (James, FtM, 24, Calgary). These systems and structures created the belief of gender as being either male or female, and exclusively presented within traditional masculine and feminine characteristics. When participants rebelled from dominant gender customs they experienced different forms of discrimination and prejudice including: “verbal, emotional and physical abuse” (George, FtM, 29, Montreal), “social segregation” (James, FtM, 24, Calgary) and “bullying” (Anonymous, MtF, 27, Regina).

Without being prompted, ten participants reported experiencing emotional, and physical abuse and neglect from their families in the pre-transition when they refused to conform to traditional gender appropriate customs. Emotional violence was described differently among the participants, but was most commonly associated with being “controlled” (James, FtM, 24, Calgary). For George (FtM, 29, Montreal), emotional violence consisted of his “parents removing [his] things and prohibiting [him] from playing with masculine toys” as a child. For Shay (MtF, 56, Victoria), emotional violence



was “being verbally manipulated into believing [she’d] burn in hell if [she] continued to act feminine”. Kevin (FtM, 31, Vancouver) described “being told you’re worth nothing repeatedly until you believe it’s true”. Physical violence was reported as including being hit, struck, or physically harmed in other ways. For Leslie (MtF, 57, Edmonton), physical violence was “[her] father’s forceful way of preventing [her] from being feminine”. Leslie elaborated upon “forceful” by explaining her father would “strike [her] across the face, or physically restrain [her] so she wouldn’t be able to leave the house”.

Neglect was described as “being excluded” (Theo, FtM, 24, Ottawa) from the family system and the failure to have basic needs met such as “supervision, food, clothing, safety, housing” (George, FtM, 29, Montreal). Participants said the most common form of neglect was “feeling unwanted and not loved” (Kevin, FtM, 31, Vancouver). MtF study participants described experiencing more consistent and more severe forms of family violence than FtM individuals. For example, without being prompted all six transgender females reported experiencing physical violence for their gender presentation at a young age, whereas only three of the six-transgender males reported such exposure. It was also more common for transgender females to experience social isolation and bullying. For example, Neil said:

When I dress like a woman I experience a lot of different things from strangers. The first couple times I was terrified to go in public dressed in feminine clothing. One time, I was on the bus and a few different men starred at me until they realized I wasn’t a woman — in their standards. It was terrifying. They threatened me and shoved me around. I never experienced anything like that as a man. In my transwoman support group, a lot of the women said they experience the same thing:

shoving, name calling, mockery and shaming. A few of them have experienced physical violence, too (genderqueer, 38, Winnipeg).

Gender performance denigration was identified by the participants as, “receiving negative criticism from others regarding how [they] performed [their] gender” (Neil, genderqueer, 38, Winnipeg). The way in which the participants performed their gender, during the discovery phase, was referred to as “an authentic and natural way of presenting either feminine or masculine characteristics” (Anonymous, MtF, 27, Regina). For example, James (FtM, 24, Calgary) stated that he has always been masculine and “it was natural to be masculine; [he] never tried to act male, it came naturally”. Leslie (MtF, 56, Calgary) concurred stating that she felt she “was born with feminine qualities”, but “taught [herself] how to be more masculine to avoid consequences by [her] parents”. In another example, George (FtM, 29, Montreal) outlined that his masculinity as a child was met with hostility by his parents, and also by his peers at school he described “being mocked” or “being begged by [his] parents to try harder to act like a girl”.

The participants of this study discussed being subjected to oppressive experiences in the discovering phase, but were determined nevertheless to continue questioning their gender. Resistance was exhibited through questioning because it encouraged the participants to become “determined” to transition (James, FtM, 24, Calgary). Despite the possibilities of experiencing further discrimination participants stated, “questioning was a priority, because feeling broken wasn’t” (Kevin, FtM, 31, Vancouver). Participants stated that they continued to explore a part of their identity despite being subjected to oppression, as mentioned by James:

I couldn’t pretend to be someone I wasn’t. Conforming was never an option. I was

depressed every day knowing I was in the wrong body. The thought of helplessness was something I couldn't accept. I knew I was different and I had to figure out why. I used a lot of media, like movies and books, to explore sexuality and gender. Every time I would connect to a fictional character I would think about the possibilities of being male. It felt like I was entertaining the thought of being a male in my head and trying to be solution focused... I was trying to figure out what would happen if I were to become a male (FtM, 24, Calgary).

Questioning sparked participants to begin a process of self-reflection. Initiating a process of meaning making to provide a platform to justify their gender difference, validate their gender presentation, and explore the possibilities of transitioning.

**Reflecting.** Reflecting on one's gender was described by study participants as "the process of serious contemplation" (Theo, FtM, 23, Ottawa) regarding their identity, motives, attitudes, and fears with being transgender. It involved "contemplating how to be okay with being transgender" (Kevin, FtM, 31, Vancouver) and about "how to deal with negative consequences with coming out" (Shay, MtF, 56, Victoria) under the trans spectrum of identity. Reflecting also meant exploring options that best suited their lives. For instance, Dez (38, MtF, Moncton) said her first reflections were "contemplating whether or not transitioning was possible and safe". Internalized transphobia, a common form of oppression experienced in this phase, affected participant's ability to be reflective and resulted in participants "exploring resources anonymously" (Mac, FtM, 26, Calgary) on the Internet.

**Internal transphobia.** During the process of reflection, participants identified that they questioned their ability to transition. These questions were: "Can I actually follow

through with the transitional process?” (George, FtM, 29, Montreal), “What would I actually want the result of surgery to be?” (MacKenzie, MtF, 23, Calgary), “Will I lose my job?” (Leslie, MtF, 57, Edmonton), and “Will my parents still accept me?” (Nolan, FtM, 23, Calgary). These questions were derived from negative attitudes towards trans identity that were influenced from transphobia. Current forms of prejudice and discrimination towards transgender identity were said to be powerful messages from parents and peers against the participant’s diverse gender expressions. Being influenced by their parents and peers disapproval, participants said they were “embarrassed” and “ashamed” of their trans identity (Michelle, MtF, 32, Charlottetown).

The process of self-reflection was not always described as positive. Dez (MtF, 38, Moncton) described the process as “scary” and Michelle (MtF, 32, Charlottetown) characterized it as “frightening”. They further noted that the process of self reflection brought up a lot of internalized transphobia, which was described as a “common result of living and functioning in environments that were filled with stigmas and stereotypes towards transgender identity” (Kevin, FtM, 31, Vancouver). Each participant in this study described having internalized transphobic thoughts while questioning their transgender identity. Internalized transphobia affected the participants in numerous ways, such as: “struggling with self acceptance” (Shay, MtF, 56, Victoria), “having low self worth” (Neil, genderqueer, 38, Winnipeg), “believing negative stereotypes about transitioning” (Leslie, MtF, 57, Edmonton), and “confirming offensive prejudice, like being mentally ill” (Shay, MtF, 56, Victoria).

Effects of internalized transphobia for study participants included: “self harming [behaviours]” (Neil, genderqueer, 38, Winnipeg), “using substances” in a harmful manner

(Kevin, FtM, 31, Vancouver), suffering from “depression and anxiety” (Leslie, MtF, 57, Edmonton), and getting involved in risky sexual activity including “sex work” (Dez, MtF, 38, Moncton). As well: poor “eating habits” (Michelle, MtF, 32, Charlottetown), “isolating from friends and family” (Jared, FtM, 29, Halifax), and experiencing “insomnia” (Theo, FtM, 24, Ottawa) were noted as consequences of internalized transphobia.

Vulnerability allowed the participants to accept their diverse identity by learning how to be “self compassionate” (Kevin, FtM, 31, Vancouver). When struggling with internalized prejudice towards their trans identity, participants described “self compassion” as a method of “self care” (Nolan, FtM, 23, Calgary). This involved participants finding ways to feel good about their qualities including “falling in love with qualities that represent [their] real gender” (Neil, genderqueer, 38, Winnipeg). Self-compassion was noted as a mechanism of resistance that supported the participants to overcome internalized transphobia. This process was described as “tedious” and “hard work” (MacKenzie, MtF, 23, Calgary). It was important in that it allowed the participants to explore their fears and find “constructive ways to overcome these fears” (George, FtM, 29, Montreal). As James elaborated:

One night after a drag show I had a friend come right up to me and just asked me: “When are you going to deal with your gender stuff?” I immediately laughed, because I guess I originally felt a little embarrassed that I was transgender. When my friend just stared at me I knew I had to do something about my identity. After that moment, it just became a lot easier for me to feel comfortable presenting as male. Day after day my presentation started becoming a lot more authentic (FtM,

24, Calgary).

**Enacting.** Enacting transgender identity was described as “performing the right gender” (George, FtM, 29, Montreal) or “consciously presenting as the correct gender” (Kevin, FtM, 31, Vancouver). Enacting was a way to affirm the participants’ body by dressing or using certain clothing to present more as feminine or more masculine. Enacting described as “liberating” (Theo, FtM, 24, Ottawa) was important in that it allowed the participants to perform gender more authentically. Body-affirming practices and coming out as transgender or under the spectrum of trans identity were two mechanisms of resistance that occurred during enacting.

***Body-affirming practices and coming out as trans.*** Both body-affirming practices and the act of coming-out were mechanisms of resistance as described by the participants. Body-affirming practices were described as certain “rituals” (Leslie, MtF, 57, Edmonton) or “common practices” (Jared, FtM, 29, Halifax), which helped the participants “perform gender in different ways until an authentic and comfortable performance was found” (Shay, MtF, 56, Victoria). Participants described body-affirming practices as “rituals” (George, FtM, 29, Montreal) or “physical ways to enhance gender performance” (Michelle, MtF, 32, Charlottetown). As Leslie said:

I have always loved makeup. As a kid I’d steal my mother’s makeup sometimes when she wasn’t home. In my room I’d blare my favorite music and play with makeup. I loved every minute of it. When I had the chance to do this stuff I would feel alive and confident (MtF, 57, Edmonton).

All participants said that they explored body-affirming practices in private prior to

coming out publicly as trans. Some participants said reaching out to resources “helped [them] feel comfortable exploring body-affirming practices” (Jared, FtM, 29, Halifax). Others said private body-affirming practices helped “confirm the need to ask for help” (MacKenzie, MtF, 23, Calgary). Once individuals became comfortable with testing their gender presentation, they stated that they found the courage to come out by seeking support from local resource centers. Participants said the next step after coming out was making a decision regarding transitioning. For some, including Jared (FtM, 29, Halifax), the decision was “easy”; for others the decision was described as “complicated” and “involved seeking support for a lot of other things, like depression” (MacKenzie, MtF, 23, Calgary). For Mac, the decision to transition was extremely difficult, as he stated:

Deciding to transition has taken me years. I am still unsure someday about what I want and what I need. I have been seeing a counselor about other mental health issues and she tells me things are all connected. I know that my mental health is connected to my transgender identity and my fear that transitioning will ruin my life. There is another part of me that thinks transitioning will make my life better. There’s another part of me that thinks my mental health stuff is causing me to be transgender. My counselor helped me realize I’m just scared and even though things are all connected I can find a way to be happy if I take the time to decide what is best for me” (FtM, 26, Calgary).

Once participants came out under the spectrum of transgender identity they began exploring their options. For some participants transitioning was a “priority” (James, FtM, 24, Calgary), for others it was a “possibility” (Nolan, genderqueer, 23, Calgary). Coming out indicated that participants were no longer discovering their trans identity and felt

comfortable identifying as a trans individual. Some participants knew they wanted to transition using both hormones and surgery. They described this process as “redundant” (James, FtM, 24, Calgary) and “tiresome” (Kevin, FtM, 31, Vancouver). For the other participants, coming out meant, “seeking professional support to figure out what [their] options were” (Mac, FtM, 26, Calgary). Whether or not participants decided to undergo hormones and/or surgery, after coming out they “began a new journey and a new phase in life” (George, FtM, 29, Montreal). This new phase was identified as maintaining transgender identity.

### **Maintaining Transgender Identity**

In order to move from discovery to maintaining, the participants said “some type of transition or coming out” was necessary (George, FtM, 29, Montreal). Transitioning, according to the participants, was not focused on medical and hormonal treatments — although the majority decided to use both. Participants defined transitioning as “coming to terms with who you are and doing something about it” (Nolan, genderqueer, 23, Calgary). They also suggested that transitioning was “accepting who you are and making necessary changes in order to be that person” (Anonymous, MtF, 27, Regina). Within this phase, participants described an ongoing process to maintain positivity and strength. As George noted:

Coming out is hard, but transitioning itself wasn't. Doing the work and reflecting on my gender was hard. I had to face all those demons I had living in my head. I had to face the loss of friendships and loved ones. Once I started transitioning though, everything became better. I started to live life through my body for the first



time. It was like I was feeling things for the very first time. Like happiness. But everything that brings such happiness has to be maintained. I still do a lot of work in order to feel happy and safe. I have to keep doing things that bring me a sense of pride (FtM, 29, Montreal).

Emotional independence, finding community and healthy boundaries were subcategories of maintaining transgender identity. They served as mechanisms of resistance, because they supported the participants in being authentic, regardless of oppressive barriers. Developing the skills to build a strong sense of independence were “necessary in order to feel in control” of their lives (Neil, genderqueer, 38, Winnipeg). Independence helped participants “cope with grief and loss” (Kevin, FtM, 31, Vancouver). Within the theme of independence, resistance was exerted by “being visible as transgender” (Leslie, MtF, 57, Edmonton).

Finding community, the second sub-category, illustrated the importance of having membership in a group and “having a sense of belonging” (Theo, FtM, 24, Ottawa). In addition social activism or being a social activist was an important theme in this subcategory. The participants stated that making positive change in the larger community helped “elevate the sources of oppression” that effected their daily life (Anonymous, MtF, 27, Regina). All of the participants agreed that social activism is important, but the level of involvement varied for each individual. The final sub-category, healthy boundaries, illustrated the “importance of self empowerment” (George, FtM, 29, Montreal) and was comprised of confronting daily prejudice. The skills of confrontation “helped direct others to use appropriate pronouns” (Kevin, FtM, 31, Vancouver), “understand and accept diverse gender identities” (Dez, MtF, 38, Moncton), and “sustain

healthy relationships” (Nolan, FtM, 23, Calgary).

**Emotional independence.** Independence, which was commonly identified by participants, was portrayed as being “emotionally independent” (Jared, FtM, 29, Halifax). This meant that participants learned “to make personal decisions and go through challenging life situations without relying on others” (Mac, FtM, 26, Calgary). With greater emotional independence, participants felt “less isolated and disappointed when others didn’t accept [their] identity” (Dez, MtF, 38, Moncton). Independence was further elaborated on by participants as being: “less affected by someone else’s disapproval” (Anonymous, MtF, 27, Regina), “achieving personal empowerment” (Neil, genderqueer, 38, Winnipeg), and “increasing self esteem” (Michelle, MtF, 32, Charlottetown). Michelle further noted:

Once I decided to transition there was no going back. I had doctors reminding me that the effects of hormones were permanent. I had friends stop talking to me or flat out tell me I was a freak. I even had a family member ask me to change my name completely so that they couldn’t be associated with me anymore. I’m laughing at all of this now, because regardless all the threats and disapproving comments nothing could have stopped me — nothing. I had to be independent. I had to think independently. I still, up to this day, remind myself to answer this question before making any decision: What is the best option for me? (MtF, 32, Charlottetown).

Participants explained that emotional independence has helped them to “gain a better sense of control over [their] life” (Jared, FtM, 29, Halifax), especially in terms of accepting their transgender identity. For these participants, independence promoted “a

greater importance on self affirmation and self validation” (George, FtM, 29, Montreal). As participants gained the skills to be more independent, they became better at “affirming the normality of transgender identity” (Theo, FtM, 24, Ottawa). This then allowed them to feel more secure and stable, allowing them “to put [their] identity and their happiness as a first priority” (MacKenzie, FtM, 23, Calgary). However, being independent meant that in many cases participants had to cope with further oppression. As Kevin stated:

My motive was to be happy, but I had my family threatening to abandon me and me threatening to abandon my family. I had to just run away, be independent and start my real life... I couldn't allow myself to feel guilty about being trans. It's not like I woke up and decided I was trans. I decided to do something about it — to be happy. It was hard at first, but I learnt to be emotionally stable and praise myself for being strong enough to transition without the support of my family (31, FtM, Vancouver).

***Coping with grief and loss and being visible.*** Significant hardship and loss were common experiences for participants as they began their transitional journey. One major concern was “grieving the loss of intimate relationships” (James, FtM, 24, Calgary), including those with family members and close friends. Neil expressed shame when explaining that his transition will never be more important than his relationship with his family. He offered:

I don't have a lot of friends. My social circle consists of family friends and the friends I made while in the military. These relationships are obviously very important to me. I can be genderqueer (pause) and still keep these relationships.

I'm a guy and I play the right part when I'm with family and friends. In my own time, in the right space, I let myself be more feminine. I try to balance living two lives in order to be happy (genderqueer, 38, Winnipeg)

Grief was suggested as a consequence of losing “membership within a community” (James, FtM, 24, Calgary). James (FtM, 24, Calgary) discussed losing membership within the lesbian community after his transition, as “the lesbian community suddenly saw [him] joining the more privileged males”. Theo shared the loss of his European identity, which he described as being “neglected” and “not recognized”. He further noted:

I don't see my family anymore. Not even during the holidays. It's easier this way so that my family isn't embarrassed attempting to explain that I am their son now. And it hurts so much, because I had to give up one part of me in order to have another. I wish there was a way to be Polish and to be a part of that community again. Maybe one day I can, but for now I can't (FtM, age 24, Ottawa)

For the study participants, the possibility of experiencing grief and loss deterred, but did not stop, them from transitioning. In reflecting on the possibility of lost relationships, as a consequence of their transition, participants planned to end certain relationships. For instance, Shay (MtF, 56, Victoria) experienced resentment and neglect from her Aboriginal community after moving away to seek support. For Shay, the counseling she received prior to transitioning helped plan for the possible loss of friends, family and her Aboriginal community. After transitioning and becoming independent, she stated her “heritage was a piece of [her] identity that had to end in order to move forward

as a transgender woman”. Only one participant said, “preventing the loss of family and other intimate relationships is more important than transitioning” (Neil, genderqueer, 38, Winnipeg).

In order to cope with the experience of grief and loss, the participants of this study suggested independence. Independence provided the participants with the ability to prioritize their needs over the opinions of others, even if the consequence was ending a relationship. Participants remarked that being independent as a transgender was a mechanism of resistance, as it “increases a sense of control and power” (Leslie, MtF, 57, Edmonton). For Leslie (MtF, 57, Edmonton), independence helped “separate [her] from needing the system that oppresses transgender identities”. Independence also provided “control from being influenced to believe transgender identity is wrong, a sickness, or anything else negative” (MacKenzie, MtF, 23, Calgary).

**Visibility.** This mechanism of resistance within independence is the act of visibility. This was depicted as a distinct act that confirms transgender identity. Participants described visibility as the prominent act that exposes a diverse gender presentation to others. When participants were visible, they reported feeling “authentic” (George, FtM, 29, Montreal) and “genuine” (MacKenzie, MtF, 23, Calgary). Mechanisms for being visible without the use of hormones and surgery included: cross-dressing, performing in drag, and using clothing to enhance the presentation of a desired gender. For participants who underwent surgery and used hormones, being visible was simply described as, “being out about being transgender” (James, FtM, 24, Calgary). Being out meant that the participants did not hide their trans identity and were comfortable addressing this part of their identity. Each participant described the act of being visible

differently. A common form of visibility was “identifying as transgender or joining a trans group” (Dez, MtF, 38, Moncton). Visibility exposed the “falsehood in stereotypes and stigmas” (Shay, MtF, 56, Victoria) that promoted prejudice and discrimination. As George elaborated:

I was so caught up with wanting to be a man I forgot the joy in being a transman. I love the fact I’m a transman. If someone asks about the scars on my chest, I smile and say ‘it’s from top surgery. So what?’ I would have never gained the confidence I need if it wasn’t for my trans group. That group was so much more than a support network; they helped remind me that I need to stick up for myself. There’s something so peaceful about accepting my identity entirely as it is (FtM, 29, Montreal).

**Finding community.** Having a healthy community was noted by participants as not only contributing to their stability and security, but as also increasing their social, emotional and psychological wellbeing. For James, (FtM, 24, Calgary) the drag community provided “the opportunity to learn about transgender identity, but also the resources needed to transition”. Participants spoke about forces that restricted their perceived ability to transition. These were described as anything or anyone that held influence over the meaning of gender and sexuality. Participants in the study stated that they learned to manage a traditional gender performance in order to survive in their immediate environments. In addition, they sought out environments that were inclusive in order to support their diverse gender performance and identity. As Michelle (32, MtF, Charlottetown) explained, “positive queer space gave [her] the opportunity to grow”. Nolan further articulated:

Once I left home and found queer space like the drag troop, I felt like everything that used to hold me back couldn't anymore. My family couldn't dictate who I should be, I didn't have to put up with high school drama and fitting in, and I wasn't living in a small town that was homophobic. I was surrounding myself with people who made me feel like I belonged. That made me feel good (FtM, 23, Calgary).

***Lateral oppression.*** Actively seeking community, as a mechanism of resistance, demonstrates the individual's desires to prioritize their identity and support the growth of trans inclusive space. Participants described their experience of vulnerability with finding community because "produced anxiety and uncertainty" (Shaw, MtF, 56, Victoria). For the majority of participants in this study, finding community meant addressing their "identity, insecurities, and facing the risk of rejection" (Jared, FtM, 29, Halifax). Participants expressed finding community is a "necessity to maintaining positivity" and "[it] secures a support network" (Kevin, FtM, 31, Vancouver).

One unique form of prejudice that was brought up by participants was lateral oppression within their queer community — the first theme under this sub-category. Even within the queer community, "transgender individuals can be excluded and segregated from queer space due to transphobia and gender related oppression" (James, FtM, 24, Calgary). Participants described feeling excluded from queer social activities after having come out as transgender for a number of reasons, including feeling "judged" (Anonymous, MtF, 27, Regina) or "labeled" (MacKenzie, MtF, 23, Calgary) by other queers. Participants from both the lesbian and gay community expressed this. Mac shared a common experience that was discussed by the majority of the participants when

describing the lesbian community's response to his transition:

The lesbian community is a strange place for me. I don't think I ever fit in with them, but then again I always had a hard time identifying as a woman. But now that I'm out as trans, it is so much harder to fit in. I don't fit in with the cis guys and I don't fit in with the lesbians. It makes my social life pretty complicated, but so does the negative lesbian attitude towards trans dudes. For some reason it feels like lesbians think I took the easy route, but I sure as hell didn't (26, FtM, Calgary)

Lateral oppression was commonly experienced by the participants as they discussed their life after transitioning and coming out as transgender. The majority of participants described friends "neglecting to validate [their] transgender identity after [they] came out" (Dez, MtF, 38, Moncton). Lateral oppression was described as having queer friends and the queer community project negative stereotypes onto transgender identity. Many decided to end relationships with friends in order to continue their journey as a transgender individual. Dez also shared a common experience with the gay community:

I was always the super feminine, but after transitioning, even though all my friends said it made complete sense, they didn't want anything to do with me. I knew that they felt like they couldn't connect with me anymore, but I could never see the difference. I wasn't any different; my body was just slowly changing. It showed me who my real friends were and more importantly, showed me what kind of a person I want to be. I was surrounded by superficial people, but after my transition I just feel more appreciative and grounded in my trans community



(MtF, 38, Moncton)

Actively seeking community, as a mechanism of resistance, demonstrates the individual's desire's to prioritize their identity and support the growth of trans inclusive space. Participants drew links between vulnerability and finding community, because it "left [them] feeling nervous and doubtful about whether or not others would be accepting" (Shay, MtF, 56, Victoria). For the majority of participants in this study, finding community meant addressing their "identity, insecurities, and facing the risk of rejection" (Jared, FtM, 29, Halifax). Participants expressed finding community is a "necessity to maintaining positivity" and "secures a support network" (Kevin, FtM, 31, Vancouver).

***Social activism.*** Participants described being an advocate differently. Some participants noted, it was the "subtle forms of correcting prejudice attitudes and thoughts, like policing oppression" (Mac, FtM, 26, Calgary), while for others, it was "marching, taking up space, and showing up for political demonstrations" (Kevin, FtM, 31, Vancouver). The importance of policing oppression, as suggested by one participant, is the "immediate action of advocacy" (Mac, FtM, 26, Calgary). The immediacy of addressing prejudice was brought up by numerous participants as a "crucial way to stick up for trans identity" (MacKenzie, MtF, 23, Calgary). It helped the participants resist being victims of oppression in nonaggressive ways. For instance, Kevin explained:

There comes a point where being the other is no longer an option. Spending the majority of my life as the other caused me so much emotional and psychological pain. I grew really tired of being treated like I am a freak or not good enough — not

normal. By being quiet and allowing people to mis gender me I feel like I'm being really passive to oppression. That really upsets me, because I am not a passive person. I'll stick up for myself and correct people. I usually use humor or a smile. It's always non aggressive. I'm just here to say 'hey, those jokes or that stereotype is really hurtful. I'd appreciate it if you stopped or considered this instead'. People for the most part react very nicely when they see I'm genuinely hurt (FtM, 31, Vancouver).

Taking part in larger organized social demonstrations was described as "crucial for the growth" (MacKenzie, MtF, 23, Calgary) and "visibility" (James, FtM, 24, Calgary) of the transgender community. Trans marches were also noted as a "way to demonstrate who trans people really are and crush prejudice" (Kevin, FtM, 31, Vancouver). One participant described feeling "excited" (Theo, FtM, 24, Ottawa) while taking part in these demonstrations. Another participant cautioned that social demonstrations have to be "well thought out and for the greater good of the transgender community" (Anonymous, MtF, 27, Regina). Taking part in larger social demonstrations allowed participants to actively take part in change, as Michelle elaborated:

You know, I love myself a lot. I've been through a lot in my life and I won't waste my time with people who don't respect me. It took a lot of courage to walk away from certain people after my transition, but after they refused to respect, me I had to do it. I really want to see the barriers that prevented me from being happy to not exist. I feel like contributing to the community by showing up and marching is a way to enforce that positive change. I'm not embarrassed to show up, but I know that a lot of people can't show up to these marches, because of the

consequences. It's scary that there are people out there scared for their life and hiding in the closet (32, MtF, Charlottetown).

While social activism increased feelings of membership and belonging among participants, it also supported participants' awareness of current issues affecting diverse genders and sexualities. By contributing to social justice, the participants learned "how to be aware of subtle forms of prejudice that affect trans identities" (Kevin, FtM, 31, Vancouver). For example, social justice demonstrations brought the participant's attention to topics such as: "understanding how transgender identities are sexualized" (George, FtM, 29, Montreal); "how media reinforces mis gendering of trans people" (James, FtM, 24, Calgary); and "the over representation of coloured trans women being victim to severe forms of violence" (Shay, MtF, 56, Victoria). Furthermore, social justice events helped the participants learn new skills to help identify and address oppression. Common skills associated with building healthy boundaries, included "knowing when someone or something is oppressing trans identity and addressing it peacefully" (Michelle, MtF, 32, Charlottetown).

**Healthy boundaries.** Establishing healthy boundaries is the final form of resistance identified by study participants. Boundary setting, described as a crucial mechanism to establishing healthy and supportive relationships, included confronting prejudice. This was further defined as nonaggressive methods to policing oppression. In order to establish healthy boundaries, participants had to learn how to respond to discrimination and prejudice when it occurred in ways that validated their identity, named the injustice (oppression), and helped others avoid making further discriminatory or prejudice mistakes. Boundary setting was the most radical form of resistance found in the data,

because it demonstrates the participant's ability to contest societal expectations. The participants said, "learning about healthy boundaries started in support groups" when experiences of objectification were shared. As Jared said:

During support groups I learnt [the way] I was being treated by others about my gender presentation and my trans identity was objectifying. Some people treated me like a freak - I sometimes felt like others saw me as a social experiment. Other times I felt like no one validated my male identity if they knew I was trans. I pass as male quite well, but if people know I am transgender then I would be a transman - not a real man... Setting healthy boundaries felt like I was changing the fundamental nature of binary gender roles. It's radical, you know, to have an entire community working together to educate itself and create their own cultural customs that advocate for human equality (FtM, 29, Halifax).

***Confronting daily prejudice.*** Confronting prejudice was described as "navigating through environments as a transgender individual and not allowing prejudice to be unnoticed" (Kevin, FtM, 31, Vancouver). There were different struggles identified by the participants that restricted their ability to feel safe in public spaces. For instance, a number of transgender male participants mentioned experiencing hostility from cisgendered men in public places. James mentioned "the gym" as "a scary place if cis men feel threatened by trans men using the same space" (FtM, 24, Calgary). Theo elaborated on navigating through environments and said, "some places are safe to be trans, but some places are definitely not" (FtM, 24, Ottawa). The places that were not safe were described as "very cisgendered" (MacKenzie, FtM, 23, Calgary) and "very heterosexual" (Jared, FtM, 29, Halifax). For George (FtM, 29, Montreal), navigating

through environments there were unsafe meant, “hiding trans identity and using the privilege of passing as a cis gendered man”.

Confronting prejudice for the transgender women of this study was more complicated. Some participants said confronting prejudice was “scary and sometimes resulted in violence” (Shay, MtF, 56, Victoria). Another shared that “confronting others, no matter how nicely can be met with a lot of hostility” (Leslie, MtF, 57, Edmonton). For one participant, being out as transgender resulted in the loss of her job, “because it made others very uncomfortable” (Anonymous, MtF, 27, Regina). All of the female identified participants shared stories of experiencing street harassment. Some described it as “catcalling” or “mockery” (MacKenzie, MtF, 23, Calgary); others described it as “being starred at” (Neil, genderqueer, 38, Winnipeg) or “being laughed at” (Dez, MtF, 38, Moncton). For Michelle (MtF, 32, Charlottetown), confronting prejudice in these circumstances involved “using social media to share the experience of oppression”. This helped Michelle by “gaining support and bringing attention to the issues”. As Anonymous said:

As a transwoman I have to protect myself. I do that by making sure friends know where I am and what I’m doing. It’s as easy as signing in on Facebook sometimes. I’ve experienced a lot of discrimination in different places — I’ve been fired from my job, had women ask me to leave the bathroom, and other things like that. I post about it. I was really surprised the first time I tried it, the amount of feedback was great. People care about their image and if you say public transit isn’t safe on a huge social network like Twitter, it will get attention. And it did. I even had Regina Police reply to a post on Twitter that supported my plea to stop street harassment

against trans women (MtF, 27, Regina).

## **Chapter Five: Discussion**

This qualitative exploratory study examined mechanisms of resistance within the performance of gender of transgender individuals in Canada. The study's research questions were twofold: 1) how does oppression affect self-identified transgender individual's performance of gender, and 2) how does gender performance illustrate collective and individual forms of resistance? Using constructivist grounded theory this work has introduced the concept of vulnerable resistance, which is defined as the ability to accept one's transgender identity and its difference from cisgender identity. It also includes the ability to challenge discrimination and prejudice through authentic gender performance. The use of vulnerable resistance provides radical self-determination, one that increases solidarity with others in the trans and queer community. The findings of this study brought into focus the power of one's ability to self-affirm vulnerable social positions for the individual and for their community.

The findings of the study suggest that transgender individuals have two distinct phases in their lives related to their gender identity – pre and post transition. These were labeled discovering transgender identity and maintaining transgender identity. The discovery phase included life experiences before any gender transition steps are taken, including hormones, surgery, or name change. Findings in relation to the discovering phase were used to respond to the first research question, how does oppression affect gender performance?

The second phase, maintaining transgender identity, occurred after the individual came out or transitioned as a transgender and had taken steps to transition their identity. Transitioning was not limited to hormones and surgery, transitioning also included any

measure one takes to identify differently from their biological or given gender at birth. Data within the maintaining phase was used to answer the second question of this study, how does gender performance illustrate collective and individual forms of resistance?

Two theoretical frameworks, queer theory and intersectionality, are used in this chapter to elaborate upon factors in the overlapping relationship between gender, other social positions, and oppression. As argued by Butler (1990), in order to comprehend gender performance and oppression, it is important to understand how attitudes, behaviours, and beliefs regarding identity affect the development of gender. An intersectional lens illustrates how each individual has multiple identities and how oppression affects each identity differently (Crenshaw, 1991).

### **How Does Oppression Affect Gender Performance?**

According to the participants in this study, oppression effects gender performance subconsciously and consciously through gender appropriation, gender performance denigration, and internalized transphobia; using body-affirming practices demonstrated how the participants challenged these modes of oppression. These dimensions are also found in transgender literature exploring cultural and social discourses and their relationship to gender development (Carlson, 2010; Stryker, 2008). Societal discourses create dominant heterosexual and cisgender narratives, which appropriate gender into binary categories and prescribe the performance of masculinity and femininity for everyone, including transgender people. Body-affirming practices demonstrated vulnerable resistance by illustrating how the participants self-affirmed their identity and overcame forms of oppression, which are the themes presented within the findings.



**Gender appropriation.** Participants discussed the gender-based oppression that they had experienced throughout their lives, within various environments and contexts. Their stories highlighted Bishop's (2002) claim that oppression is exerted by an unconscious attitude or behaviour, by articulating that oppressors were sometimes unaware of the prejudice they held towards gender diversity. Therefore the ways in which oppressors encourage gender appropriation and performance denigration are both conscious and unconscious acts. Other literature on oppression supports this assertion, suggesting that oppressors validate gender conformity over gender diversity through dominant social practices and cultural customs (Butler, 1990; Kumashiro, 2000; Mullaly, 2002; Stryker, 2008). In sharing their stories, participants identified the multiple means by which gender discourses are socially and culturally reinforced, including legal, religious, and cultural practices that exclude, segregate, and discriminate against gender diversity. These discourses promoted a traditional patriarchal gender system that separates gender into traditional binary categories, male and female or man and woman.

**Gender binaries.** The most prominent form of gender appropriation was socially and culturally reinforced with gender binary discourses. Findings of the study suggested binary categories significantly influenced how the participants performed their gender. This finding aligns with literature that depicts oppression as a social construct influenced by dominant systems that actively create discourses to regulate privilege (Bishop, 2002; Butler, 1990; Mullaly, 2002). These constructs have created a mandatory gender system that attributes social characteristics to a person's identified sex (Nagoshi & Brzozy, 2010). In this study, the most common concerns with social and cultural discourses were heterosexism and cisgender appropriation.

**Gender performance denigration.** The performance of gender is also a social construct (Butler, 1990) and as the participants of this study articulated, performance denigration greatly affects the opportunity to be diverse or transgender. Multiple discourses, for example, create a system for femininity and masculinity (Bowleg, 2008). Most commonly, these dominant systems attempt to conceptualize gender within frameworks of heterosexist, androcentric, and white narratives (Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2010).

Criticisms regarding diverse gender performance are leveled on individuals who deviate from dominant narratives (Stryker, 2008). As articulated by the participants, diverse gender performance was met with hostility in the form of: accusations, bullying, and social segregation. The results of this study suggest subtle forms of oppression, such as heterosexual and cisgender narratives, deter individuals from exploring their diverse gender identities. As Kumashiro (2000) argued, marginalized individuals have expectations placed on them in order to conform to dominant narratives. These expectations are then enforced by the denigration of diversity, including the disapproval of transgender identity (Butler, 1990; Kumashiro, 2000; Stryker, 2008).

Participants articulated that their environments significantly influenced their exposure to oppression through the regulation of gender discourses by either providing or restricting opportunity for exploration or expressions of diversity. As Mock (2014) argued, transgender individuals are more than likely to live in environments that cater strictly to heterosexual and cisgender identities. This deters gender exploration, development, and diversity for reasons related to: fear, shame, isolation, and the need to be accepted by loved ones and peers.

Valentine (2007) suggested that regulating dominant narratives maintains a patriarchal system that reinforces privilege. Participants identified unsafe environments as heterocentric, androcentric, or white normative. When expressing diversity, participants were met with discrimination and prejudice. This replicates other transgender research, which has identified that negative environments place transgender individuals at an increased risk for experiencing discrimination and prejudice (Glenn, 2002; Stryker, 2008).

As articulated by the participants, the nature and level of oppressive forces was dependent on factors such as: whether or not trans identity is exposed, the presence of witnesses/bystanders, type of activities engaged in, and whether or not the opportunity to be prejudiced or to discriminate is available. Literature investigating transphobia, including violence towards transgender people, highlights specific places that are unprotected, lack security, or are uncontrolled by authorities. Public washrooms and change rooms, gyms, and swimming pools are places where transgender identity can be exposed and where violence including mis-gendering, physical violence, verbal violence, and other forms of discrimination is more likely (Glenn, 2002; Nagoshi & Terrell, 2012; Nash, & Bain, 2007; Nuttbrock et al., 2012; Stryker, 2008; Tam, 2013).

In multidimensional ways, structures and systems combine to create discourses (Butler, 1990), which illustrate the complexities of transgender oppression. For instance, as mentioned previously, participants shared their stories about transitioning their genders within discourses that promoted androcentric, classist, white, heterocentric, and cultural narratives. As de Vries (2012) argued, transgender individuals rely on a traditional gender system, which allows gender performance only under strict heterosexist narratives. These

narratives affirm the meaning of gender, thus altering the discourses around transgender identity. These discourses create prejudice against or discrimination towards transgender identity, so that transgender identity is not validated.

Discourses influence the meanings attached to different social positions, which in turn influence the meaning transgender people place on their own social positions as a gender minority (Chaves-Korrel & Johnson, 2010). For instance, the meanings attached to man and Black identity come from racialized social and cultural constructs, which reflect the significance of intersecting identities and one's vulnerability to experiencing multidimensional oppression (Bowleg, 2008). This means that, as a Black transgender individual who transitioned from female to male, the discourses attached to racial and gender identities combine to create a much more complex experience of oppression than that of their white counterparts or male to female counterparts.

**Internalized transphobia.** Participants in this study openly discussed reflecting on their gender identity and how during this process they struggled with depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem. These emotions closely related to those presented in transgender literature exploring internalized transphobia, which is best described as the externalization of the experience of discrimination and prejudice (Alderson, 2012). Discourses also affected the schemas queers and trans individuals have about their identity (Rosenfield, 2012). Schemas are basic assumptions that organize information and guide interpretation of experience in an automatic way (Markus, 1977). As Rosenfield, Verteguille and McApline (2000) explained, hierarchal conceptions affect a person's schemas about their social position, such as: gender, race, class and self-salience, or the importance we give ourselves in social relations. Rosenfield, Lennon, and White (2005)

further argued that social schemas are greatly affected by one's social position(s) in the hierarchy of social positions.

***Gender schematic thinking.*** When schemas elevate the importance of others over the self, internalizing symptoms can result (Markus, 1977). This may explain why the participants once believed heterosexuality to be of greater value than their transgender identity. Markus (1977) argued that those who promote the self at the expense of others are inclined to make others liable for the prejudice or discrimination they experience. This means that when transgender individuals experience oppression, the oppressor(s) are inclined to blame the victim rather than empathize (Bishop, 2002; Burke, 2011; Butler, 1990; Markus, 1977). The combination of having a lower self-esteem due to internalizing oppression and being blamed by the oppressor can result in severe psychological concerns such as depression, anxiety, and self-harming (Balzer, Hutta, Adrian, Hyndal, & Stryker, 2012), which were also shared by participants. Balzer, Hutta, Adrian, Hyndal, and Stryker (2012) found that transgender individuals who suffer from internalized transphobia had an increased risk of drug and alcohol abuse, other addictions and suicide.

Social science research shows that social positions are ranked hierarchically, with the distinctions among various identities promoting differing levels of self-esteem (Rosenfield, 2012). Aizura (2014) argued that dominant gender discourses promote stereotypical schemas, which increases gender differences. These discourses regulate the dominance of males over females, but also strictly regulate which identities rank higher than others on the hierarchy (Bowleg, 2008; Crenshaw, 1991; Mullaly, 2002). As Rosenfield, Lennon, and White (2005) illustrated, conceptions of femininity and masculinity, plus any other social positions one has, regulate what is or is not appropriate

to perform. For instance, Aizura (2014) argued white concepts of masculinity give privilege to the dominant white male over other races, genders, and identities (Bishop, 2002; Stryker, 2008).

Social positions such as one's race influence the meaning of gender therefore someone's race may affect the importance of how femininity or masculinity is performed. Stewart (2012) argued that the role of racial communities, including parenting and other culturally-specific practices influences how people decide to perform their gender. Participants who reflected on their racial influences also indicated experiencing multiple forms of discrimination that deferred their decision to come out as transgender. Bowleg (2008) suggested that the severity of internalized racism affects whether or not an individual feels comfortable enough to perform their gender authentically. Stewart (2012) argued that in order to overcome racist and heterosexist forms of oppression, an individual needs affirmation and validation within their social circles.

**Body-affirming practices illustrates individual resistance.** The participants stated that publically performing their authentic gender was done through drag performances or wearing specific clothing to enhance their appearance as male or female. These activities, labeled body-affirming practices, illustrated how the participants found ways to liberate their gender identities. Body affirming practices were done before they came-out as transgender and were previous to any hormone treatment or surgery. In adopting these practices, participants benefited from "passing" (Harrison, 2013), defined in queer research as one's ability to be identified as the opposite sex (Butler, 1990), and in transgender research as the validation of one's correct gender identity (Stryker, 2008). According to Harrison (2013) passing can be a derogatory term placed on transgender

individuals, because it removes an individual from their chosen cisgender identity. This means after an individual transitions and chooses a cisgender identity, declaring their physical appearance a pass would discredit their identity.

For participants who were gender-queer or gender non-conforming, passing was identified as a safety strategy that they used when entering heterosexist and cisgender environments. Participants described avoiding places where their gender identity was not publically validated, or mis-gendered. Participants attributed greater feelings of confidence and safety to experiences and settings where they were validated and accepted. Indeed, validating emotions, increasing social support and providing accurate information on transitioning are important components of therapy (Alderson, 2012; Budge, Alderson, & Howard, 2013). Transgender literature suggests experiencing validation of gender identity significantly increases the opportunity for transgender people to perform their gender authentically (Butler, 1990; Demetriou, 2001; Glenn, 2002; Stryker, 2008).

Both genderqueer and transgender participants described body-affirming practices as taking on the dominant discourses that are associated with hyper-masculinity and hyper-femininity. Social science research has described the meanings attributed to hyper-masculinity and hyper-femininity as the language of the body (de Vries, 2012; Valentine, 2007). Salamon (2010) articulated that social constructs have many meanings attributed to the body and this affects our personal opinions of both gender and sex. For instance, the physical features of femininity are linked to specific colours or fashion accessories based on cultural customs and practices. These gender-based discourses can significantly

affect whether or not a transgender individual feels they can perform an identity as the correct gender (de Vries, 2012).

The participants of this study demonstrated their abilities to challenge social constructs and reframe discourses to validate their identities. Valetine (2007) suggested that transgender individuals negotiate the discourses of gender and other social positions to properly reflect their identity by reframing the meanings associated with gender identity (Valetine, 2007). By breaking down discourses that limit gender diversity, these participants were overcoming feelings of inadequacy, including feeling that their bodies do not align with normative socially constructed expectations.

### **How Does Gender Performance Illustrate Collective and Individual Forms of Resistance?**

In response to the second question examining the relationship between gender performance, this study found that participants' gender performance employed various forms of resistance once they transitioned based on the participant's ability to maintain their transgender identity. According to the participants the forms of resistance used were: coping with grief and loss, overcoming lateral oppression, and using healthy confrontation. Before the participants moved into the maintaining gender identity phase they had to come-out as a transgender person to at least one person. Participants discussed coming-out as transgender further liberated them. This included the decision to perform gender against dominant discourses that constrained gender expression and therefore was a mechanism of resistance. Although participants were aware of potential negative reactions from others who did not approve of transgender identity, in performing



gender they made trans identity visible. Therefore, coming-out is best described as empowering, asserting agency and choosing to be visible.

**Coming out as a form of agency, visibility, and normative resistance.**

Agency and visibility provided the participants the self-affirming thoughts they needed to resist oppression in the form of internalized transphobia, mis-gendering, and invalidating identity. As defined by Pfeffer (2012), agency is one's capacity to act independently, make decisions without influence from others, and to contract oneself from social positions that limit one's diversity. Visibility was defined by the participants of this study, as being out and openly identifying as transgender. Both agency and visibility relate to how the participants demonstrated resistance. Increased self-awareness and self-esteem supported individuals in this study to challenge dominant narratives through visibly presenting themselves outside gender binaries, and openly identifying as transgender.

As Pfeffer (2012) explained, normative resistance refers to a conscious action or behaviour for making life choices distinct from those considered normal, expected, and sanctioned. Study participants articulated that through reflection they recognized how oppressive factors such as gender constructs, affected their chosen identity. They shared that becoming reflective, gave them the ability to build a stronger sense of self, ultimately empowering greater agency. Emirbayer and Mische (1998), in their theory of agency and structure, suggest that an individual has to be conscious of how social constructs of gender influence their identity in order to deviate from or subvert the dominant narratives and discourses constraining gender identity (Stryker, 2008). Agency, as a form of resistance, is the individual's capacity to be authentic to their identity in environments,

particularly heterosexist or cisgender-normative spaces that marginalize diversity. Pfeffer (2012) asserted that individuals who establish a strong sense-of-self can survive in environments in which they are marginalized, segregated, or isolated.

Participants confirmed that they used visibility to deviate from dominant narratives such as heterosexist and cisgender norms. Similar to studies using queer theory, which labels transgender visibility as trans-normativity, findings of this study suggested visibility increases solidarity among transgender communities (Mock, 2014; Stryker, 2008). Visibility is also considered a form of normative resistance, in which transgender identity is incorporated into mainstream society, without conforming to the dominant heterosexists narratives (Pfeffer, 2012; Butler, 1990). Transgender literature suggests that in order for a transgender individual to be visible, they need to be conscious of and affirm their differences.

Transgender specific research explains that the role of visibility in creating positive discourses is to establish the differences between transgender and cisgender identity (Adkins, 2003; Stryker, 2008). The findings of this study suggest that visibility helps to affirm personal identity, as well as empower the transgender community by affirming transgender culture and discourses in contrast to cisgender ones. Different from homo-normativity practices (Puar, 2013), trans-normativity attempts to appropriate transgender identity by challenging gender discourses that limit or restrain diversity from masculine and feminine narratives (Stryker, 2008).

**Coping with grief and loss as a form of individual resistance.** This study contributes to this body of knowledge on transgender resistance by contributing information on the relationship between agency and self-affirmation. Study participants

with high self-affirming attitudes and a strong sense of agency were able to end relationships that deterred their diverse gender development, influenced internalized transphobia, and created unsafe spaces. Ending relationships meant grief and loss; however, the participants' resiliency, awareness of oppression, and agency facilitated coping.

Terminating relationships, commonly associated with deciding to transition, was also linked to grief and loss. Participants in this study expressed common feelings associated with grief and loss including: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance (Zomboni, 2006) when they ended relationships such as leaving family, long-term partners, and other relationships in order to transition. The nature of loss and grief for transgender individuals is an important consideration, as it poses a significant deterrent to gender development (Norwood, 2013). All of the participants in this study acknowledged that the fear of losing relationships significantly delayed them from coming out as transgender, transitioning, or even considering diversity from cisgender and heterosexual norms.

Research on negative associations with transitions, such as regret and shame are often over-generalized. As an example, Reisner, Gammarel, Dunham, Hopwood, and Hwahng's (2011) suggested that the experience of regret and shame post-transition, for transgender individuals was most commonly linked to conflicts with medical professionals' antipathy towards transgender identity. Interestingly, their findings also support that ongoing experiences of discrimination and prejudice continue to affect internalized transphobia and psychological wellbeing.

Similarly, participants in this study continued to struggle with self-acceptance and self-esteem during and post-transition. Stryker (2008) associated the degree of post-transitional self-acceptance with the level of internalized transphobia and the idealization of the cisgender/heterosexual image. Hansbury (2005) suggested that professionals and others supporting individuals as they transition should be aware of the “idealization of self-image” (p. 21). The idealized self-image replicates dominant discourses that define man or woman (Hansbury, 2005). Hansbury (2005) explained transitioning is very difficult and it is common for individuals to experience grief and loss as they let go of their past and any idealized image they have of the future. Zombani (2006) elaborated suggesting that in letting go of idealized images, transgender individuals must redefine discourses in order to fully accept their authentic and unique identities.

**Coping with the loss of racial identity and racial community as a form of individual resistance.** When a participant experienced their racial or ethnic community’s disapproval of their transgender identity, the severity of oppression was heightened. Some participants shared that they had left their racial communities in order to maintain their transgender identity, a decision that produced loss and grief. Robinson and Ross (2013) discussed the loss and grief experienced by transgender individuals associated with leaving influential and important communities in order to transition. Participants in this study commonly disclosed multiple forms of marginalization, especially with regard to their race, ethnicity, and culture.

**Coping with the loss of family membership as a form of individual resistance.** The concerns regarding disapproval significantly increased, because their racial communities were also identified as their immediate family members. Discussions

surrounding family disapproval were linked to grief and loss, because participants ended relationships in order to transition. This topic of grief and losses as experienced by family members of an individual during transition has been thoroughly examined in transgender research (Emerson, 1996; Israel, 2005; Norwood, 2012/2013; Stryker, 2008). Zomboni (2006), for example, discussed the implications for immediate family members during their loved one's transitions and elaborates upon the stages of grief associated with the process for family members. Importantly, the loss and grief experienced by transgender individuals themselves has rarely been investigated (Billies, Johnson, Murungi, & Pugh, 2009). However, research focusing on the grief experiences of family members of transgender people although relevant, can detract from the prominent issues for transgender individuals including the negative impact of transphobia on transitioning and transgender identity.

Further research is necessary that uncovers oppressive forces by focusing on the relationship between transphobia and the acceptance of gender reassignment procedures and transgender identity. Instead of concentrating on loss, Norwood (2012), for example, suggests that family members should be celebrating an individual's authenticity and real identity. Norwood (2012) also advanced that acknowledging that understanding how socially constructed narratives of gender affect relationships is useful in countering transphobia. For instance, social constructs of gender affect mother-son and mother-daughter relationships and when a child undergoes transition, the meanings associated with these relationships change.

**Finding community as an illustration of collective resistance.** Finding community with both queer and racial groups supported the participants to exert

resistance thus overcoming lateral oppression and challenging oppression through social activism. Among some participants, the sense of membership and belonging promoted participants' social activism and contributed to the further empowerment of their community and the provision of resources to others who are in need. When participants shared their stories of finding community, they spoke to more than just their transgender community and included the importance of both their racial and ethnic communities. This study demonstrated the importance of intersecting social positions in relationship to oppression. Transgender literature most often associates membership and belonging and gender-based oppression as it relates to race, age, class, (dis)ability, and ethnicity (Butler, 1990; Stryker, 2008). Membership and belonging within the transgender community significantly contributed to feelings of security and stability as described by study participants. Furthermore, having a healthy and supportive transgender community facilitated the exploration of diverse gender identities.

**Lateral oppression within queer communities.** Another finding in this study is the exposure to lateral oppression for participants within queer spaces. Participants described losing membership within the lesbian and gay community after they transitioned or began identifying as transgender. Literature suggests that passing as male or female helps transgender individuals conform to heterosexual and cisgender environments (Stryker, 2008), but it also causes them to experience segregation in their queer community (Christensen, 2013; Mock, 2014; Stryker, 2008). For example, studies have reported that transgender individuals who identify as cisgender experience forms of gender-based oppression in their queer community, including gender discrediting

comments, isolation, mockery, and other types of discrimination and prejudice (Collins, 2005; Cutcliffe, 2005; Demetriou, 2001).

Lateral oppression within the queer community has been attributed to the projection of internalized oppression and the influence of patriarchy within lesbian and gay culture (David, 2014). It has been argued that although queer communities have created their own gender discourses, they continue to be influenced by patriarchal, heterosexists, and cisgender prejudice (Butler, 1990; Christensen, 2013; Embaye, 2006; Ernie, 2013). As David (2014) argued, experiencing oppression can result in the incorporation of negative stereotypes into cultural values or traditions. This helps explain why transgender stereotypes are found in queer culture. David (2014) further suggested that particular group members of a minority could be viewed as inferior, or less threatening than the dominant group, often resulting in group violence. The projection of oppression in queer culture, as suggested by Stryker (2008), results in certain group members gaining a sense of privilege over others. Literature exploring lateral oppression and the transgender community is scarce, but within gay, lesbian, and bisexual research, lateral oppression is related with someone's other social positions influencing their membership within queer communities (Mock, 2014; Stryker, 2008).

**Finding community outside the transgender and queer communities.** The findings of this study concluded that one's membership in racial groups significantly influences gender performance. Social science research supports this finding, suggesting that the stronger the feeling of membership one has with a racial group the more significantly gender-based discourses affects gender performance (Aizura, 2006; Haritaworn, 2010; Lamble, 2008; Stryker, 2006). For instance, Bowleg (2008) suggested

that people present their social positions or identities from the perspectives of their racial discourses. Bowleg's (2008) argument suggested that one's racial membership could cause their queer identity to be discredited or vice versa. The findings of this study supported this concept with cases of racial marginalization within queer space, and transphobia within one's racial community.

Intersectionality theorists examine the connection between gender and other social positions in relation to privilege and oppression (Glenn, 2002). Intersectionality also takes into account the relationship gender has with: sexuality, race, ethnicity, culture, class, ability, age, socio-economic class, religion, and even stage of development (Lutz, 2002). Each social position's relationship with another can increase or decrease the experience of oppression and privilege (Bishop, 2002). For instance, someone who is able-bodied, of higher socio-economic status, and white identity can increase their privilege even though they are transgender. Conversely, a transgender person of colour, (dis)abled, or of lower socio-economic status can experience a higher level of oppression (Stryker, 2008). Finding community was associated to gaining a sense of privilege by the participants, because it increased their sense of security and stability.

**Social activism as a form of collective resistance.** In the present study, once the participants found community they began social activism as a form of resistance including participation in social demonstrations, organizing advocacy events, and non-violent protests. Stryker (2008) suggested minority groups could heal from the trauma associated from experiencing oppression through community empowerment and unity. It has also been asserted that when marginalized groups battle oppression, the qualities that best conforms to dominant social constructs are the first to be recognized or appropriated



(Butler, 2004). Queer history in Canada provides support for this: white queer males were first to have access to mainstream society, queer identities with various (dis)abilities continue to struggle with accessing queer space, and queer people of colour continue to be invisible in queer communities (Christensen, 2013; Mock, 2014; Stryker, 2008).

Using media to examine queer assimilation into mainstream culture, Butler (2004) argued that the illustration of gay male characters as flamboyant and feminine bestows an identity that is non-threatening. This gay identity and performance has led to what Butler (2004) argues is the mainstream acceptance of queer culture. Mock (2014), however, challenges the notion of 'acceptance' by highlighting the invisibility of transgender identity in mainstream society, arguing that assimilation is merely another manifestation of conforming to dominant narratives. Bowleg (2008) further highlights the absence of racial minorities in queer culture. Mock (2014) furthers this argument by identifying the invisibility of coloured transgender people in mainstream culture. The isolation and separation of minorities increases the experience of overlapping oppression (Bowleg, 2008; Crenshaw, 2005; Mock, 2014; Stryker, 2008).

**Social activism and knowledge production.** The transgender community has used knowledge production as their key method of successful social activism (Balzer, Dutta, Adrian, Hyndal, & Stryker, 2012; Mock, 2014). Knowledge production, as defined in transgender research, uses similar political and social tactics as homonationalism (Puar, 2013). This collective approach focuses on political and social education. The findings suggest knowledge production was used to provide significant support to participants as they journeyed through their transitional process. Transgender activists rely on members to educate one another in order to empower their community (Mock,

2014), most commonly through facilitating free and accessible information events (Stryker, 2008). The findings from this study illustrated transgender communities that empowered diverse gender identities and gender discourses were extremely beneficial for the participants.

Transgender activist groups recognize and affirm diverse genders in order to appropriate gender-neutrality within their particular culture (Stryker, 2008). By avoiding the influence of patriarchal, racial, and classist oppression, transgender activists encourage diversity in their community, thus creating and sustaining a unique transgender culture (Mock, 2014). Stryker (2008) suggested transgender communities and leaders should always check their privilege, the privilege of those around them, and should prioritize engaging those who have the least privilege including: recognizing and affirming trans people of colour, those with various (dis)abilities, and making sure their community is accessible to everyone equally.

**Confronting prejudice illustrates resistance?** Unlike the majority of transgender literature exploring collective resistance, the study's findings revealed very subtle forms of policing oppression, such as confronting daily prejudice and establishing healthy communication skills. Collective resistance relies on social organization, and not the lapse of power within particular dominant structures or institutions (Stryker, 2008). As Foucault (1990) argued, dominant structures never lose power. As Foucault (1990) argued, when resistant mechanisms cannot be deciphered from normative practices they will incapacitate the bureaucracy of power (Foucault, 1990; Sanger, 2010). The study findings support Foucault's (1990) concept of power, which argued that oppression is a network of social relations holding repressive functions, through which actors can resist

or transform the discourses that constrain their marginalized group. As the study results illustrated, participants used knowledge production to resist heterosexist, cis-normative and patriarchal discourses by creating and empowering transgender culture.

**Confronting the hierarchy of social positions.** Institutions, systems, and structures regulate privilege and oppression through creating a hierarchy of social positions, and can be changed when incongruences, such as the impracticality of certain laws, are exposed (Tam, 2013). This means that by creating and securing a strong alliance within the transgender community, social, political, and legal advocacy reforms have an increased chance of creating change (Mock, 2014). This conforms to Butler's (1990) assertion that marginalized groups challenge oppression by building their own power and confronting the injustice within dominant systems.

In general there is a lack of empirical research exploring guidelines or suggestions for confronting prejudice, especially within social work literature and transgender literature (Rattan & Dweck, 2010). This is a critical gap in transgender research. Literature on the marginalization of transgender people relates to the findings of this study, suggesting that transgender people frequently encounter explicit expressions of prejudice in their everyday lives (Aizura, 2006; Asta & Vacha-Haase, 2012; Ayoub, 2013). Research exploring resistance in the form of confrontation to prejudice has been largely focused on women or people of colour (Swim & Hyers, 1999; Woodzicka & LaFrance, 2001). In this study, participants offered confrontation as a means of educating people who expressed prejudice.

**Confronting prejudice to increase self-esteem.** As Czopp, Monteith, and Mark (2006) argued that the ability to comprehend prejudicial behavior can reduce the affects

of it on self-esteem and increase psychological wellbeing. This means various forms of discrimination and prejudice have little affect to those who understand how oppression exists within their environments. Social activists argue against remaining silent to oppressors because: it fails to communicate important anti-prejudice norms (Blanchard, Crandall, Brigham, & Vaughn, 1994), can affect the psychological well-being of minorities (Mock, 2014; Shelton, Richeson, Salvatore, & Hill, 2006), and may determine how an individual interacts and copes with future oppressive incidents (Rattan & Dweck, 2010).

Studies exploring communication, confrontation and oppression have found that individual differences, such as optimism (Kaiser & Miller, 2004) or involvement with activism (Hyers, 2007; Swim & Hyers, 1999) can influence decisions to confront prejudice (Rattan & Dweck, 2010). It has been shown that people are less likely to confront other individuals when there are potential costs for doing so (Shelton & Stewart, 2004), especially with the prominent risk of physical violence for transgender peoples (Mock, 2014; Stryker, 2008; Tam, 2013). Other studies have shown a decreased rate of individuals confronting prejudice when the context is public (Stangor, Swim, Van Allen, & Sechrist, 2002). In this study, the willingness to confront prejudice was related to an individual's perceived safety and how important confrontation is to the individual.

Rattan and Dweck (2012) suggested that an individual's personality greatly affects whether or not they will confront prejudice. Those who believe that confrontation cannot effect change in others lack the motivation to confront prejudice. Although this study did not explore in detail the motives behind participants' desire to confront prejudice, it does demonstrate the significant relationship between agency, resistance, and

healthy confrontation. Participants were able to connect healthy communication to validation and respect from others.

### **Trans-Inclusive Social Work Practice**

Findings from this study suggest that social workers should take an active role in challenging oppression of transgender (and others) by eliminating gender binaries and challenging traditional gender customs/dictates. Abiding by the Social Work Code of Ethics (CASW, 2015) means honoring the dignity of each person. Therefore, social workers should maintain a practice that offers a safe and judgment-free space (Grise-Owens, Vessel, & Owens, 2004; Mallon, 1999; Morrow, 2004). Implementing a fluid paradigm on gender and sexual orientation offers social workers a critical approach to using a person-in-environment perspective. This paradigm would also capture the ways in which multiple systems affect an individual, preparing social workers to have an intersectional and anti-oppressive approach with clients (Kondrat, 2002).

Socially constructed gender binaries and the resultant prejudice, negatively affect transgender individuals as they discover and maintain their identity. Exposure to prejudice has psychological consequences, including internalized transphobia (Hunter & Hickerson, 2003; Stryker, 2008). Professionals must be aware of common psychological consequences associated with marginalization and be prepared to address them (Hansbury, 2005). In order to provide the most effective support, professionals should be competent on transgender identity, transitioning procedures, gender variance, the continuum of gender and sex identity, and how oppression can affect self-esteem and self-perception (Hansbury, 2005; Hansbury & Bennet, 2014).

Transgender individuals are most likely to seek support from professionals who can engage in conversations and provide information about transitioning (Markman, 2011). These conversations should include the pressure to choose either male or female identity and how that affects the psychological wellbeing of transgender individuals (Stryker, 2008). Having to choose a dichotomous gender presentation can be seen as a form of social bullying and aspiration of being accepted by others (Mock, 2014). As well, access to medical resources depends on individuals proving their desire to be either male or female (Tam, 2013).

More transgender individuals are claiming space outside gender binaries and encouraging gender presentation to be fluid, regardless of male or female identity (Stryker, 2008). This means that the transgender community has encouraged gender identity to be visually separated from traditional gender roles, allowing space for femininity and masculinity to be presented interchangeably by both women and men (Stryker, 2008). For professionals supporting transitions, this new perspective on fluid gender identity is crucial for advocacy and empathy.

The increasing visibility of the transgender community supports the need to change the paradigms used by professionals working with them (Bockting, 2004; Stryker, 2008) in ways that reduce gender-based oppression (Mock, 2014; Stryker, 2008). Groups such as the Intersex Society of North America (2004) and the International Lesbian Gay Association (Balzer, Hutta, Adrian, Hyndal, & Stryker, 2012) have helped increase public access to education and political advocacy efforts. These groups have expressed the need for professionals to respect, engage with, and encourage the political action and efforts of transgender communities in creating equitable laws.

The Canadian Social Work Code of Ethics (CASW, 2005) has respect for the dignity of all persons as a core value; this means that professionals must advocate for trans-inclusive policies, such as workplace protection, supportive safe spaces, legal rights and identity recognition for transgender individuals (Gambrill, 2012). By doing this, social work practices increase their queer and critical paradigms (Markman, 2012). At the same time, social workers can encourage transgender clients to become politically involved in their communities. This can support transgender individuals in finding connection and membership, which can improve self-esteem and self-acceptance (Stryker, 2008).

On a larger scale, being competent with queer and transgender issues would increase a social worker's scope of practice to include activism and promoting social equality (Burdge, 2007). In this paradigm a social worker is not merely in the role of assisting clients to cope with transgender oppression, they would also fight against the systems that support gender oppression (Lambardi, 1999; Morrow, 2004). When working with transgender clients, conversations that explore, analyze, and reflect on how systems affected and restricted gender development can be crucial in developing awareness (Mock, 2014; Stryker, 2008). This means social workers should engage in a practice that adopts an untraditional theoretical framework that supports gender diversity (McPhail, 2004).

## **Limitations**

This study was limited in the time available to address the research questions, however the number of participants and the consistency in most of the major themes of

the study, suggests that the study findings are credible. The literature review was conducted prior to the data collection and analysis of data, a fact that does not conform to grounded theory process (Charmaz, 2006). However, as acknowledged by other researchers, including Charmaz (2006), it is not always possible to have a literature review conducted at the end of a project (Backman & Kyngas, 1999, Haas, 2002). In this case the literature has to be reviewed in order to develop a sufficiently detailed proposal so that ethical approval could be obtained.

One criticism of Charmaz's (2006) grounded theory qualitative approach surrounds the objectification of focus, where meaning is found in the abstract. When the researcher focuses on how something is constructed, they risk missing other messages in the data. Glaser (2002) critiqued Charmaz's version of grounded theory for over-focusing on the interaction between the researcher and the participant. In order to overcome this possible barrier, the analysis of data from one participant was completed prior to interviewing the next participant. This allowed for hunches to be explored through the analysis process and, if needed, further explored during the next interview.

A major concern for researchers conducting qualitative research is the overreliance or emphasis of their own contributions to the research. Glaser (2002) also objected to the fact that Charmaz considered the researcher's perspectives to be equally important as the participants'. Nonetheless, Charmaz (2006) has established thorough considerations to ensure ethical research practices. Charmaz (2006) suggested collecting sufficient data to portray a full range of contexts, using constant comparisons, and incorporating the data to enhance the interviewing questions from one participant to the next. This helped focus the procedure, go beneath the surface of the data, and gain a full



range of contexts from the participants.

This project used a qualitative methodology, because its purpose was to focus on the participants' stories and draw descriptive conclusions from them. The study could have incorporated quantitative approaches. Quantitative methods such as on-line surveys or questionnaires highlighting the issues transgender individuals face when developing their identity, expressing their gender, and using resistance mechanisms could have promoted a more focused investigation. The sample size of the study could have been larger in order to provide a more diverse population sample. A more diverse sample of participant answering questionnaires could have provided common issues or concerns presented by transgender individuals, which would have provided a more focused field guide prior to conducting interviews. Since the researcher was limited in time and resources, this option was not chosen. The collection of data was continued with sampling and analyzing until no new data appeared, which Charmaz (2006) described as saturation.

Consistent with the Canadian population in general the majority of participants in this study were white. Greater representation of ethno-cultural, racial and type of transgender identity in the sample may have offered a glimpse into a range of experience and a more nuanced and layered understanding privilege and oppression as a result of these factors. Furthermore, those who experience multiple forms of marginalization will also experience different forms of privilege and oppression (Bishop, 2002). If more racially diverse individuals took part in this study, the results may have shown a stronger overlap of intersecting identities. Using a different selection process could have provided a larger variety of participants. This study used theoretical sampling, but was limited by

the time available to recruit participants

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

This study aimed to investigate transgender resistance in order to focus research on the empowerment of the transgender community. Rather than limit itself to a description of struggles, it explored how this resilient and capable community continues to improve its position in society. Future studies could explore these forms of resistance more thoroughly and provide further insight about the intersection of multiple identities and the relationship between privilege and oppression.

Future studies can provide further understanding by including a more demographically diverse sample, although over-representation of white people in queer studies is typical (Fergus, 2009; Riggle, 2008; Solomon, 2004). It is highly recommend that future studies explore how low income status and poverty affect a transgender person's ability to access both medical and legal support to transition. Further, participants from rural areas reported higher rates of discrimination, and limited access to support groups and medical and legal professionals. These issues should be explored more fully in additional research.

And finally, an ethnographical approach rather than a methodological one would increase the focus on transgender culture, investigating body-affirming practices more thoroughly. It could also provide greater insight into the struggle many transgender individuals have with accepting their identity and idealizing socially constructed depictions of gender.

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## **Appendix A: Definitions**

### **Agender**

A person who is internally un-gendered or does not have a felt sense of gender identity.

### **Aggressive (Ag)**

A term used to describe a female-bodied and identified person who prefers presenting as masculine. This term is most commonly used in urban communities of color.

### **Androgynous**

A person appearing and/or identifying as neither man nor woman, presenting a gender either mixed or neutral.

### **Ally**

Someone who advocates for and supports members of a community other than their own. Reaching across differences to achieve mutual goals.

### **Asexual**

A person who is not sexually attracted to any gender.

### **Bigender**

A person whose gender identity is a combination of man and woman

### **Biphobia**

The irrational fear and intolerance of people who are bisexual.

### **Bisexuality (also Bi)**

A person who is attracted to two sexes or two genders, but not necessarily simultaneously or equally. This used to be defined as a person who is attracted to both genders or both sexes, but since there are not only two sexes (see intersex and transsexual) and there are not only two genders (see transgender), this definition is inaccurate.

### **Cisgender**

A person who by nature or by choice conforms to gender/sex based expectations of society (also referred to as “Gender-straight” or “Gender Normative”)

### **Cisgenderism**

Assuming every person to be cisgender therefore marginalizing those who identify as trans\* in some form. It is also believing cisgender people to be superior, and holding people to traditional expectations based on gender, or punishing or excluding those who don't conform to traditional gender expectations.

### **Crossdresser**

Someone who wears clothes associated with another gender part of the time. This term has replaced "transvestite," which is now considered outdated and offensive.



### Domestic Partner

One who lives with their beloved and/or is at least emotionally and financially connected in a supportive manner with another. Another word for spouse, lover, significant other, etc.

### Dominant Culture

The cultural values, beliefs, and practices that are assumed to be the most common and influential within a given society.

### Drag

The act of dressing in gendered clothing and adopting gendered behaviors as part of a performance, most often clothing and behaviors typically not associated with your gender identity. Drag Queens perform femininity theatrically. Drag Kings perform masculinity theatrically. Drag may be performed as a political comment on gender, as parody, or simply as entertainment. Drag performance does not indicate sexuality, gender identity, or sex identity.

### Family

Colloquial term used to identify other LGBTIQ community members. For example, an LGBTIQ person saying, "that person is family" often means that the person they are referring to is LGBTIQ as well.

### Family of Choice

Persons or group of people an individual sees as significant in their life. It may include none, all, or some members of their family of origin. In addition, it may include individuals such as significant others, domestic partners, friends, and coworkers.

### FTM/F2M

Abbreviation for a female-to-male transgender or transsexual person.

### Gay

Men attracted to men. Colloquially used as an umbrella term to include all LGBTIQ people.

### Gender

A socially constructed system of classification that ascribes qualities of masculinity and femininity to people. Gender characteristics can change over time and are different between cultures. See "Gender Identity" and "Gender Expression" for more on gender.

### Gender Conformity

When your gender identity, gender expression and sex "match" according to social norms. See "Gender Identity," "Sex" and "Gender Expression" for more on gender.

### Gender Diverse

A person who either by nature or by choice does not conform to gender-based expectations of society (e.g. transgender, transsexual, intersex, genderqueer, cross-

dresser, etc) preferable to “gender variant” because it does not imply a standard normativity.

#### Gender Expression

The way in which a person expresses their gender identity through clothing, behavior, posture, mannerisms, speech patterns, activities and more.

#### Gender Fluid

A person whose gender identification and presentation shifts, whether within or outside of societal, gender-based expectations.

#### Gender Identity

An individual’s internal sense of gender, which may or may not be the same as one’s gender assigned at birth. Some gender identities are "woman," "transman" and "agender" but there are many more. Since gender identity is internal it isn’t necessarily visible to others. Additionally, gender identity is often conflated with sex, but they are separate concepts – please see [GenEq’s Gender/Sex Infosheet](#) for more on the difference between the two.

#### Gender Identity Disorder

The medical diagnosis in the American Psychiatric Association’s Diagnostics and Statistics Manual IV (DSM4) used to describe a person who experiences significant gender dysphoria (lack of identification with one’s sex and/or gender assigned at birth). It is anticipated that the DSM5 (released in 2013) will replace this diagnosis with "gender dysphoria."

#### Genderism

The system of belief that there are only two genders (men and women) and that gender is inherently tied to one’s sex assigned at birth. It holds cisgender people as superior to transgender people, and punishes or excludes those who don't conform to society’s expectations of gender.

#### Gender-Neutral/Gender-Inclusive

Inclusive language to describe relationships (“spouse” and “partner” instead of “husband/boyfriend” and “wife/girlfriend”), spaces (gender-neutral/inclusive restrooms are for use by all genders), pronouns (“they” and “ze” are gender neutral/inclusive pronouns) among other things.

#### Gender Non-Conforming

A person who don't conform to society's expectations of gender expression based on the gender binary, expectations of masculinity and femininity, or how they should identify their gender.

#### Genderqueer

A person whose gender identity is neither man nor woman, is between or beyond genders, or is some combination of genders. This identity is usually related to or in

reaction to the social construction of gender, gender stereotypes and the gender binary system. Some genderqueer people identify under the transgender umbrella while others do not.

#### Gender Role

How “masculine” or “feminine” an individual acts. Societies commonly have norms regarding how males and females should behave, expecting people to have personality characteristics and/or act a certain way based on their biological sex.

#### Gender Variant

A synonym for "gender diverse" and "gender non-conforming"; “gender diverse” and “gender non-conforming” are preferred to “gender variant” because variance implies a standard normativity of gender

#### Heterosexuality

Sexual, emotional, and/or romantic attraction to a sex other than your own. Commonly thought of as “attraction to the opposite sex” but since there are not only two sexes (see "Intersex" and "Transsexual"), this definition is inaccurate.

#### Heterosexism

Assuming every person to be heterosexual therefore marginalizing persons who do not identify as heterosexual. It is also believing heterosexuality to be superior to homosexuality and all other sexual orientations.

#### Heterosexual Privilege

Benefits derived automatically by being (or being perceived as) heterosexual that are denied to gays, lesbians, bisexuals, queers and all other non-heterosexual sexual orientations.

#### Homophobia

The irrational fear and intolerance of people who are homosexual or of homosexual feelings within one's self. This assumes that heterosexuality is superior.

#### Homosexuality

Sexual, emotional, and/or romantic attraction to the same sex.

#### Institutional Oppression

Arrangement of a society used to benefit one group at the expense of another through the use of language, media education, religion, economics, etc.

#### Internalized Oppression

The process by which an oppressed person comes to believe, accept, or live out the inaccurate stereotypes and misinformation about their group.

#### Intersex

Intersex is a set of medical conditions that feature congenital anomaly of the reproductive

and sexual system. That is, intersex people are born with "sex chromosomes," external genitalia, or internal reproductive systems that are not considered "standard" for either male or female. The existence of intersexuals shows that there are not just two sexes and that our ways of thinking about sex (trying to force everyone to fit into either the male box or the female box) is socially constructed.

#### In the Closet

Keeping one's sexual orientation and/or gender or sex identity a secret.

#### Invisible Minority

A group whose minority status is not always immediately visible, such as some disabled people and LGBTIQ people. This lack of visibility may make organizing for rights difficult.

#### It

A pronoun used to refer to a thing; the use of "it" as a pronoun for a person is extremely offensive in its complete dehumanization of the subject; for appropriate, gender neutral pronouns, see chart of gender neutral pronoun usage at the bottom of this page.

#### Lesbian

A woman attracted to a woman.

#### Marginalized

Excluded, ignored, or relegated to the outer edge of a group/society/community.

#### MSM

Men who engage in same-sex behavior, but who may not necessarily self-identify as gay or bisexual.

#### MTF/M2F

Abbreviation for male-to-female transgender or transsexual person.

#### On T

When a person takes the hormone testosterone.

#### Out (of the Closet)

Refers to varying degrees of being open about one's sexual orientation and/or sex identity or gender identity.

#### Non-Op

A trans-identified person whose identity does not involve receiving Sexual Reassignment Surgery/Sex Confirmation Surgery

#### Pangender

A person whose gender identity is comprised of all or many gender expressions

### Pansexual

A person who is fluid in sexual orientation and/or gender or sex identity.

### Polyamory

Polyamory is the practice of having multiple open, honest love relationships.

### Post-Op

A trans-identified person who has received Sexual Reassignment Surgery/Sex Confirmation Surgery.

### Pre-Op

A trans-identified person who has not received Sexual Reassignment Surgery; implies that the person does intend to receive such surgical procedures.

### Queer

- An umbrella term to refer to all LGBTIQ people
- A political statement, as well as a sexual orientation, which advocates breaking binary thinking and seeing both sexual orientation and gender identity as potentially fluid.
- A simple label to explain a complex set of sexual behaviors and desires. For example, a person who is attracted to multiple genders may identify as queer.
- Many older LGBT people feel the word has been hatefully used against them for too long and are reluctant to embrace it.

### Rainbow Flag

The Rainbow Freedom Flag was designed in 1978 by Gilbert Baker to designate the great diversity of the LGBTIQ community. It has been recognized by the International Flag Makers Association as the official flag of the LGBTIQ civil rights movement.

### Sex

A medical term designating a certain combination of gonads, chromosomes, external gender organs, secondary sex characteristics and hormonal balances. Common terms are "male," "female" and "intersex."

### Sex identity

The sex that a person sees themselves as. This can include refusing to label oneself with a sex.

### Sex Reassignment Surgery (SRS)/Sex Confirmation Surgery

A term used by some medical professionals to refer to a group of surgical options that alter a person's sex to match their sex identity.

### Sexual Minority

- Refers to members of sexual orientations or who engage in sexual activities that are not part of the mainstream.

- Refers to members of sex groups that do not fall into the majority categories of male or female, such as intersexuals and transsexuals.

### Sexual Orientation

The deep-seated direction of one's sexual (erotic) attraction. It is on a continuum and not a set of absolute categories. Sometimes referred to as affection, orientation or sexuality. Sexual orientation evolves through a multistage developmental process, and may change over time. Asexuality is also a sexual orientation.

### She-Male

An offensive term used to refer to MTF trans individuals by the sex/porn industries to objectify and eroticize the trans body

### Stereotype

An exaggerated oversimplified belief about an entire group of people without regard for individual differences.

### Straight

Person who is attracted to a gender other than their own. Commonly thought of as "attraction to the opposite gender," but since there are not only two genders (see transgender), this definition is inaccurate.

### Tranny

A derogatory term used to refer to a trans-identified person. Sometimes a term reclaimed by trans\* people for empowerment.

### Transgender

- Transgender (sometimes shortened to trans or TG) people are those whose psychological self ("gender identity") differs from the social expectations for the physical sex they were born with. To understand this, one must understand the difference between biological sex, which is one's body (genitals, chromosomes, ect.), and social gender, which refers to levels of masculinity and femininity. Often, society conflates sex and gender, viewing them as the same thing. But, gender and sex are not the same thing. Transgender people are those whose psychological self ("gender identity") differs from the social expectations for the physical sex they were born with. For example, a female with a masculine gender identity or who identifies as a man.
- An umbrella term for transsexuals, cross-dressers (transvestites), transgenderists, gender queers, and people who identify as neither female nor male and/or as neither a man or as a woman. Transgender is not a sexual orientation; transgender people may have any sexual orientation. It is important to acknowledge that while some people may fit under this definition of transgender, they may not identify as such.

### Transition

A complicated, multi-step process that can take years as transgender people align their anatomy with their sex identity and/or their gender expression with their gender identity.

#### Transman

An identity label sometimes adopted by female-to-male transsexuals to signify that they are men while still affirming their history as females; also referred to as “transguy(s).”

#### Transphobia

Fear or hatred of transgender people; transphobia is manifested in a number of ways, including violence, harassment and discrimination.

#### Transsexual

Transsexual refers to a person who experiences a mismatch of the sex they were born as and the sex they identify as. A transsexual sometimes undergoes medical treatment to change his/her physical sex to match his/her sex identity through hormone treatments and/or surgically. Not all transsexuals can have or desire surgery.

#### Transvestite

Individuals who regularly or occasionally wear the clothing socially assigned to a gender not their own, but are usually comfortable with their anatomy and do not wish to change it (i.e. they are not transsexuals). Cross-dresser is the preferred term for men who enjoy or prefer women's clothing and social roles. Contrary to popular belief, the overwhelming majority of male cross-dressers identify as straight and often are married. Very few women call themselves cross-dressers.

#### Triangle

A symbol of remembrance. Gay men in the Nazi concentration camps were forced to wear the pink triangle as a designation of being homosexual. Women who did not conform to social roles, often believed to be lesbians, had to wear the black triangle. The triangles are worn today as symbols of freedom, reminding us to never forget.

#### Two-Spirit

American Indian/First Nations/Native American persons who have attributes of both men and women, have distinct gender and social roles in their tribes, and are often involved with mystical rituals (shamans). Their dress is usually mixture of men's and women's articles and they are seen as a separate or third gender. The term “two-spirit” is usually considered to specific to the Zuni tribe. Similar identity labels vary by tribe and include “one-spirit” and “wintke.”

#### Ze

Gender neutral pronouns that can be used instead of he/she.

## Appendix B: List of Agencies

Alberta Pride Centre of Edmonton  
10608 105 Ave NW  
Edmonton, AB T5H 0L2  
(780) 488-3234  
[exec@pridecentreofedmonton.org](mailto:exec@pridecentreofedmonton.org)

Calgary Outlink  
Office 303, 223 12 Ave SW  
Calgary, AB T2R 0G9  
403.234.8973  
[supportworker@calgaryoutlink.ca](mailto:supportworker@calgaryoutlink.ca)

British Columbia Victoria Pride Society  
Box 8607  
Victoria BC  
V8W 3S2  
[president@victoriapridesociety.org](mailto:president@victoriapridesociety.org)

Qmunity  
1170 Bute St. Vancouver, BC  
V6E 1Z6  
(640) 684-5307  
[reception@qmunity.ca](mailto:reception@qmunity.ca)

Manitoba Winnipeg Transgender Group  
c/o Rainbow Resource Centre  
Box 1661 STN Main  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
R3C 2Z6  
[contact@winnipegtransgendergroup.com](mailto:contact@winnipegtransgendergroup.com)

Rainbow Resource Centre  
170 Scott St. Winnipeg, MB  
R3L0L3  
(620) 474-0212 EXT 201  
[rainbowresourcecentre.org](http://rainbowresourcecentre.org)

New Brunswick Moncton Transgender SupportGroup  
Contact: Eldon Hay  
Tel:(506) 536-0599  
Email: [eldonhay@nb.sympatico.ca](mailto:eldonhay@nb.sympatico.ca)

Catalyst (Mount Allison University, Sackville)



c/o Donna Sutton, Counsellor  
 Mount Allison University  
 Sackville, NB, E0A 3C0  
 Te:(506) 364-2357  
 Fax: (506) 364-2263  
 Email: [dsutton@mta.ca](mailto:dsutton@mta.ca) [orktrotter@mta.ca](mailto:orktrotter@mta.ca)

Newfoundland & Labrador  
 Out'port Magazine  
 (709) 730-0353  
[theoutport@outlook.com](mailto:theoutport@outlook.com)

Memorial University of NFL  
 Student Union  
[studentlife@munsu.ca](mailto:studentlife@munsu.ca)  
 (709) 846-7633

Nunavut, the Yukon and the Northwest Territories  
 NWT Pride  
 Iman Kassam Director  
[nwtpride@gmail.com](mailto:nwtpride@gmail.com)

Out Words  
[www.outwords.ca/contact](http://www.outwords.ca/contact)  
 Nova Scotia Nova Scotia Rainbow ActionProject  
 Halifax, NS B3K 3B4  
 (902) 444-3206  
[nsrap@nsrap.ca](mailto:nsrap@nsrap.ca)

Ontario Rainbow Health Ontario  
 Pride Toronto  
 sherbourne Health Centre  
 333 Sherbourne Street  
 Toronto ON M5A 2S5  
 tel 416.324.4100  
 fax 416.324.4262  
[shinnighan@rainbowhealthontario.ca](mailto:shinnighan@rainbowhealthontario.ca)

Trans Pride Toronto  
[transpride@pridetoronto.com](mailto:transpride@pridetoronto.com)

Quebec ASTT(e)Q Action Sante:  
 Travesti(e) et Transsexual(le) du  
 Quebec  
 ATQ L'Association des

Transexual(le)s du Quebec  
1300 Sanguinet, Montréal, QC  
H2X 3E7  
astteq@facebook.com

Montreal Pride  
Jean-François Perrier, Director of Marketing  
Montréal Pride  
jfperrier@fiertemontrealpride.com  
Telephone : (514) 903-6193 ext.3524  
Cell. 438-821-3978

Saskatchewan The Avenue Community Centre for Gender & Sexual Diversity  
#201–320 21st Street West  
Saskatoon, SK S7M 4E6  
Phone: (306) 665.1224  
Toll free: 1.800.358.1833  
Fax: (306) 665.1280  
Email: info@avenuecommunitycentre.ca

University of Saskatchewan  
Students' Union (USSU)  
Room 110 - Place Riel Student Centre  
#1 Campus Drive  
Saskatoon SK S7N 5A3  
contactus@ussu.ca

### Appendix C: Field Guide

<b>Natural Demographic Questions</b>	<p>What is your name or preferred name?</p> <p>Which pronouns do you go by?</p>
<b>Primary Questions</b>	<p>How do you identify in terms of gender and sexuality (orientation)?</p> <p>How long have you identified as this?</p> <p>Have you identified differently in the past?</p> <p>How does your identity affect how you present your gender?</p> <p>How has the presentation of your gender changed over time?</p> <p>What has influenced how you express your gender?</p>
<b>Secondary Questions</b>	<p>What does gender mean to you as a trans individual, and how has this meaning affected how you act, think and behave?</p> <p>Can you tell me about a time when you started to experiment with how you presented your gender? What made this experience easier/difficult? What influenced your presentation of gender?</p> <p>What things have contributed to how you present your gender?</p> <p>How has your ability to present your gender affected the roles you have in your life like work, relationships, hobbies, etc?</p> <p>Does the presentation of your gender ever change depending who you are with or where you are? How? What influences this change?</p> <p>What is it like for you as (identification) in the queer community? Are there negatives/positives associated with how you identify and being in the queer community?</p> <p>Has your gender presentation contributed to your self-esteem? How so?</p> <p>Has your gender presentation caused hardships in your life? Can you tell me about these times and how they affected your gender presentation?</p> <p>Can you think of any times when your gender presentation has helped or supported others? Can you describe how?</p>

<b>Demographic Questions</b>	<p>What is your age?</p> <p>What is your race/ethnicity?</p> <p>What is your marital status?</p> <p>What is your employment status?</p> <p>What is the highest level of education you have?</p> <p>some high school</p> <p>high school diploma</p> <p>trade/technical/vocational training</p> <p>post secondary diploma or degree</p> <p>graduate degree</p> <p>doctoral degree</p> <p>What is your annual income bracket:</p> <p>\$0 - 30,000</p> <p>\$30,000 - 60,000</p> <p>\$60,000 - 90,000</p> <p>\$90,000 - +</p>
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## Appendix D: Project Poster



### Research Project:

Queer and Political: Exploring Transgender Resistance, Gender Expression and Performance

### Research Questions:

What does gender mean to you? How has performing gender and expressing your identity helped you resist forms of discrimination and oppression. And how has gender been a form of resilience - an internal ability to cope with hardships.

### Research Details:

This research project aims to explore gender-empowerment for transgender and gender variant individuals and their community to further counseling knowledge and practices.

### Participants Should Be:

For this project, trans\* means: any person with a gender identity that is different from their birth sex or who expresses their gender in ways that range between man and woman. Of legal age. A Canadian citizen who speak either English or French. 30-60 minute interviews will be conducted via Skype (audio only), phone, or in person.

### Research Participants: Please Email [dolcecore@icloud.com](mailto:dolcecore@icloud.com)

**Researcher Bio:** My name is Gio Dolcecore a current master's of social work student at the University of Calgary, AB. I am currently on the board of directions for the Calgary Dyke March and a Board Member at Large for Calgary OUTlink. I have been working in social services since 2007 and have specialized in counseling and educating young person on equality, gender, sex and healthy attachment/relationships.

## Appendix E: Ethics Certificate

9/16/14, 2:33 PM



Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board  
 Research Services Office  
 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor Mackimmie Library Tower (MLT 300)  
 2500 University Drive, NW  
 Calgary AB T2N 1N4  
 Telephone: (403) 220-3782  
 Fax: (403) 289-0693  
[cfreb@ucalgary.ca](mailto:cfreb@ucalgary.ca)

### CERTIFICATION OF INSTITUTIONAL ETHICS REVIEW

This is to certify that the Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board at the University of Calgary has examined the following research proposal and found the proposed research involving human participants to be in accordance with University of Calgary Guidelines and the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* 2010 (TCPS 2). This form and accompanying letter constitute the Certification of Institutional Ethics Review.

Ethics ID: REB14-0068  
 Principal Investigator: Christine Ann Walsh  
 Co-Investigator(s): There are no items to display  
 Student Co-Investigator(s): Susan Dolcecere  
 Study Title: Queer and Political: Exploring Transgender Resistance, Gender Expression, and Performance  
 Sponsor (if applicable):

**Effective:** March 10, 2014

**Expires:** March 31, 2015

#### Restrictions:

**This Certification is subject to the following conditions:**

1. Approval is granted only for the project and purposes described in the application.
2. Any modification to the authorized study must be submitted to the Chair, Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board for approval.
3. An annual report must be submitted within 45 days prior to the expiry date of this Certification, and should provide the expected completion date for the study.
4. A final report must be sent to the Board when the project is complete or terminated.

**Date:**

[Christopher R. Sears, PhD, Chair](#), CFREB

March 10, 2014

## **Appendix F: Consent Form**

Gio Dolcecore, MSW Candidate, Faculty of Social Work, (403) 305-7872  
[dolcecore@icloud.com](mailto:dolcecore@icloud.com)

Supervisor : Dr. Christine Walsh, Faculty of Social Work, (403) 220-2274  
[cwalsh@ucalgary.ca](mailto:cwalsh@ucalgary.ca)

### **Title of Project:**

Queer and Political: Exploring Transgender Resistance

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.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to investigate how forms of oppression have affected trans individuals and their ability to express and perform their gender, and to investigate how forms of resistance have supported these individuals throughout their life. Participants will be from across Canada, identify within the trans spectrum, and currently be living in Canada. The research questions are 1) How do self identified trans individuals perform their gender and sexuality? And 2) How does this performance illustrate collective and subjective forms of resistance? The results of this study will be summarized in a final thesis manuscript and may be reported through academic publications, academic conferences or public presentations. All forms of reporting will summarize the findings of the research project and will enrich our understanding of the experiences of trans individuals.

### **What Will I Be Asked To Do?**

You will be asked to participate in an interview either over the phone or via Skype which will last between 60 to 90 minutes which will be audio recorded for the purpose of transcribing. During the interview you will be asked to share your experiences as a trans individual and to share your experiences on how you have expressed and performed your gender in different settings. After the interview you will be asked to answer a few demographic questions about yourself. This information is being collected to describe the types of participants involved in the study.

Also near the completion of this study, a completed transcription of the interview will be E-mailed to you for verification of content. You will not be required to make any changes, but the option is there if you choose to clarify any information. At that time you will be asked to provide any additional feedback (through E-mail) within a two week period on a voluntary basis. The reason for asking your feedback will be to ensure the final results adequately represent your experiences. Providing feedback on the interview

summary is voluntary and not a requirement of your participation in this study. The researcher will email you a copy of the final findings once the project is complete.

Moreover, your participation is voluntary and you may stop your participation from this study without penalty during the interview. You will be asked if you are comfortable using your name, an anonymous or pseudonym name for when portions of the collected data are used in the project and for the purpose of transcribing the interview. Also you may withdraw your participation, edit, clarify, or change any information shared up to two weeks after your interview and your data including audio recording, transcripts, and field notes will be erased and destroyed appropriately. However, if you wish to withdraw after that two week period your data will be retained as it will be already included in the analysis of the interviews from this study. Also if at any time during the interview you wish to withdraw participation the recording will be stopped. Any data collected up to that point (consent form, interview recording, demographic questionnaire, and any field notes) will be destroyed and none of the data will be incorporated into the study. No one except the researcher and their supervisor will be allowed to see or hear any of the answers to the questionnaire or the audio recording. All communication between the researcher and their supervisor will be stored and protected, then deleted after the project is completed.

### **What Type of Personal Information Will Be Collected?**

Should you agree to participate, you will contact the researcher who will then contact you to go over any questions and the consent form with you. An interview date will be set upon this contact and after the interview the researcher will ask a few basic demographic questions such as your age (within a range), highest level of education obtained, occupation (from a list of options), your race/ethnicity, employment status, and annual income (within a range).

I grant permission to be audio taped:

Yes: \_\_\_\_ No: \_\_\_\_

I wish to remain anonymous:

Yes: \_\_\_\_ No: \_\_\_\_

You may refer to me by a pseudonym:

Yes: \_\_\_\_ No: \_\_\_\_

The pseudonym I choose for myself is:

---

You may quote me and use my real name:

Yes: \_\_\_\_ No: \_\_\_\_

### **Are there Risks or Benefits if I Participate?**

There are no reasonably foreseeable risks to you as a participant. You will have an opportunity to share your thoughts, experiences and insights and in this way increase our knowledge about the experiences of trans individuals in Canada. This study will also contribute to the larger social work knowledge base in this area.

You will be able to stop the interview at any time. If you decide to stop, the interview can either be terminated or after a break you can continue if you desire. Also if after participating in this study you wish to discuss your emotions or experiences further, information is provided below about services you may wish to contact for support. It is



hoped that all the questions you will be asked through this study, will be similar to questions you may encounter in your everyday life.

### **What Happens to the Information I Provide?**

The results of this study will be summarized in a final thesis manuscript and may be reported through academic publications, academic conferences or public presentations. If any quotations are used for any presentation or publication your anonymity will be protected to the best of the researcher's ability. You are welcome to use an alias name if you wish to keep your identity completely confidential. Only the researcher and their supervisor will have access to the raw data. Audio recordings will be destroyed upon successful completion of the researcher's thesis defense. Hard copies will be kept in a locked electronic folder on the researchers computer for five years and then will be wiped of their content and destroyed appropriately. Hard copies may be stored in order for future publications of the thesis manuscript. Electronic data files will be kept in password protected folder within a password protected computer and will be retained for five years, at which time files will be erased and deleted appropriately.

### **Signatures**

Your consent clarifies that you 1) understand to your satisfaction the information provided to you about your participation in this research project, and 2) agree to participate as a research subject. 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. Once an interview has taken place you will have up to two weeks to withdraw from the study, after this period the data will be implemented into the final study. 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:  
Susan Dolcecore MSW Candidate  
Faculty of Social Work University of Calgary  
(403) 305-7872  
[dolcecore@icloud.com](mailto:dolcecore@icloud.com)

Or

Dr. Christine Walsh  
Faculty of Social Work University of Calgary  
(403) 220-2274  
[cwalsh@ucalgary.ca](mailto:cwalsh@ucalgary.ca)

If you have any concerns about the way you've been treated as a participant, please contact an Ethics Resource Officer, Research Services Office, University of Calgary at (403) 210-9863; email [cfreb@ucalgary.ca](mailto: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.

## Appendix G: The Findings

### Mechanisms of Resistance and Forms of Oppression

Key Categories	Sub-categories	Theme	Theme
<b>Vulnerable Resistance</b>			
<b>Discovering Transgender Identity</b>	Questioning	Gender Appropriation	Gender Performance Denigration
	Reflecting	Internalized Transphobia	
	Enacting	Body Affirming Practices	
<b>Maintaining Transgender Identity</b>	Emotional Independence	Coping with Grief and Loss	
	Finding Community	Lateral Oppression	Social Activism
	Healthy Boundaries	Confronting Daily Prejudice	