THE GRIEF OF IDENTITY FORMATION: HOW NON-DEATH LOSS COMPLICATES
TRANS IDENTITY NARRATIVES

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of

Antioch University New England

In partial fulfillment for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PSYCHOLOGY

by

R. Frank

ORCID Scholar No. 0009-0005-4979-7393

November 2024

THE GRIEF OF IDENTITY FORMATION: HOW NON-DEATH LOSS COMPLICATES
TRANS IDENTITY NARRATIVES

This dissertation, by R. Frank has
been approved by the committee members signed below
who recommend that it be accepted by the faculty of
Antioch University New England
in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PSYCHOLOGY

Dissertation Committee:

Shannon McIntyre, PhD, Chairperson

Katherine Evarts, PsyD

Lorraine Mangione, PhD

ABSTRACT

THE GRIEF OF IDENTITY FORMATION: HOW NON-DEATH LOSS COMPLICATES
TRANS IDENTITY NARRATIVES

R. Frank

Antioch University New England

Keene, NH

Trans members of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and other marginalized sexual and gender identities (LGBT+) community may be at risk of erasure from both dominant sociocultural scripts and clinical psychological research. Identity development experts have asserted that identity is fixed by late adolescence, with some room for evolution depending on context (Marcia, 2002; Sokol, 2009). Research about grief suggests that anything that has been lost has the potential to be experienced through the lens of grief (Chapple et al., 2016; Collings, 2007). This grief of non-death loss has been linked to loss of relationships, expected life trajectory, and self-concept. The loss of relationship to the previous gender label has not been discussed in the extant literature. This lack of research might both be endemic to and perpetuate self-concealment in LGBT+ communities. Trans individuals might also be vulnerable to grief, becoming disenfranchised and exacerbated by lack of representation. The current dissertation offers a mixed-method Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis to address gaps in the extant literature. Surprisingly, the current research supports that, while internal processes may play a role in shifting gender labels, participants are more impacted overall by the loss of social factors such as understanding self in relation to social environment. This dissertation is available in open access at AURA (https://aura.antioch.edu) and OhioLINK ETD Center (https://etd.ohiolink.edu).

Keywords: trans, identity, gender, grief, coming out, IPA

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the people who helped see me through this amazing, challenging, and rewarding process. Chief amongst them, I would like to thank Dr. Shannon McIntyre for being a strong advocate, mentor, and friend to me throughout the genesis of this project. I would also like to thank Drs. Katherine Evarts and Lorraine Mangione for their guidance, care, and enthusiasm for my research serving as a guiding light as I navigated this new and exciting branch of my academic journey. I want to thank all my family and friends, in particular Corey Frank (PhD), Mary Lou Frank, Claudia Stüber (PsyD), and Hali Santiago (PhD) for providing comfort, warmth, acceptance, humor, and advice while I balanced multiple roles in the context of this undertaking. I want to thank my auditor, Jade Shapiro (MA, MLS), for her support in refining my analyses as I reached the final stages the writing process. Finally, I want to thank my partner, Tessa Janes (BEd) for always standing behind me over the years. No matter the obstacle, I felt sure that it could be overcome with you by my side, and I do not know how I could have accomplished this milestone without your support. Thank you all so much.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Transgender individuals are those who identify with a gender identity outside of whichever binary gender label was initially assigned to them at birth (GLAAD, 2021). Conversations about trans people's experiences, narratives, or needs tend to be ancillary conversations when speaking about the interests of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Other marginalized sexual and gender identities (LGBT+) community, more broadly. The problematic underpinning of this common practice is twofold: it tends to simultaneously conflate gender identity with sexual orientation and it assumes that the experiences or needs of lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals will uniformly apply to transgender individuals (Iaftrate, 2020). While it may be possible that aspects of these different experiences overlap, little research has been dedicated to deeply understanding the internal experiences of the trans community, specifically (McNutt & Yakushko, 2013). The current study will address the lack of research about trans experiences by focusing on the internal experiences of trans identity discovery, exploration, and resolution.

Identity resolution within the broader LGBT+ community might be represented by the complex process of what has historically been known as coming out, which is represented as the moment in which a member of the community feels comfortable enough to make the knowledge that they fit outside of a heterosexual or cis gender label publicly known (Iafrate, 2020). The process may also be described as *identity disclosure*, since the decision to discuss this identity may be a conscious choice based on an evaluation of both personal and interpersonal context. While identity disclosure is the more current terminology at the time of writing, members of the LGBT+ community may choose to use either identity disclosure or coming out depending on personal comfort. Indeed, this process is extremely personal and tends to be experienced through

the lens of the individual's sociocultural context and the supportiveness (or lack thereof) of those around them. The large-scale acceptance of the coming out narrative tends to position the public announcement of queer identity as a marker of a satisfying end to what is positioned as a lifelong struggle for self-actualization (Jones, 2020). This common narrative structure tends to position gender and/or sexual identity as a static quality for which the individual must have felt in some way dysphoric until discovering their authentic identity label. Jones (2020) describes this paradigm as essentialism, due to how it positions queer identity as being bound by the assertion of essential, unitary patterns of self-experience and discovery. While this essentialist paradigm facilitates greater social acceptance, it may also oversimplify queer identity resolution and limit the range of acceptable experiences in both pop culture and research (Jones, 2020). Rather, the discovery and initial coming out story may only be the starting points of the complex and ever-evolving process of identity exploration, refinement, and re-establishment (Mosher, 2001). Trans people might experience a wide range of comfort with both their relationship to social expectations of gender and their internal experience of gender (Joel et al., 2013).

Limiting how openly trans individuals can represent their personal narratives, essentialist frameworks may contribute to the erasure of trans voices in research while failing to capture the full nuance of trans identity formation experiences in vivo (Jones, 2020). Rather than taking the stance that sexual or gender identity is static and present from birth, Mosher (2001) suggests that queer identities and coming out stories tend to be lifelong experiences of re-examination, exploration, and re-establishment that continue to be refined as individuals disclose their identities in different contexts throughout their lives. This assertion is similar to how Sokol (2009) builds from Erikson's (1968, as cited in Sokol, 2009) identity development theory to suggest that self-identity may be a constantly evolving process that undergoes major changes

when the sociocultural context allows for it. However, little is currently known about how this constant renegotiation and redefinition of the self tangibly impacts trans individuals both internally and interpersonally.

In an effort to make sense of the complex topic of identity development, researchers have taken to reframing and simplifying Erikson's initial theories for practical use. For example, Marcia (2002) describes various stages of identity development that allow for interpersonal intimacy, mutuality, and generativity without risking the loss of a sense of self when engaging in these ways. Ideally, individuals receive the emotional support necessary from their environments to explore and resolve internal conflicts necessary to reach the identity *achievement stage*. Marcia (2002) describes the identity achievement stage as "a secure sense of self-definition so that one can risk vulnerability and mutuality with another without fear of surrendering or losing oneself" (p. 12). The *moratorium stage* is generally understood to be an exploratory and transitional one that hopefully leads to the ideal, achieved identity status. By contrast, Marcia (2002) describes the *foreclosure stage*, which is associated with pseudo-intimacy in adulthood and as not containing the exploration necessary to reach identity achievement. Those in the identity foreclosure status tend to prioritize maintaining interpersonal connections with others who are "suitable" (p. 12) for their perceived role in society. The most pessimistic stage, *diffusion*, is a status associated with neither exploration nor commitment and is also associated with outlooks of isolation and despair. Thus, while internal and interpersonal exploration of the self only accounts for one transitional status (moratorium), it may also be a key ingredient in shifting perceptions more towards strong, authentic connections with others and the self.

One circumstance that is commonly understood to bring about major shifts in individuals' understanding of the self is the inherent process of grief over a significant loss (Chapple et al.,

2016). Chapple et al. (2016) highlight that what is significant is decided by the individual, and that anything with which one forms a significant bond has the potential to be grieved when it has been lost. This begs the question of how significantly individuals might relate to their self-conception, and thus, need to grieve the bond between the self and the gender identity that was assigned to them. Indeed, Collings (2007) has found that sudden shifts in concepts of self, self in relation to others, and self in relation to previously foreclosed expectations for life trajectory may unambiguously be attached to feelings of intense grief. However, no extant research has specifically addressed whether the loss of a gender identity label, such as might be expected when one discovers and resolves to use a trans identity label, might bring about feelings of grief over the loss.

The stress of grief associated with trans identity formation is likely compounded by feelings of emotional reality being undervalued, as research suggests that, when experiences of loss go largely unacknowledged by a population's sociocultural context it brings about a process of disenfranchised grieving (Corr, 1999; Rinofner-Kreidl, 2016). This aspect is particularly relevant to trans populations, who might be vulnerable to social and systemic erasure on an ongoing basis and across a range of domains (Iafrate, 2020). Thus, trans people might feel pressured to collude with the erasure of complex trans identity narratives as a means of self-protection. By doing so, trans people are placed in a vulnerable position as this self-concealment of grief may also engender disenfranchised grief, which may further complicate the development and resolution of identity amongst internalized sentiments of devaluation.

Statement of the Problem

When queer people first discover an identity label that feels right for them, this realization tends to come attached to feelings of shame that they may feel compelled to conceal

from their communities **(**Beagan & Hattie, 2015). This tendency for self-concealment may result in a continuation or exacerbation of negative feelings about the self which may limit healthy exploration and resolution of negative feelings. However, Beagan and Hattie (2015) highlight the fact that queer individuals with communities that demonstrate open acceptance, regardless of the individual's identity label, tend to foster queer individuals with the same (if not better) coping as cis gender/heterosexual counterparts. Similarly, Konik and Stewart (2004) propose that queer people might initially experience an unsettling period of self-discovery and exploration after discovering that their sexual or gender identity is not what they had previously considered. However, this exploration is also associated with a greater incidence of both identity achievement and overall better psychosocial wellbeing than cisheterosexual counterparts who have not typically explored or tested their identity in this way. Members of the queer community who are not allowed to openly explore their internal reality in the context of an open and affirming sociocultural context may compulsively self-conceal as a means of survival (Shepherd et al., 2021). This supports the possibility that self-concealment may be a key factor in both limiting exploration and achieving effective, affirming resolution of negative feelings that may be inherent in the trans identity development process.

Psychological research pursuant to the particular experiences or needs of the LGBT+ community tends to focus more so on sexual orientation than gender identity, resulting in major gaps in the extant literature (Bristowe et al., 2018; McNutt & Yakushko, 2013; Wheat & Thacker, 2019). Wheat and Thacker (2019) suggest that individuals exploring gender nonconforming identities may be at a heightened risk for experiencing grief related to non-death losses associated with this exploration, while simultaneously feeling pressured to conceal negative emotions. The tendency to conceal, rather than explore and process mixed emotions associated

with redefining the self, may put trans people at a heightened risk for experiencing disenfranchised grieving.

While the hypothesis that trans coming out narratives will contain themes of grieving and disenfranchisement is consistent with both theories of identity development and grief processing, little research has been devoted to the internal experiences of trans people, specifically. The current dissertation will make use of an Interpretive Phenomenological Analytic (IPA; Creswell & Poth, 2018) qualitative process as the core methodology to provide a detailed account of how trans participants have personally experienced their own identity development and how they have made sense of the factors leading them to feel resolved in the use of a trans identity label. This research fills major gaps in the extant literature by investigating whether the ongoing coming out narratives of trans individuals contain themes congruent with feelings of disenfranchised grieving of the cisgender label.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

The process of identity exploration, loss, and re-formation is complex in most, if not all, cases. This is certainly true in the case of queer identities. Despite an understanding that members of the LGBT+ community might experience their identity exploration and formation process significantly differently from their cisheterosexual counterparts, little is known about the trans community (Iafrate, 2020). Specifically, research pursuant to the interests of the queer community tends to paint this community in broad enough strokes that trans identities tend to be missing from empirical research. McNutt and Yakushko (2013) identify gaps in research about the complex emotional journeys of queer individuals that leave trans identities out of critical, empirical conversations. Researchers would benefit from addressing gaps in modern understandings of how grief within the LGBT+ community, and specifically the trans community, is systemically suppressed (and potentially exacerbated).

Trans Identity Definition

Typically, in the dominant sociocultural narrative of the United States, individuals who are assigned male or female at birth tend to be expected to adopt the gender identity of being a man or a woman, respectively. These gender identities are known as cisgender (or cis; GLAAD, 2021) and are associated with a milieu of sociocultural scripts that are outside the scope of the current research. The trans identity umbrella also encompasses any identity that falls outside the lens of the "man" or "woman" gender label binary (GLAAD, 2021). Thus, while trans identities might certainly pertain to those for whom the opposite side of the binary holds more appeal than that congruent with the sex assigned at birth, it is not limited thereto (Deaux & Stewart, 2001). For the current research, the trans identity label will refer to anyone who falls outside of the cisgender binary including (but not limited to) gender non-binary, genderfluid, agender, and any

other gender-nonconforming label that fits best for the individuals involved. There are varying degrees of comfort that one might have with their gender identity label (Joel et al., 2013). The current research will focus on individuals who feel closely aligned with their gender identity.

Erasure of Trans Identities

Narratives depicting the stories of trans individuals usually come intermingled with the heteronormative assumption that individuals who have a trans identity will also identify with a queer sexual identity label. This tendency to conflate gender identity with sexual identity might erroneously assume that issues significant to sexual minority individuals will uniformly apply to trans individuals (Iafrate, 2020). Subsequently, this hyper-inflated umbrella may then result in narratives specific to sexual minority individuals being represented in a way that overshadows the interests of trans individuals. This common tendency might make narratives of queer identity more palatable for people who identify as both cisgender and heterosexual, while simultaneously doing inadvertent harm to those whom research is intended to serve (Iafrate, 2020).

Given that the erasure of trans voices may perpetuate ongoing devaluation of the needs of the trans community (Iafrate, 2020), an acknowledgment of factors that separate trans and cisgender identity development remains prudent. Unlike cis individuals, members of the trans community may be at a heightened risk for erasure both by the dominant culture and by research related to the LGBT+ community (Iafrate, 2020; Jones, 2020; McNutt & Yakushko, 2013)**.** Iafrate (2020) suggests that the tacit, dominant expectation that individuals will grow to have both cisgender and heterosexual leanings might lead to both cisnormative and heteronormative assumptions about queer experiences that do not, in actuality, reflect the full nuance of trans experiences. For the current research, literature relevant to the queer community, more broadly, will be reviewed to explore how trans individuals might be impacted by the identity exploration

process and the erasure thereof. However, it should be noted that this decision was made due to there being minimal research about trans identities.

Historic Perspectives of Identity Development

The complex process of trans identity development, exploration, and resolution cannot be disentangled from the larger conversation of identity development, in general. Erik Erikson is credited with laying the groundwork for a better understanding of the processes of identity development and resolution (Sokol, 2009). Erikson's theory of identity development focuses on eight distinct stages of significant change that are thought to occur in succession throughout childhood, adolescence, and adulthood, and are largely dependent on sociocultural factors to either foster or inhibit effective resolution of each stage. Sokol (2009) highlights that some ambiguity in the literature may lead to the potentially erroneous conclusion that identity formation always concludes at the end of adolescence and remains fixed from that point forward. Indeed, Marcia's (2002) work in the identity statuses of achievement, foreclosure, moratorium, and diffusion are described as continuing to evolve throughout adulthood and require exploration as an essential component for achieving intimacy. Both Erikson's original works and more modern research in identity development suggest that identity continues to evolve throughout the lifespan and into late adulthood (Konik & Stewart, 2004; Marcia, 2002; Sokol, 2009).

Interestingly, individuals in middle adulthood may commonly "begin to reclaim opposite-sex qualities" (Sokol, 2009, p. 144) as their life circumstances, priorities, and opportunities for exploration change. That is, women may begin to take on more masculine qualities, and men may begin to take on feminine qualities as their perception of their remaining lifespan shortens. Sokol (2009) highlights that these instances of identity reformation are thought to be relatively uncommon, and the emotional correlates of such identity refinement/redefinition

are unclear. Thus, little is known about the internal experiences of redefinition of gender identity, though there is some evidence that relationship to gender identity may naturally evolve or refine over time and in consideration of personal context.

Just like the complex process of identity formation, the processing of loss and grief comes with the inexorably intertwined journey of re-defining the self in the context of the loss (Kessler, 2020). Generally, conversations about loss and grief center on the significant loss of a loved one. However, the definitions of what constitutes a significant loss vary across both cultures and individuals. Kessler (2020) highlights that acceptance of a new way of being, in the context of what has been lost, is a complex and winding process that individuals should undertake without self-criticism or comparison to others. Yet, undergoing major shifts in previously foreclosed aspects of self may also evoke feelings of grief that require attention and self-compassion (Beagan & Hattie, 2015; Collings, 2007). This study will examine the trans individuals' narratives about the personal impact of shifting away from a previously foreclosed gender identity label and hypothesizes that themes of loss and grief will emerge from individuals' stories of trans identity discovery, exploration, and re-definition. This research has clear clinical implications regarding psychotherapy with trans individuals, which will be further discussed in the conclusion section of this dissertation.

Essentialism v. Continuous Coming Out

The cisnormative assumption about the nature of gender identity tends to support a narrative that gender identity is static, present from birth, and securely resolved for most people (Iafrate, 2020). Transnormative narratives might therefore follow that an individual always knew about their trans identity, or that the moment of discovery should come with a sense of deep self-understanding, joy, and/or satisfaction **(**Iafrate, 2020). Further, transnormative narratives

about gender identity may also come intertwined with the basic assumption that most, if not all, individuals are heterosexual and attracted to those at the opposite end of a gender binary. These basic assumptions may underlie the majority of conversations about queer identity and perpetuate binary expectations that do not apply to everyone in the trans community. Considering transnormative perspectives is important for conversations about trans identity development because they impact how both society and researchers might approach conversations about identity exploration and achievement. This tendency for oversimplification perpetuates the conditions for continued misunderstandings about the ongoing fluidity of trans identity throughout the lifespan.

The tendency to perceive trans identity development in a way that is most palatable for cis people poses the risk that transnormative assumptions about gender may unintentionally invalidate trans stories. Additionally, framing gender as a necessary piece of sexual/romantic attraction might run the risk of positioning gender as a subsidiary of sexual identity rather than a foundational piece of personal identity all its own. Indeed, gender identity might only be tangentially related (or potentially completely unrelated) to sexual/romantic attraction (Iafrate, 2020). Despite some similarities in the narratives of sexual and gender minority groups (such as feelings of being excluded), the predominant focus on the coming out stories of lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals might contribute to an erasure of the trans community in dominant understandings of queer identity exploration and formation. Finally, the false equivalence of gender identity to sexual identity might cyclically perpetuate the conditions that produce invalidation, disenfranchisement, and further erasure of trans voices in research. Most relevant to the current research, trans identity formation may be a complex process of self-exploration that only begins when one discovers that a trans identity label fits them.

By positioning the dominant representations of identity development as those that fit typical cis scripts of identity being foreclosed by late adolescence, researchers can miss the complexity of ongoing identity exploration more common for queer people. The assumption that queer identity formation will cleanly fit with this expected trajectory risks queer identity development being further misunderstood and potentially discounted from the literature. Jones (2020) proposes an alternative understanding to the typical coming-out narrative in terms of a sexual minority or gender "essentialism" (p. 500), which assumes sexual or gender-nonconforming identities are innate qualities that are present from birth. This essentialism has a complicated impact on the LGBT+ community as a whole. On the one hand, essentialism helps communicate the experiences of queer individuals to the dominant, cisheterosexual culture and fosters greater sociocultural acceptance of queer people. Subsequently, discussing gender and sexual minority identities as innate qualities positions them as a natural part of human diversity and facilitates the creation of equalizing policies or protections (Jones, 2020). On the other hand, essentialism may be oversimplistic, transnormative, and ultimately harmful to trans people.

Jones (2020) suggests that popular coming out narrative structures tend to fit with a "homonormative" (p. 499) essentialist assumption which posits that people with queer identities have always felt as though cisheterosexual expectations are wrong/unnatural for them. Simply put, this narrative essentialism positions coming out stories as only being valid if the individual has always felt misrepresented by a cis identity label. Thus, upon finding a trans identity label that fits, trans individuals might be expected to have all questions of sexual or gender belongingness resolved. In creating conditions by which queer identity narratives might be more valued by the dominant culture, transnormative narratives might simultaneously invalidate

stories that require more identity exploration and are not resolved upon the discovery of a more fitting identity label. Indeed, Jones (2020) suggests that members of the queer community might be vulnerable to feeling greater distress at their identity exploration/formation simply by virtue of having mixed emotions during identity exploration. This is due to departing from this essentialist cisheterosexual normative script, which tends to be upheld as most valid by both queer people and cisheterosexual peers. The exclusion of narratives outside the essentialist norm sets up trans people with mixed feelings to continue being unseen and disenfranchised in exploring, expressing, or processing all of their feelings.

Essentialism impacts which types of identity formation narratives are largely acknowledged and valued with those that are more complex or winding to be discounted entirely. As such, valuable themes of experiencing mixed, negative, and or grieving feelings may be lost as individuals feel pressured to adapt their narratives to a more typically valued format. Jones (2019) suggests an essentialist bend to modern coming-out narratives that assumes all queer individuals have always been aware of and resolved about their difference and merely needed deep acceptance to articulate this to others. However, these essentialist narratives might be unhelpfully restrictive in how they construct social expectations about the acceptability of mixed feelings associated with identity exploration. Individuals who are exploring gender minority identity might feel pressured to continue the essentialist narrative as a means of finding social acceptance (Jones, 2020). Thus, any roles or expressions that the individual feels are congruent with a cisheterosexual lens are expected to be either rejected or concealed by the individual due to social pressure. The individual may then find themself at a crossroads in which essentialist coming-out narratives pressure them to either conceal nuances of their authentic self and their identity exploration or lose connections that may be significant for them.

As an alternative to essentialist coming out narratives, Mosher (2001) suggests that the identity exploration, testing, and resolution inherent in coming out tends to be a long and continuously changing process. Typically, publicly available coming-out narratives center on where/how individuals first realized which identity label might fit them better. However, Mosher (2001) purports that a large majority of the queer identity exploration process might only begin at this juncture. A more accurate depiction of queer narratives is in the establishment, renegotiation, and consolidation that comes from continuously coming out over time and with various types of close interpersonal relationships. Despite this evidence that queer and trans identity exploration and formation might be a complex and continuous redefinition of previously foreclosed aspects of identity, there are gaps in empirical research around how this continuous redefinition emotionally impacts trans individuals; so, the specifics of this journey remain unclear.

The current research addressed gaps in the literature by actively investigating the emotional experience of trans individuals over the course of their exploration, consolidation, and redefinition of gender identity. The central hypothesis of the current project is that this complex mix of emotions, inherent in identity exploration, includes the pain of loss associated with shedding the cis identity label and loss of expectations for self, others, and self in relation to others. The mix of emotions in the identity exploration and redefinition process might aptly be described as containing forms of grieving for the cis identity label. To address the experience of losing this identity label, the current review will turn to two relevant concepts in the literature: the grief of losses that are not associated with the death of a physical body (i.e., non-death losses) and disenfranchised grieving.

Non-Death Losses and Grief

Anything that an individual has formed a personally significant bond with might be grieved if it is lost, though what is grieved, how intensely it is grieved, and how the grief is processed may be complicated by personal and interpersonal factors (Chapple et al., 2016). Chapple et al. (2016) argue that the expected progression of grief follows both specific, sociocultural scripts as well as the "micro-culture" (p. 119) of the individual's system of understanding and meaning making. Thus, understanding grief as terminal upon acceptance of the loss, and the decisive end to grieving feelings, may not capture the wealth of definitions and experiences of grief. This may relate to an understanding of conventional grieving as one that is associated with the death of a physical body and positions the loss of concepts like relationship, expectation, or identity as being unconventional grieving. Chapple et al. (2016) suggest that non-death-related losses might be better represented as a necessary, sudden redefinition of personal identity. Considering the redefinition of self that is inherent in trans identity exploration across multiple personal and interpersonal domains (Mosher, 2001), this reconceptualization of loss and grief positions the trans identity exploration process as a prime example of the impact of non-death loss in the identity development.

While extant literature does not conceptualize trans identity in terms of non-death loss, there are other examples of non-death losses being associated with the expected identity or presentation of an individual becoming significantly transformed. For example, in the case of acquired brain injuries, individuals may begin to present in ways that might be radically different than how they had presented before the injurious incident (Collings, 2007). In these cases, families might commonly experience what will unambiguously be described as grief for the loss of (1) their expected script for the life progression of the injured individual as well as (2) the

expectations that were once held for what the family considers important for adult life. Though the injured individual is physically present, the loss of "normal" sociocultural scripts might be reasonably expected to be a catalyst for the process of grieving. This has significant implications for both the practical and interpersonal correlates of publicly redefining self-identity. While trans identity exploration is a very different process from acquiring and recovering from a significant brain injury, the redefinition of self, self in relation to others, and self in relation to previous conceptions of self are relevant. However, little is currently known about how the grief of a previous social script applies to individuals experiencing the continuous redefinition of self-identity inherent in the trans identity development process.

Disenfranchised Grief

Disenfranchised grief is the experience of having bereaved feelings that are associated with losses that are not recognized nor supported by others (Corr, 1999), which is relevant in consideration of trans identity development. This type of grief appears when one experiences a loss that they feel cannot be openly acknowledged, mourned, or supported by others and is associated with prolonged feelings of isolation and distress. For example, Corr (1999) suggests that bereavement tends to be socially accepted in cases of significant loss, such as the death of a spouse or close loved one. However, when the loss is evaluated to not be significant enough to warrant feelings of grief, by the individual and/or by their sociocultural context, the feelings of grief at a loss might come encapsulated alongside feelings of shame or guilt for grieving something that has been treated as nonsignificant. This concept is similar to the assertion of Rinofner-Kreidl (2016), who suggests that disenfranchised grief is related to those feelings of loss that have been evaluated as less worthy of bereavement by the dominant sociocultural script.

The twofold risk of disenfranchised grieving arises from both the grieving and the felt need to suppress grieving for not feeling worthy of critical exploration. Considering the consistent erasure of trans identity exploration in psychological research (Iafrate, 2020), it stands to reason that trans individuals who feel that their attachment to the cis identity label is not valued might also feel disenfranchised in their pursuit to explore and resolve mixed emotions inherent in the identity exploration process. Trans may be at risk of feeling disenfranchised by both the dominant culture and LGBT+ communities. By openly acknowledging and exploring feelings associated with disenfranchisement, individuals might reconceptualize complex feelings as a necessary piece of redefining their self-identity and coping with feelings of isolation in the long term. For trans individuals who might feel pressured to conceal mixed or grieving feelings associated with their gender identity, disenfranchisement might be a common occurrence based on how pervasively they feel prohibited from openly exploring their feelings.

Self-Concealment and Disenfranchised Grief

Members of the queer community might be at a heightened risk of experiencing disenfranchised grief on multiple levels and across domains. McNutt and Yakushko (2013) investigate accounts of lesbian and gay identified individuals who struggle with the loss of a partner. The authors find that disenfranchised grieving is extremely common amongst bereaved members of the queer community, as they feel their loss is not allowed to be openly acknowledged or supported. This issue is further exacerbated by the fact that the loss of a partner also comes with the loss of someone with whom the individual can be open about sexual or gender expression. Without this connection, the feelings of loss and isolation might become compounded with the historical underserving of queer individuals both in clinical practice and in academic research. McNutt and Yakushko (2013) have suggested that members of the queer

community doubly suffer from both feelings of grief and feeling as though they are not free to publicly mourn their losses in the same way as others.

Concealment of queer identities, within the context of the United States, may put queer individuals at a heightened risk for disenfranchisement, in general, and disenfranchised grief of their identity label, specifically. Beagan and Hattie (2015) suggest that trans members of close religious communities are often asked to either never disclose this aspect of their identity or to leave their communities entirely. Conditions that shame, reject, or stigmatize members of the queer community tend to result in the "spirit crushing" (Beagan & Hattie, 2015, p. 94) cycle of isolation and self-hatred in which concealing their identity to resist loneliness is only slightly preferable to identity exploration in a hostile environment. Indeed, members of the LGBT+ community are likely to experience intense feelings of guilt, shame, or loss upon discovering that a queer identity label feels natural for them (Beagan & Hattie, 2015). What this might result in is a felt desire to conceal their queer identity even when amongst other members of the queer community, which may prolong both the need to explore and persistent feelings of self-hatred. Therefore, the tendency to conceal queer identity exploration narratives limits the openness with which trans individuals can process elements of identity achievement, and grief may endure even in communities that are fundamentally structured to be holding and supportive.

Grief of a previously foreclosed cis identity label may be complicated by the tendency to conceal queer identity due to the stigmatization of queer identities in the dominant culture. For example, Shepherd et al. (2021) find that due to living through many polarizing eras of heavy anti-LGBT+ policies and sentiments, members of the queer community who are older than 50 years might be at a higher risk for identity concealment and, as a result, the development of complicated grieving in the face of bereavement. Due to enduring significant sociocultural

stressors such as the HIV/AIDS epidemic in formative years, these sexual and gender minority elders might become used to the feeling of concealment such that the desire for interpersonal acceptance might become ancillary for this population. While this tendency to self-conceal serves queer communities in terms of self-protection, it might also feed the perpetuation of disenfranchisement given how concealment restricts exploration.

Those LGBT+ individuals who can alternatively work through complex feelings, usually with the help of an affirming community that fully supports all labels that feel most comfortable to the individual, tend to emerge with the same, if not better, psychosocial advantages as cisheterosexual peers (Beagan & Hattie, 2015; Konik & Stewart, 2004). Thus, similar to the distress observed in disenfranchised grief, the distressing emotions observed in the LGBT+ community might be ameliorated if given the space for all explorations to be witnessed and valued (Beagan & Hattie, 2015). Multiple outside pressures may result in feeling as though the full emotional reality of self-exploration is not valuable and must be kept secret from most (if not all) people in their community. Since the tendency to conceal mixed feelings is relevant to queer identity exploration and might leave trans individuals vulnerable to disenfranchised grieving, researchers do well to address this vulnerability by focusing on how they emerge within queer individuals' narrative accounts of identity exploration.

Need for Research About Trans Identity Exploration and Resolution

Openly exploring emotions related to identity exploration and re-definition enables one to process these mixed emotions for positive gains. For example, Marcia (2002) suggests that the key difference between the identity achievement stage (in which intimacy and generativity continue to evolve throughout the lifespan) and foreclosure (in which individuals have a committed sense of identity but experience pseudo intimacy) is the moratorium stage. This

implies that emotional and interpersonal exploration is an essential component for wellbeing throughout the lifespan. Yet queer identity exploration is often different from the narrative of expectations co-constructed by dominant sociocultural scripts (Jones, 2020; Mosher 2001). Therefore, this population might be expected to experience some form of grief or grieving as adoption of the queer identity label results in the loss of the identity label more accepted by the dominant culture. It is also possible that the systemic undervaluing of queer identities might result in the disenfranchised, ambivalent feelings about the lost cis identity label (Beagan & Hattie, 2015; Corr, 1999). This might be described in terms of Marcia's (2002) identity diffusion status, in which individuals experience neither exploration nor commitment in their identity status and experience a sense of isolation as a result. Due to the lack of research specific to the trans community in the literature, it remains unclear how trans individuals experience and resolve mixed and potentially grieving feelings amongst pressures for self-concealment**.**

The current research posits that the act of redefining identity may come with an experience of grieving. Therefore, members of the trans community might be at an increased risk of experiencing disenfranchised grief because of the social expectation to conceal identity and, by extension, the limiting of identity formation and achievement by impacting how publicly they are allowed to express their feelings. This disenfranchisement and self-concealment is concerning because it negates identity formation; yet, little is currently known about how the trans community experiences, and processes, the mixed emotions inherent in the loss.

Gaps in Research About Identity and Grief in the Trans Community

Within the complex and continuously evolving process of coming out, individuals in the trans community might be at heightened vulnerability to feelings of grief over the loss of connections such as those to communities, individual relationships, or their relationships with

their own identities. Wheat and Thacker (2019) discuss the multiple, intersecting opportunities for non-death losses to be experienced by members of the queer community and highlight the continuing pattern of these non-death losses being undervalued and underexplored in clinical research. The authors investigate how gender expectations intertwine with conceptions of self, others, and self in relation to others which also tend to go underrepresented. As a result, people who explore feelings of gender nonconformity might feel particularly compelled to suppress the pain associated with these losses as gender nonconforming narratives tend to be generally undervalued. Thus, Wheat and Thacker (2019) have identified a critical gap in clinical research on queer identity formation and a need for further investigations into the relevance of non-death losses on the inter/intrapersonal relationships of the trans members of the queer community. These results are congruent with other research related to queer experiences, which have identified critical gaps in focusing on trans people, specifically (Bristowe et al., 2018; McNutt & Yakushko, 2013).

Recent attempts to better understand the queer community discuss how LGBT+ individuals might be at a heightened vulnerability for disenfranchisement, but do not address how this conversation applies to queer identity development or trans individuals, specifically (Konik & Stewart, 2004; McNutt & Yakushko, 2013). Despite some research about how the impact of disenfranchisement and self-concealment might differentially impact members of the LGBT+ community, broadly, across different psychosocial domains (Beagan & Hattie, 2015; McNutt & Yakushko, 2013; Wheat & Thacker, 2019), the field of psychology may systemically perpetuate the conditions of disenfranchisement by virtue of omitting its impact on queer identity development broadly, and trans people specifically. Bristowe et al. (2018) suggest that even resources specifically designed to serve the needs of grieving LGBT+ individuals tend to lack a

critical understanding of how such resources differentially apply to gender-diverse individuals. Thus, research aimed at addressing the disenfranchisement of queer individuals would do well to lean into the emotional nuance of identity exploration and examine how it manifests in specific populations. The current research will facilitate this discussion by specifically investigating the narratives of trans individuals, with clinical implications to be more fully discussed in later chapters.

The Current Research

Since identity formation is a complex and ever-changing process that occurs throughout the lifespan, shifts in previously foreclosed aspects of gender identity might also bring complex, grieving feelings. Specifically, while an injuriously induced loss of a past identity results in significant grieving (Collings, 2007), the current research argues that this is also true of trans identity development. That is, within the process of exploring and defining identity labels that feel more authentically representative, trans individuals might feel commensurate grief over the loss of the identity label that is shed. This is likely exacerbated by trans identity erasure, essentialism in coming out narratives, disenfranchised grieving, and the tendency for protective self-concealment of both identity labels and feelings of the identity exploration process.

As previously discussed, while essentialism in coming out narratives has been successful in creating greater social acceptance in the dominant culture, it might also presuppose that trans individuals must always feel resolved about the trans identity label; it thereby invalidates narratives in which there is an experience of ambivalence, tension, or grief at the change of identity label. Additionally, based on the popularized scripts of identity formation, which presuppose either that the individual must always know or that they must feel immediately freed by the knowledge of trans identity, trans individuals may feel pressured to conceal the full

nuance of their internal experience. Subsequently, the feelings of loneliness, isolation, and self-hatred alluded to by Beagan and Hattie (2015) may endure while the individual struggles to reach identity achievement without the support of a community. As such, disenfranchised grief and self-concealment complicate identity formation among trans individuals.

While psychologists do well to assume a nonjudgmental stance that embraces the nuance of the identity formation process, more research is needed to better understand how identity development might look very different depending on both the sociocultural context and the queer identity being explored. The current research addressed gaps in understanding of non-death loss in the queer community by investigating the coming-out narratives of trans individuals, with the initial discovery of an appropriate, personally significant identity label as the starting point of the narrative. This qualitative investigation of trans coming out narratives made intentional space for the possibility of non-death losses associated with the shedding of the cis identity, as well as potential benefits of exploring/establishing themself as a trans person.

Research Questions

1. Do themes of loss enter into narratives about trans identity formation?

2. Are trans perspectives on disenfranchised grief informed by gender essentialism?

3. Will themes of self-concealment, ego identity status, and gender essentialism naturally arise in trans participants' exploration of grief?

4. Do trans participants believe that self-concealment, ego identity status, and gender essentialism are related to grief?

5. Do trans participants believe that self-concealment influences grief?

CHAPTER III: METHOD

The current dissertation investigated how the phenomenon of trans identity discovery, exploration, and resolution is experienced by trans individuals from the perspective of their own sociocultural contexts. As such, an IPA approach was selected as most appropriate to represent the core intention of the research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The structure and design of this study closely followed the guidance laid out by Smith et al. (2009) for guidance in regard to qualitative analyses for large sample sizes, along with Moustakas (1994, as cited in Creswell & Poth, 2018) for supplemental descriptions study designs. The appropriate steps relevant to this research framework include the identification of the researcher's own experience with the phenomenon and clustering of significant statements to both textural and structural elements, as well as capturing the essence of what participants have communicated about their experiences. Additionally, steps were integrated for the sole purpose of ensuring that the conclusions drawn from the data are as valid and reliable as possible. Within the qualitative process, the authors acknowledge that individual worldviews may impact what researchers decide is a significant statement and how they might be pulled to cluster different statements, either structurally or texturally (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Thus, I ensured that I remained as transparent as possible about opportunities for bias and took steps to minimize these.

Researcher's Perspectives and Assumptions

I am a White, able-bodied, queer, nonbinary individual from a historically lower–lower middle-class background in the eastern United States. Ethnically, I identify as English, German, and Scotch-Irish. I was raised Episcopalian Christian, though currently identify more with pagan spiritual practices. As someone who discovered a trans identity label later in life, I might be predisposed to pay more attention to/demonstrate more active curiosity towards those whose

stories more closely resemble mine. Additionally, I may be vulnerable to perpetuating systemic marginalization of the narratives of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) folks due to enduring racial blind spots within the profession and myself. During the analysis process, I made my best effort to keep my biases in mind and to interpret results with as little of my own sociocultural blind spots as possible. For example, when selecting representative samples of relevant themes, I tried to ensure that each participant was included at least once to minimize the centering of stories from any one context. To further address the potential for blind spots, I also solicited the help of an auditor to examine de-identified transcripts and categorization schema to help account for biases in the process.

Author's Worldview

I ascribe to the worldview that people do not exist within a vacuum. That is, individuals define themselves in increasingly nuanced ways that are based on both personal and interpersonal factors. In essence, conversations about whether any given element of an individual's identity is nature or nurture tend to be irrelevant; it is often both. Thus, identity narratives must be taken into consideration in the personal, interpersonal, and cultural context of the individual. I believe that both compassion and collaboration are necessary for substantive growth for both the individual and their societal context. Most importantly, I believe that individuals must work to identify and challenge biases, both internally and within systems, to positively foster change.

As an individual therapist, I tend to lean towards a relational-cultural lens. This theory posits that humans naturally gravitate towards relational growth and that healing happens under the conditions of mutuality, empathy, and empowerment (Comstock et al., 2008). Most relevant to the current research, relational-cultural theory posits that "[authenticity] is necessary for real

engagement in growth-fostering relationships" (Jordan, as cited in Comstock et al., 2008, p. 280). The conversation about authenticity is particularly salient when considering how trans individuals may be pulled to conceal central pieces of their self-identity or exploration process. Conversations pursuant to self-concealment, authentic identity communication, and the relational-cultural correlates thereof are essential for facilitating empowering, mutually beneficial scientific conversations between researchers in the field and the participants their research endeavors to serve.

Rationale for Research Method

The current study followed a mixed-methods approach incorporating aspects of both qualitative and quantitative analyses. For the qualitative aspect of this study, an IPA framework was chosen to address previously identified gaps in research about the trans identity development, at the suggestion of experts in the field. An IPA approach was evaluated as being the core methodology to better understand the phenomenon of trans identity discovery and exploration, without the expectation that publicly coming out is a necessary endpoint to the narrative. This approach was beneficial in elucidating details of the internal realities of those whose personal accounts are historically underserved (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Thus, it was a prime framework for better understanding the narratives of those who redefine significant aspects of their self-identity, which have been historically underrepresented, and was the primary research method of the current study.

In addition to qualitative data, the current research integrated mixed methodology as a means of providing results that may be read as stronger and more reliable than qualitative analysis alone (O'Cathain et al., 2010). Specifically, O'Cathain et al. (2010) recommend the use of a "mixed method matrix" (p. 2) as a means of representing nuances, surprises, or patterns that

might be missed through the use of either qualitative or quantitative methods alone. With this technique, researchers provide participants with quantitative surveys, the results of which are visually represented on a matrix containing both the prevalent themes observed in the interviews of individuals and the results of quantitatively gathered reports. O'Cathain et al. (2010) describe this technique as a means of "quantisising" (p. 2) qualitative research to potentially illustrate phenomena of interest to greater clarity.

Methods

Sampling and Recruitment

For phenomenological research, Creswell and Poth (2018) recommend a participant sample group of about 3–15 participants. As such, the current research incorporated participant interviews within this range. This study aimed to recruit participants from a diverse range of racial, ethnic, and sexual identities from a variety of ages and socioeconomic backgrounds. Upon responding as interested parties from the publicly available advertisement either online or via printed posters, participants were sent (via email) a link to a brief demographics survey. Considering the central goal of incorporating diverse trans narratives, the only inclusion criteria was that the individual must have been a legal adult (over the age of 18) that identified in some way with a label under the trans umbrella and spoke English fluently. Some examples of included gender identity labels are the label "trans," as well as nonbinary and agender (GLAAD, 2021). However, given the wide range of gender identity labels that evolve based on both systemic and personal necessity, the pre-screener simply assessed that the participant's primary gender identity label was not cis. Participants were asked to report whatever gender identity label felt most fitting for them.

Procedure

Meetings were scheduled for one and a half hours, with the first 30 minutes set aside for paperwork and answering questions, 45 minutes for the qualitative interview portion, and 15 minutes for debriefing. At the start of the session participants were sent or were handed a consent to participate and consent to audio recording forms. Participants were encouraged to thoroughly read both forms and to ask questions about the limits of confidentiality, should they have any. After completion of both consent forms and clarifying questions, participants were sent or were given a copy of the brief screening questionnaire to clarify the nature of their relationship to the gender binary, known as the Multi-Gender Identity Questionnaire (Multi-GIQ; Joel et al., 2013). At this time, participants were also provided with the 32-item Ego-Identity Process Questionnaire (EIPQ; Balistreri et al., 1995) to assess where they fall in their identity exploration journey. Participants were informed about the nature of the study, confidentiality, and limits thereof, before initiating audio recordings for the interview process.

Multi-Gender Identity Questionnaire

The Multi-Gender Identity Questionnaire (Multi-GIQ; Joel et al., 2013) was created to aid researchers in teasing apart how strongly individuals identify with either side of the man/woman gender binary. The 32-item scale rates how strongly the individual has felt aligned with (or uncomfortable in aligning with) statements about their gender identity on a 5-point Likert scale, with the option to note if a statement is not relevant to them. This scale assesses how the individual has related to feeling as a man, feeling as a woman, or feeling general dysphoria related to the concept of gender in the past 12 months. It contains items such as "In the past 12 months, have you felt more like a man than like a woman?", "In the past 12 months, have you felt more like a woman than like a man?", "In the past 12 months, have you felt at times

more like a man and at times more like a woman?", and "In the past 12 months, have you felt somewhere in between a woman and a man?" to assess how closely aligned participants feel to either side of the gender binary, or neither option. Unlike most other quantitative measures of gender, the Multi-GIQ does not solely assess gender dysphoria as a necessary marker for trans identity. It also does not presuppose that individuals must wish to identify with the opposite end of the gender binary. Rather, the Multi-GIQ assesses participants' perceptions of themselves and their overall relationship to the perceived gender binary, whether that pertains to significant discomfort living within one side of the gender binary or not.

This measure is essential for the current research, since it provides a means of quantisising trans identity and how participants experience living within the context of a gender binary. This will prove invaluable for further illuminating whether strong feelings of discomfort also map on to themes of self-concealment of authentic gender identity and disenfranchised grieving, which was explored qualitatively through the semi-structured interview portion of the study. By integrating the Multi-GIQ into the process of data collection, this research embodies the robust mixed-method matrix recommended by O'Cathain et al. (2010).

Ego-Identity Process Questionnaire

The Ego-Identity Process Questionnaire (EIPQ; Balistreri et al., 1995) was created based on Marcia's structured interviews on ego identity, which place participants in one of four stages of identity development (achievement, moratorium, foreclosure, and diffusion). The EIPQ was designed to provide researchers with a simple, streamlined self-report questionnaire that could quickly and accurately place where participants fall in either their identity exploration or commitment status. After the pilot study, a total of 260 university students responded to the final, 32-item version on a 6-point, Likert-type scale. Examples of items on the EIPQ include, "I have

consistently re-examined many different values in order to find the ones which are best for me," "I have evaluated many ways in which I fit into my family structure," and "I am very confident about what kinds of friends are best for me." Approximately half of these items are worded negatively and half positively to account for social desirability. Those items which are intentionally worded negatively are reverse coded to yield two different, summed composite scores on both the commitment and exploration domains, which can also be used to classify the participants in one of the four identity domains if desired.

The EIPQ, in conjunction with the Multi-GIQ, facilitates the quantisising of the transgender identity exploration and achievement process to further elucidate how this process might reflect aspects of grief and loss. Where the EIPQ assesses for identity status, the Multi-GIQ assesses relationship to gender identity and the potential presence of discomfort or congruence related thereto. In essence, where the latter measure illuminates the nature of the participant's gender identity, the former illuminates the status of exploration or commitment to that identity. This allowed me to infer how themes of grief and/or self-concealment might pertain differentially based on both what the status of the identity exploration process is and how the individual relates to the concept of gender, specifically. In conjunction, these two measures place how participants relate to their identity exploration status, broadly (the EIPQ) and trans identity, more specifically (the Multi-GIQ).

Semi-Structured Interview

After completing all necessary paperwork in the initial 30 minutes of the session, I asked participants a series of open-ended questions (Appendix A) aimed at assessing what the experiences of trans identity discovery, exploration, and disclosure has been like for them. These questions have also been designed to align with common markers of grief resolution. Since most

research about grief and grief work tends to assume that grief is borne of the death of a physical body (Chapple et al., 2016), a brief measure of grief resolution was adapted to reflect the potential process of non-death, and identity loss. Additionally, questions pursuant to self-concealment and grief have been added to assess for presence of these elements in coming out narratives of trans people. At the end, participants were also given the opportunity to add anything that they thought it would be important for me to know before stopping the recording and moving on to the debriefing portion of the session.

Grief Resolution Index. The Grief Resolution Index (GRI; Remondet & Hansson, 1987) was created as a brief, short-form 7-item tool to assess long-term distress associated with a significant loss and, particularly, to assess the participants' level of adjustment following the loss. It was applied to a participant pool of 75 widowed women with ages ranging from 60–90 years and demonstrated good reliability (Cronbach's alpha = 0.87). The GRI also demonstrates strong face validity by predicting both short- and long-term emotional adjustment in the context of a loss. It should be noted, however, that while the participant pool did include populations of older women, this was not the primary population focus of the current research. Thus, while this measure was deemed to be an appropriate foundation for the creation of semi-structured interview questions about the nature of adjustment in the face of a loss, these items may not capture the full nuance of identity loss, adjustment, and resolution. To account for this, I asked follow-up questions as needed to ensure that participant accounts of their identity re-definition are represented as accurately as possible.

Ethical Concerns

While ethical decision-making may commonly be associated with the data collection and storage stages of research, Creswell and Poth (2018) assert that ethical, qualitative studies must

consider the needs of both participants and stakeholders at all stages of the process. While this begins with the researcher(s) acknowledgment of their own biases, it must necessarily include both internal and external checks to ensure that risks to all involved are minimized. Considering the ongoing marginalization of the trans community in both the dominant culture of the United States and Canada, and in the field of psychological research, trans participants might be at a heightened vulnerability of exploitation by authority figures, including myself. Additionally, given the nature of discussing loss and grief, particularly in the context of losses that may have been historically disenfranchised, the participants may be vulnerable to heightened psychological distress as a result of talking through salient narratives.

To address anticipated ethical concerns, I first sought approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Antioch University New England, and followed all ethical guidance related thereto. Based on the expectation that interviews might evoke distress from participants, lists of community mental health resources were sent or handed to participants during the debriefing to help individuals cope with any feelings the interview may have generated. I also assume the responsibility of ensuring that interviews were held in as safe, private, and confidential space as possible. For example, unless the participant was unable to meet with me via internet connection, all participants were seen via the secure, HIPPAA-compliant video hosting platform known as Zoom. Before beginning the process, I established from where the participant was calling and whether they were alone at the time of interview. If the participant could not ensure a confidential space, or could not ensure a stable internet connection, I assumed the responsibility of finding a confidential interview space to minimize the level of burden placed on participants.

Methods of Analysis

Phenomenological research is employed to represent the common experiences associated with a particular phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Researchers use the first-hand accounts of participants' lived experiences with a phenomenon of interest, through written transcripts, and cluster significant statements across the different accounts into groups of similar statements. From this, researchers can create meaning from the similar themes that participants report. Smith et al. (2009) provide step-by-step guidance for how to engage in qualitative, phenomenological research in a way that is both helpful and elucidative. During the analysis process, I relied largely on guidance from Smith et al. (2009) for steps in qualitative analysis with large sample sizes, which was supplemented by Moustakas (1994, as cited in Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Analytic Procedure

Research involving historically marginalized communities does well to employ qualitative analysis to demonstrate how underrepresented phenomenon may be understood (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As such, Creswell and Poth (2018) outline specific steps for ensuring that qualitative analyses are carried out reliably and effectively. Within the text, the authors describe how Moustakas (1994, as cited in Creswell & Poth, 2018) enumerates how researchers might go about the analysis of specific phenomena under investigation: (1) describe personal experiences with the phenomenon, (2) develop a list of significant statements from either participant interviews or other written accounts, (3) group significant statements into similar clusters or themes, (4) create textural descriptions of what participants tended to experience within the phenomenon, (5) provide structural descriptions of how the phenomenon occurs and in what contexts, (6) write a composite description of the phenomenon including both the

textural and structural elements identified to attempt to capture the "essence" (p. 110) of what has been communicated by the participants.

After volunteering to be included in the current study, participants were sent a demographics questionnaire containing questions that were screened for eligibility. Once participants were confirmed eligible for participation, I reached out to the participant via contact information provided to establish a meeting time and confidential space for interviews. After a confidential meeting space was reserved (in person or via Zoom), an invitation containing specific meeting times/locations was sent and collaborated upon to ensure all needs were met. During the meeting, participants completed quantitative measures and had the opportunity to ask questions. After signing the relevant confidentiality agreements, participants were presented with the open-ended prompts of the semi-structured interview. Conversations taking place in person were recorded via a secure, physical tape recorder that was only used for the purposes of the current research. This tape recorder will be kept in a secure, locked location for 5 years following the collection of data in 2023. After which time, all records of the data, either physical or electronic, will be destroyed.

Validity and Reliability

Quantitative

Multi-GIQ. The Multi-GIQ was first tested on a participant pool of around 2,415 participants who have been identified as both queer and non-queer (Joel et al., 2013). The content validity of the Multi-GIQ was supported by basing items that assess gender dysphoria on previously validated measures, and the discriminant validity was supported by the Multi-GIQ effectively discriminating between queer and non-queer participants at sensitivities similar to other measures that have been used in studies involving trans participants. Reliability of the

Multi-GIQ was demonstrated across items assessing both feelings congruent with one's affirmed gender and feeling as though one wishes to more align with another gender with Cronbach's alphas that fell in an acceptable to good range (α = .73 to .88).

EIPQ. The enduring and widely used nature of the EIPQ is supported by the strong validity and consistency of the measure. Cronbach's alphas for both exploration and commitment subscales are good (α = .76 and .75, respectively). Expert raters also administered identity interviews in the original study and demonstrated the construct validity of the measure through agreement at a rate of .83. The EIPQ also demonstrated moderately high test-retest reliability, moderately high internal consistency, and high goodness of fit for all items. Overall, the EIPQ demonstrates the intended goal of aiding researchers in clarifying where participants might fall in their ongoing identity exploration and formation process. For the current research, this measure assisted in conceptualizing where participants fell in the process of exploring and refining their identity at the time of the interview. The EIPQ functionally assisted the current research by assigning participants to one of four ego identity statuses based on whether they scored high or low on the exploration or commitment scales, as described by Balistreri et al. (1995).

Qualitative

Verification Strategies. Creswell and Poth (2018) recommend that qualitative researchers integrate multiple strategies to ensure that data collection and analysis are as trustworthy and valid as possible. One of these strategies, identifying the internal biases of the researcher(s), has already been undertaken and continued to be at the forefront of my investigation when asking questions of the participants. The authors also recommend that qualitative researchers integrate multiple forms of data collection to corroborate findings. This was achieved through the integration and analysis of the Multi-GIQ and EIPQ to quantitatively

assess for similar themes that were uncovered through the semi-structured interview portion. For example, though not the primary focus of the Multi-GIQ, this measure does contain some items that assess for gender dysphoria (Joel et al., 2013). Thus, qualitative accounts that contain elements of gender/body dysphoria should ideally be corroborated with similar reports on the Multi-GIQ.

To ensure the fair reporting of all evidence garnered in the research process, Creswell and Poth (2018) recommend that researchers remain attentive to and report on elements of disconfirming evidence. While the primary goal of phenomenological research is to remain attentive to areas of interest within participants' narratives, attention to these areas at the exclusion of statements that stand in opposition to the hypothesized relationship may ultimately serve to perpetuate researcher biases (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For example, in the current research, it is hypothesized that gender essentialism may not be wholly representative of trans narratives and may play a role in perpetuating disenfranchised grieving of the cis identity label. Therefore, interviews that support essentialist narratives, in which a participant may have always felt resolved in fitting under the trans umbrella, could be considered disconfirming evidence. Throughout both analysis and reporting, I remained attentive to statements like this in participants' transcripts to ensure that disconfirming statements are represented fairly.

Interpretations of the essence of qualitative information are vulnerable to being unduly influenced by the personal perspectives and/or biases of researchers (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To ensure that data are handled appropriately and ensure the verification and transferability of the results, Creswell and Poth (2018) recommend that researchers employ techniques such as inter-rater verification to support that their codes are minimally influenced by internal biases. With this technique, multiple researchers review the same sets of data to ensure that the coding

of statements and themes are agreed to accurately represent the core tenets of thematic clusters. One challenge of the current research is that collection, analysis, and reporting was primarily done by myself, without the support of a research team. This challenge was addressed by soliciting the support of an auditor to review my statement clustering and themes, based on transcripts of the interviews.

The auditor was provided with all information necessary for data analysis in a way that ensured the ongoing right to confidentiality of the participants. Specific names, locations, and places of work were all changed to protect the identities of participants before surrendering any coding materials to the auditor. Creswell and Poth (2018) recommend that analyses between raters take place in as similar fashion as possible. As such, both myself and the auditor worked from the same table to cluster and create appropriate codes to describe the central themes. After meeting to discuss central findings, the auditor and I collaborated to generate a consistent set of codes for the most prevalent findings from the statement clusters. Creswell and Poth (2018) recommend that these codebooks are created to ensure clarity of inter-rater agreement as well as clear communication of the key findings. This codebook consists of three central features of the most prevalent clusters of statements: (1) an appropriate label (or abbreviation), (2) a brief description of the boundaries of what the code represents, including both inclusion and exclusion criteria, and (3) clear examples of a statement that fits the code, based on participant data. The auditor assisted in refining themes so that each quote was accurately represented by their thematic category.

Analysis Procedure

The current research, analyzed with IPA, closely followed the guidance laid out by Smith et al. (2009) as well as Moustakas (1994, as cited in Creswell & Poth, 2018). As previously

mentioned, this includes identification of the researcher's own experience with the phenomenon and includes clustering significant statements to both textural and structural elements, as well as capturing the essence of what participants have communicated about their experiences.

Quantitative measures may be used as a means of communicating a post-positivist, objective depiction of an experienced reality (O'Cathain et al., 2010). This may be seen as potentially at odds with the social constructivist foundations of the IPA methodology. However, the process of quanitisising a qualitative methodology is a tool to further elucidate details of participants' inner reality and communicate them with greater clarity. Therefore, in the current mixed methodological research, the quantitative measures are used as a feature that further illuminates the richness of the participant's inner experience. Rather than suggesting objectivity in identity development experience or labels, the quantisising measures utilized in the current research are tools to better serve the qualitative analysis.

The analysis procedure involved tape-recorded interviews which were transcribed into written text via a secure, password-protected device and stored on a secure drive that will also be kept in a secure, locked location for 5 years before being destroyed. Transcripts of interviews were transferred to the qualitative research program MAXQDA (VERBI Software, 2021) to aid in organizing transcripts and selecting significant segments before organizing into a single spreadsheet for further refinement and thematic grouping. These clusters were evaluated for common themes and coded as such. While doing so, I paid particular attention to any statement that disconfirmed the central hypotheses. This spreadsheet was organized into an anonymized table to be sent to the auditor, with de-identified transcripts available for more in depth review, as needed. The product of this review was a coherent table of themes with the most prevalent thematic clusters.

Participants' self-reported experiences of gender on the Multi-GIQ and identity exploration on the EIPQ were collected and analyzed for experiences of gender identity and identity exploration status. All findings were compiled and represented on a mixed method matrix in which each participant's pseudonym was presented in distinct rows and the areas of interest (including prevalent themes and questionnaire responses) were represented in distinct columns. Patterns of reporting, including consistent themes across interviews, paradoxical responses, and/or disconfirming evidence were described for both the textural descriptions of the experience and structural descriptions of contexts. Conclusions were then drawn in consideration of the patterns of responses and the clinical implications thereof.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

Participants

For this study, I sampled adults over the age of 18 who spoke English fluently and self-identified with a gender label that falls under the trans umbrella. I recruited participants through posting on my personal Facebook page, on the Queer Exchange Boston, and Halifax Queer Network Facebook group pages, as well as physical recruitment flyers on community resource boards in Keene, New Hampshire and Lowell, Massachusetts. Although I did know one participant personally, they were unaware of the parameters and goals of the research. I took every precaution to ensure that our relationship did not interfere with the fidelity of the interview and analysis processes. The analysis only took place once pseudonyms were assigned, reducing the likelihood of my biases affecting the analysis process.

Due to a heavy influx of interested contacts (over 300 initial emails), participants who did not meet all of the inclusion criteria listed on the recruitment flyer (a trans adult over the age of 18 who spoke English fluently) were not contacted for follow-up. Participants who directly named that they were legal adults whose gender identity fit within the trans umbrella were offered interview times on a first come, first served basis and were required to complete a demographics questionnaire before the scheduled meeting time. Scheduled participants were presented with consent forms and quantitative measures for completion in the initial 30 minutes of the scheduled time. After completion of forms, participants were asked to complete the second phase of data collection; the qualitative interview, which was followed by a brief debriefing phase. Due to the proposed participant range between 3–15 interviews, only the first 15 participants to fully complete the scheduling, self-report surveys, and semi-structured interview process were included in the final analysis and received compensation in the amount of a $25 gift

card. Each participant was given the option of receiving a gift card to Amazon.com if the participant did not state a preference, a gift card to an alternative business upon request, or cash compensation in the event of in-person interviews. Participants selected 12 (80%) virtual gift cards to Amazon.com, one (6%) virtual gift card to Target.com, and two (13%) cash compensations for participants' emotional labor.

Due to a number of inconsistencies in the first interviewee's responses to the interview protocol, their interview was excluded from the analysis. Additionally, as I adjusted to the semi-structured interviewing process, I discovered that my first interviews may have involved some unintentional leading of the interviewees. For example, I would tend to check understanding of the essence of their meaning in real-time such as through phrases like "I am hearing you say that X. Did I get that right?" While this may have solidified my understanding of the participants' core intentions, it produced an experience of the interview process that was not standardized across participants. As a result of this much more active interview style at the beginning of the data collection, initial interviews were evaluated as not being comparable across participants. Due to concerns about potentially leading the participants' responses, the first three interviews were not included in the analysis process.

This resulted in a total of 11 participants in the current mixed methods analysis, including five participants living in the United States at the time of interview, five participants living in Canada, and one in England. These participants ranged in age from 20–47 years and racially identified as 64% White/Caucasian and 36% Black. Ethnically, participants self-identified as 27% White, 18% Non-Hispanic, 18% African American, 18% Métis, and 18% Canadian/Protestant Canadian. Participants self-identified their gender label as falling under trans woman/femme/female (36%), trans man (18%), nonbinary (9%), agender (9%), and

genderqueer (18%), including one (9%) intersex participant who reported that their most accurate label would fall under "Bearded Lady."

Procedure

Participants joined sessions lasting anywhere from 40–75 minutes, either via Zoom or in person based on participant preference and access to confidential interview spaces. Participants were then given more detail about the nature of the study, the expected framework of available time, and all necessary paperwork to be completed and signed before moving to the interview portion. I remained present while participants responded to confidentiality forms and quantitative measures to answer any questions or address concerns. After participants completed the forms, I looked over all forms for completion and then provided an opportunity to ask further questions before initiating the recording for the interview portion.

Semi-structured interviews were held either via Zoom or in person during an agreed-upon appointment time. The qualitative interview portion of the meeting lasted between 20–45 minutes. Interviews were recorded through Zoom and then downloaded with the text transcription. I then individually reviewed each interview and transcript to ensure transcription accuracy. For sessions that took place in person, by participant request, a Zoom session was also used to record and aid transcription, review, and editing to accurately reflect conversations. The use of a secure, physical tape recorder was used for in-person meetings to facilitate accurate transcription when participants were seated farther from the computer that was running the Zoom client.

Due to the semi-structured nature of the interview process, questions were asked in a set sequence, differentially based on how participants responded to each. While all participants were fluent in English, some participants reported that English was not their first language and

occasionally requested clarification around terminology or repetition of key phrases. To preserve the accessibility of the study design, these requests were honored with brief descriptions of key terms or by repeating the entirety of the question, respectively. While this study intended to present terminology as close to current clinical standards of language as possible, many participants expressed some confusion regarding what the researcher meant by "identity disclosure." In these instances, the phrase "coming out" was substituted to reflect the core intention of the question through the accessible avenue of more widespread, popular terminology. Aside from these minor adjustments, which were based on individual participant requests and intended to support accessible engagement across individuals, every effort was made to create as uniform an interview experience as possible across cases. All participants were given the opportunity to debrief and provide feedback about the experience of the study before receiving compensation for their time.

Analysis

During the interview process, I took steps that would lend towards later analyses using IPA steps outlined by both Smith et al. (2009) and Moustakas (1994, as cited in Creswell & Poth, 2018). During interviews, I wrote down reactions, notes, or key phrases that were emphasized as important to the participants. I then transcribed interviews, assisted by technology embedded in my secure Zoom room, and scanned for errors in the process. Then, I immersed myself in the stories told by each participant by reading and rereading transcripts of their responses. In this process of immersing myself in the stories of each participant, I also created lists of initial notes intended to aid the analytic process by highlighting areas of text that stood out as important, including areas such as description and word choice. These comments were used to generate a list of initial, emergent themes based on interpretations of these important text segments. Due to

the volume of text to analyze, MAXQDA (VERBI Software, 2018) aided in the identification of significant segments of text before being compiled into a single spreadsheet. During this process, I used my interpretation of the stories to both capture the essence of participants' experiences and to produce the smallest number of themes possible.

In the process of generating initial themes, I adhered to a process of abstraction in which I grouped emergent themes by type and then created a superordinate theme that captured the essence of each grouping of sub-themes (Smith et al., 2009). The final step in IPA involves looking for commonalities across cases. Given that the sample of the current study is nearly double that recommended by Smith et al. (2009; up to six for IPA), this required analysis of accounts for the large number of themes common across participants. Themes representing a minority of participant accounts (less than three representative segments) were re-examined and either omitted for low applicability across participant accounts or re-grouped into a similar category.

I took steps to adhere to previously described verification methods. While in the early stages of coding and interpretation, I continued to bear in mind my sociocultural blind spots and attempted to account for them at the outset. Throughout the coding, abstraction, and interpretation process, this internal checking remained consistent. I then hired an auditor who is an expert in clinical work with LGBT+ individuals, but who was unfamiliar with the core research questions to analyze my interpretation of core themes and provide feedback as to whether these themes reflect the essence of the participants' accounts. After I generated relevant codes and performed the process of abstraction (Smith et al., 2009) to create categories, I sent a full list of relevant super-ordinate and subthemes (Appendix B) to the auditor for review. The auditor received this information after the initial codes had been sorted into categories and was

not a part of the analysis process. The auditor and I met to discuss each sub and superordinate theme to refine categories to the smallest possible number while still capturing nuances of the identity development process. The auditor and I also met for roughly an hour to review a table containing the text segments contained within each category to evaluate whether some segments would be better sorted into another category, or if a segment required contextualizing information to be added.

I met with this auditor for one hour to receive feedback, asking clarifying questions when necessary to better understand suggestions. This auditor provided specific feedback regarding the use of jargon, adding context to unclear segments through bracketing, and reorganizing specific segments into other thematic categories for better fit. They also suggested renaming one sub-theme under the Presentation category from "Visibility" to "Public Tells" to clarify that this theme reflects unintentional identity disclosures to the public by way of visibly representing gender diversity. This category was re-termed "Public Perception" to preserve the core intent of highlighting identity exploration through public interactions while avoiding undefined colloquialisms. A table of themes defining relevant themes may be found in Appendix C.

Mixing quantitative measures with qualitative IPA also provided support for the reliability and validity of the study design. Participants' responses on the Multi-GIQ and EIPQ consistently aligned with qualitative reports of their gender identity label and ego identity status, respectively. I scored quantitative measures of internal experiences appropriate to the intent and design of the measures. These scores were initially calculated by hand and then sorted into spreadsheets with corresponding pseudonyms to facilitate tracking patterns across cases. The results of these quantitative measures were added to a mixed methods matrix (O'Cathain et al.,

2010; Appendix D) table to visually represent relevant data across the quantitative and qualitative portions of this study.

Results

Gender Identity

Participants were asked to respond to the Multi-GIQ, which represents gender as a multifaceted and dynamic combination of both experience and expression. More specifically, this measure captures several domains of gender such as (1) feelings of alignment with the internal experience of being a woman, man, both, or neither, (2) feelings of contentment with being a woman or a man, (3) feelings of discontent with a female or male body, (4) viewing being a man or woman as performance, and (5) preferring to use masculine or feminine language when interacting with others (Joel et al., 2013). For the current research, only the initial, internal feelings domain was used as a means of quantisising participants' self-described gender identity labels. This was done by listing which of the four categories in the feeling domain participants ranked themselves highest, to represent the strongest feelings of internal alignment at the time of the interview.

Overall, participants' responses were in alignment with subjective identity labels, with four of the 11 participants (33%) Feeling as a Woman and encompassing participants who self-identified as trans woman/femme; three participants (25%) aligning most with Feeling as a Man and reflected this in self-identified labels of being a trans man; two participants (17%) scoring highly on Feeling as Both and both participants self-identified as aligned with the label of Genderqueer; and three labels of Feeling as Neither (25%) being assigned to participants, reflecting identity labels of being Agender and Nonbinary. The participant given the pseudonym Spike self-identified as a trans man and also scored equally as highly for both Feeling as a Man

and Feeling as Neither. Given the aforementioned complexity of gender identity as being a nuanced conversation of both experience and expression, this complexity of Spike's experience was honored through the labeling of both categories. Nevertheless, all participants responded to the Multi-GIQ in a way that was consistent with their subjective gender identity labels.

Identity Status

Participants responded to the EIPQ to assess where they might currently be in relation to the identity development process. Consistent with guidance from Balisteri et al. (1995), participants who fell below the median were classified as Low, leaving those at or above the median with the Exploration or Commitment scales to be considered High. This categorization scheme results in a possible label in identity Achievement (High Exploration, High Commitment), Foreclosure (Low Exploration, High Commitment), Moratorium (High Exploration, Low Commitment), or Diffusion (Low Exploration, Low Commitment) status. Of the 11 participants analyzed in this study, four participants (36%) fell into the identity Foreclosure status, three participants (27%) in identity Achievement, three participants (27%) in identity Moratorium, and one (9%) in Diffusion.

Experiential Themes

Five core themes emerged from the qualitative portion of this study: (a) Introspection, (b) Social Environment, (c) Queer Identity and Education, (d) Marginalization, and (e) Presentation. Each of these themes was broken down into relevant sub-themes to better illustrate the significant factors of participants' identity exploration process. A brief breakdown of how these sub-themes connect to larger categories may be found in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1

Experiential Themes

Superordinate Themes	Introspection	Social Environment	Queer Identity and Education	Marginalization	Presentation
Sub-Themes	Acknowledgment of Emotional Labor	Family	Disclosure as Empowering	Discrimination	Desire to Present Comfortably
	Internal Identity Exploration	Medical Systems	Sexual Identity	Dysphoria	Taking on Emotional Labor
	Metacognition	Exploration of Role in Society	Terminology	Ostracization	Public Perception
	Loss of Potential Experiences	Peers		Safety	

Each thematic category contains at least three representative segments of interviews that align with the core facet of the category. Table 4.2 provides a brief summary of each category and a representative segment contained within each.

Table 4.2

Categories, Emergent Themes, and Raw Text Segment

Category	Emergent Theme	Text Segment
Introspection		
	Acknowledgement of Emotional Labor	I'm in a position where I'm alone in a small space. The people that I don't know as part of my job and it is just easier to avoid conflict.
	Internal Identity Exploration	There was a lot of relief that happened. I don't know that I realized how damaging it was for me to be trying to fit into a box that I didn't fit in.
	Metacognition	I really felt that I needed to do it without any outside influence because I wanted to make sure that I was correct and I wasn't being persuaded by other people to do this.
	Loss of Potential Experiences	For me, I feel a lot of grief around … what could have been if I had an environment that allowed me to recognize these things of myself earlier.
Social Environment		
	Family	[Mom] was the one to explain everything to my dad, so my dad always felt mad about me [being trans].
	Medical Systems	I finally got top surgery at the end of April, which was amazing. Very, very affirming.
	Exploration of Role in Society	I always yield to the acceptance point, because maybe I want to feel accepted … accepted by other women.
	Peers	my friends; females. I… I reached out to them a lot, and they have been so supportive, and they've got my back.
Queer Identity and Education	Disclosure as Empowering	I think that argument with him was when I really put my foot down and said, I'm not being delusional. This is how I feel and I'm actually trans.
	Sexual Identity	I thought maybe it would be a fetish thing or something to that effect, and the first time I was dressed as a … as a woman. I realized that I felt like I belonged in my body.
	Terminology	as the Internet inevitably gives us all the terms and ... and introduce … introduces us to other people in the world. And kind of, you know, I … I think that's probably played a large role in bringing whole communities together.
	Terminology	as the Internet inevitably gives us all the terms and ... and introduce … introduces us to other people in the world. And kind of, you know, I … I think that's probably played a large role in bringing whole communities together.

Category	Emergent Theme	Text Segment
Marginalization		
	Discrimination	But when a doctor picks up your file or looks at you and it Says 'trans' on it, sometimes they don't treat you as well.
	Dysphoria	it is always with great sadness to conceal. Feels like lying, feels like lying to a loved one. Because really it is, it's lying to yourself.
	Ostracization	High school was very homophobic, very transphobic. Aggressively so. So, that was an obvious, like, social barrier.
	Safety	If [disclosing] is something that will actively put me in danger, there's no way I'll talk about it.
	Safety	If [disclosing] is something that will actively put me in danger, there's no way I'll talk about it.
Presentation		
	Desire to Present Comfortably	I preferred female clothing and I didn't feel comfortable being male.
	Taking on Emotional Labor	But I would rather have had that sort of like slow story and pain than to just kind of almost like break apart my family like that.
	Public Perception	I had to go home and be kind of like "A young man over there? But I'm a girl. So, I'm … that's a trans person?"

Introspection

The first and largest theme contains elements of the identity exploration narrative that are contained within the self, including internal monitoring of thoughts, feelings, emotions, and perspectives. These can include factors that can either support or limit the identity exploration and resolution narrative, including recognition of how one internally responds to both externally present and internally imagined scenarios regarding what might happen if they were to disclose trans identity publicly. For example, participants represented elements of self-concealment that were seated in an acknowledgment that they would be likely to be coerced into taking on emotional labor as a result of trans identity disclosure.

August: Because then [disclosing trans identity] opens up a lot of questions, some of which are not appropriate because people don't seem to know, like, the limit of what they can ask about.

Fen: I'm in a position where I'm alone in a small space. The people that I don't know as part of my job and it is just easier to avoid conflict.

Participants also described noticing emotional harm from being expected or instructed to conceal their authenticity, as well as the reverse; a feeling of joy from being able to interact through the lens of deep internal identity exploration and self-understanding:

Fen: I realized how damaging it was for me to be trying to fit into a box that I didn't fit in.

Courtney: I'm running to this person. I'm trying to become this person as fast as I can because I just … I'm happy as this person.

Participants evidenced consistent themes of metacognitively controlling their thoughts or patterns of thinking for multiple purposes including avoidance of dwelling on unpleasant feelings related to self-acceptance:

Ave: I'm not usually like … reflective about the experience. I live the experience, and then I move through it as I move through it, and I don't think a lot about how I've moved through it.

Some participants also report a desire to anticipate pushback and self-protect through mental checking:

Otis: I was going through the early parts of my transition. I really felt that I needed to do it without any outside influence because I wanted to make sure that I was correct and I wasn't being persuaded by other people to do this.

Several participants resonated with applying terminology consistent with grief to their identity

exploration narrative. These tended to be consistent with a feeling that a version of themself was

lost within the genesis of their authentic self, or that opportunities were lost by not being able to

discover trans identity earlier in life. Rather than grieving a former version of self or of cis

identity label, they tended to grieve this potential self.

> Fen: For me, I feel a lot of grief around … what could have been if I had an environment
>
> that allowed me to recognize these things of myself earlier.
>
> Otis: destroying another person by becoming Otis, becoming myself did feel like a
>
> burden that I would have to bear, and then I didn't want other people to bear that as well.
>
> Ave: My jewelry box is a memorial, in a lot of ways, to that person. Because there are
>
> some very, like, beautiful feminine pieces that are laid to rest there that are just probably
>
> not coming out . . . She was here. She came through. This is … this is the graveyard for
>
> that person.

Participants' introspection consistently identified their internal worlds as being discordant with

how they are received, and their reactions to this discordance may vary across their lifespan and

contexts.

Social Environment

The second theme reflects gender as being both an internal experience and a contextual,

social conversation. Participants identified various spheres of social influence that directly

impact both their ability to explore or resolve to use a trans identity label and their ability to

disclose identity across contexts. These environments tend to be reported as starting with the

family environment and can reflect both interpersonal tensions and support. In so doing, families

can either present trans individuals with unique difficulty in or ease of self-acceptance, respectively:

> Spike: [Mom] was the one to explain everything to my dad, so my dad always felt mad about me [being trans].

> Alice: [I] grew up in a rural area and I was lucky enough to have an accepting family and accepting friends and an accepting community.

> Otis: Looking back, I wish that I … not that I didn't come out, but I wish that I never had had to come out to [my family], and they had always known.

Some participants also identified themes of seeking internal resolution with the assistance of medical systems designed to provide gender-affirming care:

> Fen: I finally got top surgery at the end of April, which was amazing. Very, very affirming. Definitely, in this place of being in a much better … better place than I was prior to that. It changed my relationship with my body.

> Taylor: I've been thinking about taking some surgeries to change some parts.

> Ave: Medicalization is not central to trans experiences. But, when it's … when it's not, it's because I'm … I'm not trans, I'm intersex … Or, I'm not trans, I'm just existing.

Several participants also identified significant themes of considering, or re-considering, their role within society after publicly disclosing trans identity. Some participants identified common themes of craving a feeling of acceptance or waiting to disclose until they had moved to a social setting that seemed to be more accepting of diverse identities.

> Amelia: I always yield to the acceptance point, because maybe I want to feel accepted … accepted by other women.

Lexi: I'll give you some of when I first stepped out into college, you know. You know, that fear of rejection.

Fen: It's still a part of that environment that had taught me hate in the first place. And I just couldn't really fathom a world where I came out as trans and where they would be accepting. Not because they had ever given me any signs that they would be hateful.

Other participants report feeling more accepted and encouraged to continue identity exploration after disclosing their trans identity.

Courtney: [My experience has been] isolated in a way where there's so much positivity. So much acceptance. So much encouragement. That I haven't experienced much in the way of hate, or anything else, or lack of understanding, or … or any of that yet.

Participants also largely attribute feelings of safety in both exploration and disclosure when discussing themes consistent with close peers, friends, and colleagues:

Lexi: I deserved more, you know, speaking about relationships, [a friend had] given me advice, and I felt like I had more [self-exploration] to do.

Taylor: … my friends; females. I … I reached out to them a lot, and they have been so supportive, and they've got my back.

August: And so, it kind of has helped to give me language, and I think it helps a lot of us to have like a network of people you know, to identify with that are like you. Having a similar experience to you to kind of validate what you're going through.

Some participants acknowledged issues within the queer community more broadly, in which difficulty in peer acceptance may perpetuate the social stigma surrounding experimentation and limit both exploration and ability to disclose a trans identity label.

August: I think there's a lot of stigma in the community about being gay enough or queer enough for anything to meet. I don't know, like, a standard, I guess, to be allowed to use certain labels.

Many participants identify feelings of being coerced into concealing their trans identity by social expectations across different domains, and feelings of fear, shame, or sadness associated thereto. Conversely, participants consistently report a sense of safety and gratitude towards social domains that have treated them with warmth, support, and encouragement to both explore and disclose their authentic identity.

Queer Identity and Education

The third theme encompasses aspects of the identity exploration process that were either hindered or supported by access to members of the queer community directly, or education regarding diverse identity labels more generally. For example, several participants expressed either initial or ongoing confusion related to whether their internal experience reflected diverse gender or sexual identity:

Courtney: I thought maybe it would be a fetish thing or something to that effect, and the first time I was dressed as a … as a woman. I realized that I felt like I belonged in my body.

August: It's kind of all wrapped up in my whole queer identity, which has been sort of a big question mark over time, and it's kind of been building on that, I guess, but not really subscribing to labels.

Ave: I'm a person who has an AFAB body that grows beard, and that positions me as queer, and I've got to decide what to do about it.

Participants also represent themes of recognizing an internal feeling of discordance, but not being able to put words to the feeling until the experience was normalized through engagement with similar others (either online or in person):

> August: as the Internet inevitably gives us all the terms and . . . and introduce . . . introduces us to other people in the world. And kind of, you know, I . . . I think that's probably played a large role in bringing whole communities together.

> Spike: I will say that when a trans person is, let me say, a kind of natural thing that can happen to anybody.

> Fen: It's definitely something that I internally fumble through. I listen to other people's experiences and try to follow through my own experience.

Some participants identified participation in public disclosure as an essential facet of their resolution process and being experienced as solidifying or empowering.

> Otis: I think that argument with him was when I really put my foot down and said, I'm not being delusional. This is how I feel and I'm actually trans.

> Courtney: I would say it was within like 2 months that I was talking to some of my closer friends as a woman. Using the feminine pronouns, using the name that I wanted to use. And they were all very accepting of it, and very encouraging.

Participants' engagement with existing terminology, discourse, or similar others in person or online are consistently represented as essential pieces of discovering, exploring, and resolving to use a trans identity label. Many participants reported sentiments that they were previously unaware that there were already terms to accurately describe their internal feelings. Therefore, the discovery that they were not alone in their experience and that there were already ways of

describing their internal reality was an essential piece of helping them to resolve that they fit within the trans umbrella and to resolve dysphoric feelings within themselves.

Marginalization

The fourth theme, marginalization, reflects how fears of, direct experiences of, or witnessing of the ongoing marginalization of gender-diverse individuals impact both interest or ability in disclosing trans identity to others and in feeling free to engage in gender identity exploration overall. Participants consistently expressed concerns regarding discrimination based on disclosure of their gender identity:

> Alice: especially in rural areas … when it comes to medical issues. Being a trans person … I still … still get the common cold. I still get a yeast infection. I still break my nose like, just like anyone else. But when a doctor picks up your file or looks at you and it says 'trans' on it, sometimes they don't treat you as well.

> Ave: I got called a dyke a lot which has got to do something to your little brain to be aligned with masculinity in that way right from the get-go.

Notably, Black trans participants tended to report concerns regarding how their experience of their racial identity has impacted their gender identity development through pressure to conceal within the Black community as well as racially motivated confrontations with White members of the queer community:

> Taylor: It's just a very new thing, and there's under-representation, in the Black community, and there's a stigma around those kinds of situations that happen and make people not t-talk about it.

> Spike: And she, that one was kind of saying, who is that … that black monkey? I … I … I feel very bad. That is the reason I say telling people my real gender and I'm a trans

person, that it might bring a kind of discrimination … discrimination between me and

other people.

Participants would report negative feelings related to either the expectation or direct solicitation

to conceal a diverse identity label. This dysphoria is sometimes represented as one that was

intense in the past and alleviated over time through open disclosure or self-acceptance, while

also unambiguously linked to subjective experience of gender concealment:

Alice: it is always with great sadness to conceal. Feels like lying, feels like lying to a

loved one. Because really it is, it's lying to yourself.

Taylor: Maybe I'm making mistake or something. Or maybe I'm over-reacting and then

later … later on I discovered that that's not the case

Amelia: Because grieving is going to make you sad, is going to make you, is going to

affect your mental health and your self-esteem like it affected mine.

Similarly, participants consistently identified fears of isolation or social ostracization as being

major factors in their identity exploration process, particularly in their decision to conceal trans

identity, once known:

Taylor: it was not easy trying to accept the facts because of the people around me say I

can't.

Fen: High school was very homophobic, very transphobic. Aggressively so. So, that was

an obvious, like, social barrier. It's definitely created an internal barrier.

Lexi: That fear of rejection, you know, and losing the few friends I had, and, you know,

safety concerns.

In addition to concerns regarding the social and emotional safety of trans identity disclosure, participants consistently endorsed themes related to fear of the physical safety inherent in disclosing trans identity, depending on context.

> Alice: If I'm going into new environments where I am not familiar with the politics, attitudes, or people I will conceal to self-protect, and a lot of cases that's physically protect.

> Marshal: In the moment, all I'm thinking about is literally, like, safety procedures to get out of the situation.

> Otis: If [disclosing] is something that will actively put me in danger, there's no way I'll talk about it, or if [the interaction] is something that will be very short-lived.

Participants describe ongoing experiences or concerns regarding marginalization to be major barriers to internal identity exploration. Additionally, marginalization requires reconsideration of how their evolving understanding of gender fits within the context of multiple other areas of identity. These aspects include how a trans identity label may impact racial, professional, and cultural identities.

Presentation

Finally, the theme of presentation represents those aspects of gender identity exploration, resolution, and disclosure that occur with members of the general public, who may not have a direct connection to the individual. This includes acts of disclosures through unintentional visibility that impacts the perceptions of and interactions with the general public:

> Ave: I had to go home and be kind of like "A young man over there? But I'm a girl. So, I'm … that's a trans person?"

Participants generally report a desire to intentionally disclose their gender identity through implicit means, such as style of dress, in a way which was more comfortable in aligning with their internal gender identity:

> Amelia: I preferred female clothing and I didn't feel comfortable being male. And also I didn't feel comfortable wearing male clothing. So that's how it started.

> Marshal: Now that I look more outwardly masculine, it makes me feel more attached to my gender to look outwardly masculine with stubble.

> Ave: … experimenting with your expression, and, like, going out. Being a little freak is part of the whole experience. So, I just always yeah explored it that way, like, I just be out working here until I find the right weird.

Many participants also report feeling a desire to connect more with themselves and others through volunteering to take on emotional labor. This may have been through acts of supportive outreach, particularly as a means of providing social support to others within the trans community, or through accepting emotional burdens to ease or spare pain for others:

> Alice: It just was. As soon as I got handed the label, I was trans. I was under the umbrella. That was okay. Go because you have to go help other people.

> Otis: But I would rather have had that sort of like slow story and pain than to just kind of almost like break apart my family like that.

> Ave: I did not want to make the very sweet but not very complex people in my community have to think too hard about it.

Participants tended to report an awareness that the disclosure of a trans identity label would impact both them as individuals and the structure of their social contexts. Themes of outwardly presenting in line with internal experiences tended to reflect feelings of relief or joy and themes

of concealment (or disclosure on a more protracted timeline than desired) were consistent with themes of emotional burden or pain identified in earlier sections. This domain illustrates more of the complexity in access to identity disclosure. That is, many participants report reticence to disclose, intentionally or unintentionally, as a means of sparing others the emotional labor of reconfiguring an aspect of their social environment.

Relationships Among Themes

Appendix D summarizes relevant identity labels and themes to further highlight shared patterns amongst participants as well as those that are shared uniquely amongst specific demographics. For example, Black participants report experiences of the Black community uniquely limiting opportunity or willingness to engage in open exploration of gender. Additionally, all Black participants fell within the identity foreclosure stage of the developmental process, which reflects an identity label that is committed to with limited (if any) exploration. In this way, both the quantitative and qualitative portions of the data analysis reflect themes of limited exploration in the context of Black trans identity, specifically.

One commonality amongst all participants is the importance of a sense of community in the identity exploration and resolution process. This was a surprising shift from the initial assumptions underlying the structure of the research, which assumed gender identity development to be a primarily intrapersonal process that can look different depending on social context. Rather, participants overwhelmingly identify a process of evaluating interpersonal relationships in the context of the shift in internal understanding. For some, this looked like a consistent feeling of connection and support from close, biological family members. In these instances, participants also tended to score in the identity achievement phase on the EIPQ. Participants reporting ongoing difficulties in accessing interpersonal support (internally or

externally) also tended to present with an identity exploration label characterized by low commitment (moratorium and diffusion). It should also be noted that participants with narratives that were consistent with early and ongoing interpersonal strain, but in finding community later on in their identity resolution process (either by explaining their identity to initially hostile family or by finding strong community through queer social spheres) tended to also have identity labels characterized by low commitment (moratorium and diffusion).

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

The current study used a primarily IPA-based, mixed methodology design to address gaps in the literature regarding trans identity development as distinct from other queer identities. More specifically, this study sought to illuminate how shifts in identity are experienced, explored, and resolved, including whether participants experienced any sense of loss at the change in self-understanding. However, the results of this study show that participants were more likely to focus on the impact of social systems and what it was like to re-evaluate their role within them, which was a welcome surprise in line with a more feminist perspective on human well-being. The results of this study illustrate that, while there is some level of intrapersonal exploration involved in identity development, the majority of identity development processes occurs on the social, interpersonal spheres.

In response to the first research question, regarding whether themes of loss enter into narratives about trans identity formation, findings indicated that, while themes consistent with grief and loss consistently enter into narratives about trans identity formation, the exact nature of the non-death loss varies across participants. Most commonly, participants experienced loss relevant to a sense of safety, community, or belongingness which shifted in some way after the moment of trans identity discovery. Due to past literature regarding self-concealment, disenfranchisement, and the perpetuation of psychological risk factors common in the queer community more broadly (McNutt & Yakushko, 2013), participants were asked both about how or if grief entered into their self-explorations as well as whether and how self-concealment might relate to experiences of grief. Participants typically report grieving non-death losses of previously held conceptions of safety, community, and belongingness related to how they experience or imagine their individual sociocultural contexts' acceptance of trans people.

Through the investigation of common themes, I hoped to provide insight into the specific mechanisms that perpetuate cycles of self-concealment, grief, and disenfranchisement. By clearly understanding these mechanisms, clinicians may be able to interrupt these cycles of grieving the non-death loss more effectively, or at earlier opportunities, to better serve the needs of this vulnerable population.

Trans Identity Formation and Gender Essentialism

Gender essentialism posits that one's gender identity is relatively fixed from birth, resulting in the assertion that trans people must have a deeply held sense of discordance with the gender assigned at birth from a young age (Iafrate, 2020). Participants in this study report several different entry points to first discovering that a trans identity label might fit for them, including interactions with trans people in their community as adults, encountering terminology describing their internal experiences as adolescents, and feeling deeply resonant with a gender identity other than the one assigned to them since they were young children. While some participants report experiences aligned with gender essentialism, such as feeling dysphoric with a cis label from a young age (Iafrate, 2020), others report ambivalence about the gender they were assigned at birth, or even enjoying aspects of exploring/presenting as the gender they were assigned at birth. Some participants directly expressed disdain for the medicalization of trans identity being used as a marker of validity. Others report feeling as though supportive medical systems including surgeries, hormone replacement, and psychotherapy are essential components of their identity exploration and resolution process.

Overall, these results challenge essentialism, given that a gender essentialist framework that assumes that trans identity will be known since childhood, fits the stories of some, but not all, trans identity exploration narratives. Those who report not knowing they held a trans identity

since early childhood tended to report this as a barrier to identity exploration, resolution, and disclosure. As a result, they also typically report themes of grieving lost time or experiences that they were not able to have due to difficulty in openly exploring, accepting, or expressing themselves openly. This may put trans individuals whose stories do not fit with gender essentialism at an increased risk of disenfranchised grief, given that the driving force behind disenfranchised grieving lies in not being able to openly explore feelings (Corr, 1999). Therefore, the current study suggests that trans perspectives in disenfranchised grieving may be informed by gender essentialism, based on the degree to which a trans individual's identity formation fits within an essentialist framework.

Some participants' experiences also further illuminate the importance of considering identity formation in the context of external factors. For example, several participants report an intentional delaying of gender identity exploration until finding a social context (such as going to college or moving cities) that would be more likely to be accepting of diverse gender identities. The unsafe and discriminatory structures of different social contexts were occasionally expressed directly by use of slurs, threats, or demands from their immediate social circles, but also occurred in the context of an implied non-acceptance of queer identities. For example, participants from historically rural areas report an instinctual drive to self-conceal their queer identity due to a sense of quiet disapproval from their environment as a whole, rather than explicit statements of rejection.

These results hint at the importance of considering how environmental factors such as implicit, cultural messages may impact trans people's openness to gender identity exploration or disclosure, both internally and externally. These results are also consistent with past literature regarding models of gender minority stress and resilience; that is, trans and gender

nonconforming individuals may be at an increased risk of depression, anxiety, and suicide due to both internal (e.g., internalized transphobia, thwarted belongingness, and identity non-disclosure) and external (e.g., interpersonal rejection, discrimination, and non-affirmation) factors (Testa at al., 2015). However, Testa et al. (2015) also suggest that trans individuals may have the opportunity for unique resilience in the face of this minority stress. Connection to pride and community support are strong influences on trans individuals' access to resilience in the face of gender minority stress. This element may also be relevant to the ways in which self-concealment may limit opportunity for authentic connection with other members of the community, and impact feelings of grief in the face of limited connection to self as well as to others.

Grief and Self-Concealment

While explorations of grief in trans identity exploration and resolution yield inconsistent patterns relevant to grief of self-identity, participants consistently report grief of external factors such as senses of safety, community, belongingness, experience, and time that was lost by not being able to explore or express identity openly. Whether themes of self-concealment, gender essentialism, and ego identity status naturally arose from participants' exploration of grief also depended on the individual context of the participants. For example, those participants whose stories did not fit with a gender essentialist framework tended to report the idea of self-concealment with neutrality or, occasionally, positivity for how concealment can protect them across social contexts. Those whose ego identity status reflected low commitment (diffusion and moratorium) also tended to present fewer themes of grief and occasional responsibility to self-conceal as a means of sparing others the emotional labor of having to reconfigure an aspect of their social environment.

However, those with ego identity statuses marked by high commitment (foreclosure and achievement) tend to report experiences of grief related to self-concealment. These participants who present as being high in identity commitment also tended to present with stories that fit a gender essentialist framework, in which they knew from early childhood that their gender did not fit the one assigned to them at birth. Themes of self-concealment and gender essentialism most often tended to arise in participants' exploration of grief when ego identity status was consistent with a label that is high in identity commitment. Those who feel firmly connected to a trans identity label, particularly if they have felt this way from a young age, tend to feel grief in situations that require them to conceal their gender identity. The loss of this connection to self that is implicated in concealment, regardless of the necessity of the concealment given the circumstance, can result in feelings of grief for those who have committed to their trans identity.

The pattern of results observed when answering the third research question (i.e., will themes of self-concealment, ego identity status, and gender essentialism naturally arise in trans participants' exploration of grief?) is also relevant in consideration of the fourth (i.e., do trans participants believe that self-concealment, ego identity status, and gender essentialism are all related to grief?). Participants who reported as being high in identity commitment consistently believed that their self-concealment was related to grief. By contrast, those participants low in identity commitment also tended to have stories that fall outside of a gender essentialist framework. For these participants, gender essentialism or, more precisely, feeling disallowed access to the trans community due to experiencing gender outside of this framework, was related to grief. No participant directly attributed their ego identity status to their experience of grief, though common patterns among themes suggest that experiences of grief may have a different relationship to gender essentialism and self-concealment based on ego identity status. Those

individuals who are not yet committed to a specific identity label may not experience grief

related to concealing their gender, and also may not have stories that fit within the framework of

gender essentialism. These results suggest that the loss of connection to self may be related to

experiences of self-concealment for those who have committed to a trans identity label.

Participants report mixed experiences with whether they believe that grief is related to

self-concealment. While many participants report experiences consistent with grief, loss, or

sadness in contexts that either coerced or required them to engage in the concealment of their

gender identity, others report distress related to a loss of interpersonal connection more so than a

loss of aspects of the self. For example, many participants report adverse experiences in the

initial stages of trans identity disclosure that changed the nature of their connection to primary

support networks or their understanding of how they fit within their social context. This

consideration of one's place within their social context seems to be a major motivating factor in

self-concealment and a factor in experiences consistent with grief. Still, participants

inconsistently report a feeling that grief and self-concealment are directly related. Therefore,

feelings of grief related to self-concealment may more often be in reaction to a loss of social

connection with others rather than disconnection from the self as a result of identity

concealment.

Summary

Overall, the results of this study suggest that the gender essentialist framework may

present a unique barrier to identity exploration and resolution, resulting in unique experiences of

grief for those whose stories are not commensurate with gender essentialism. While participants

consistently report some form of loss inherent in the identity exploration and resolution process,

those who do not fit with gender essentialism do not tend to believe that there is a strong

connection between self-concealment of gender identity and feelings of grief. These participants whose stories do not fit within gender essentialism also tended to present as having identity labels marked by low identity commitment. Those with ego identity statuses marked by high commitment also tended to have stories that fit an essentialist framework. These participants did tend to endorse feelings of grief related to self-concealment. This supports the complex impact of a gender-essentialist narrative framework on trans individuals' identity development and resolution. That is, gender essentialism may support identity commitment for those people who knew they did not align with their assigned gender from a young age, resulting in grief in contexts requiring self-concealment. By contrast, those who discover and explore a trans identity label later in life may both not feel as committed to their identity label and not experience grief related to concealing authentic identity across different contexts. These findings suggest that grief is associated with self-concealment among those that have committed to a trans identity label.

The results of this mixed methods analysis also suggest an inverse relationship between experiences consistent with grief and factors supporting personal autonomy and expression, such as consistent connection to social supports, access to affirming medical and mental health care, and the ability to publicly present in alignment with internal comfort. For example, one participant, in the early stages of identity discovery, exploration, and disclosure at the time of the interview, reported that she had not experienced circumstances in which she felt forced or unsafe to disclose her gender identity publicly. Rather, she expressed concern for the experience of her children in disclosing having a parent with a trans identity and actively initiating conversations with them about the context in which they would feel comfortable with her disclosing her gender through words or presentation. Other than circumstances in which she

might conceal to make other people more comfortable, she felt no need to conceal her identity in any context and reported improved relationships at home, at work, and with the larger community because of disclosing her trans identity with others. This is unique amongst this sample of participants since all others report circumstances in which they have felt, or currently feel, pressured to conceal in some way. This suggests that this participant's story may uniquely represent protective factors of trans identity resolution such as autonomy, safety, connection to family/community, or perceived role in society that are beyond the scope of the current study. These results may support that these factors have uniquely protected this participant from experiences of grief within the trans identity development process.

Clinical Implications

The trans community may be served in shifting understanding of identity exploration from one of purely internal identity factors to an exploration of self in the context of community and environment. Beyond the core questions guiding this research, the results of this study additionally reveal the importance of considering community and cultural context as core facets of the identity development process. The questions formed, based on the GRI (Remondet & Hansson, 1987), were framed in the context of internal experience while intentionally opening to leave space for disconfirming evidence. Within this framework, participants overwhelmingly named factors such as family, peers, environment, culture, and location as being essential in the discovery, exploration, and resolution of their trans identity. Similarly, consistent with the findings of Collings (2007), participants report a sense of loss regarding who they might have been if a moment of discovery had never happened or had happened at an earlier point in their lives.

Participants volunteered an awareness of how the shift in their gender identity label might have an impact on those around them and navigating choices for how to spare or mitigate the potential for negative impact this could have on themselves as well as their community. Occasionally, this internal negotiation results in a reliance on peer support, and particularly on peers who demonstrate warmth, encouragement, and advocacy. This is particularly important in the context of the queer community (more broadly), since several participants also report experiences of gatekeeping, or the practice of individuals within a community forming internal rules regarding whose access to these identity labels is regarded as valid or invalid (PFLAG, 2024). While gatekeeping, as a concept, is a nuanced process often reflecting perceived power (im)balances within a community, and is beyond the scope of the current research, several participants reported a sense of loss in wanting a supportive community of similar others but feeling thwarted by acts of discrimination from within the queer community.

To further illustrate the impact of interpersonal factors on trans identity development, Figure 5.1 (Word Cloud Maker, 2024) was generated by compiling how many representative segments fell within each thematic category such that the relative size of each theme represents how often a segment fell within that category.

Figure 5.1

Theme Incidence by Relative Font Size

Represented another way, Figure 5.2 (Canva, 2024) depicts this relationship through use of relatively sized bubbles, separated by each of the five overall categories. Both figures clearly illustrate the importance of both intra and interpersonal exploration on trans identity development, as represented by the largest bubbles or fonts falling within the Introspection category, but more numerous fonts or bubbles representing multifaceted, interpersonal domains of interaction.

Figure 5.2

Concept Web of Relevant Themes
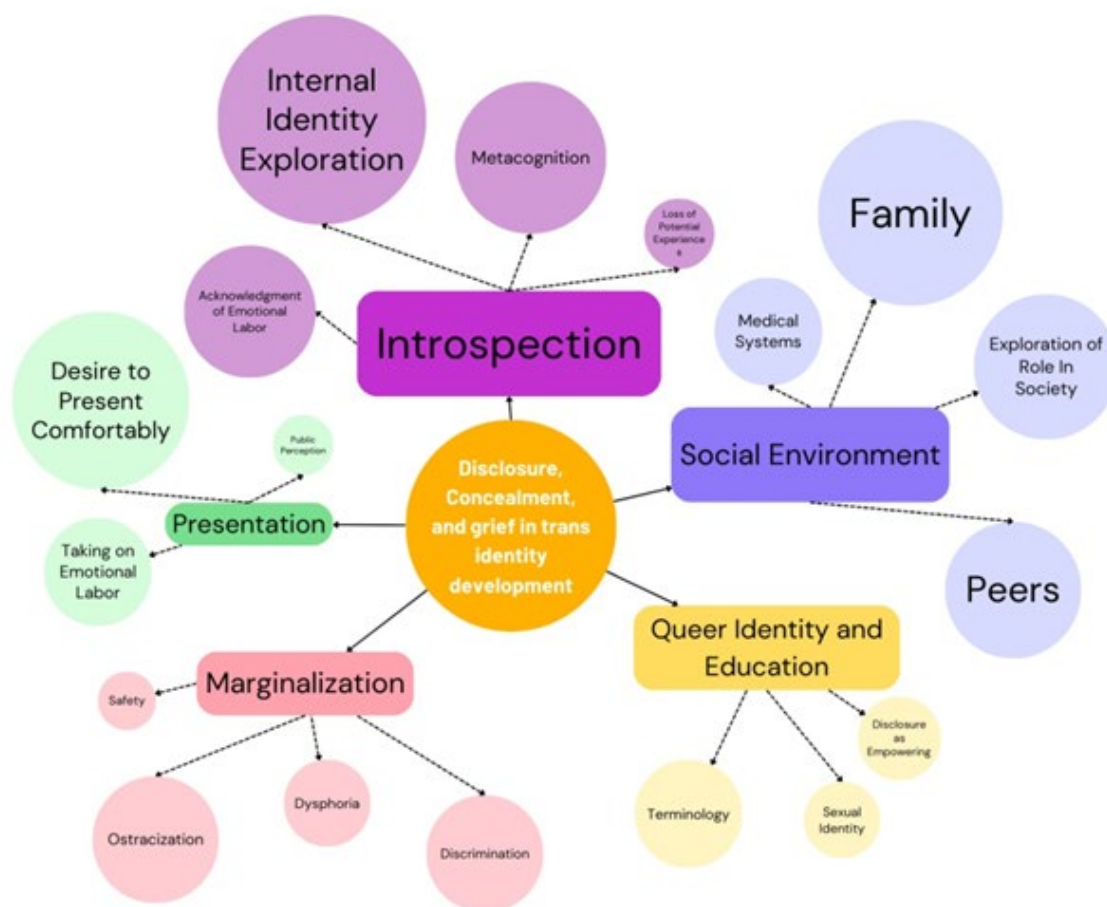
Given how little is currently known about the transgender identity development process in general, the results of this study may provide insight into opportunities to better serve the trans community. For example, this study was designed with an individualistic assumption that participants would report individual, internal experiences which may differ depending on social context. Whereas the results illuminate that, while internal processes are certainly a piece of trans identity development, a majority of topics tended to surround re-examining aspects of social context in consideration of a shift in identity labels, concerns about social supports predominate interview responses. While some participants do acknowledge dysphoric, grieving feelings

related to self-concealment, which may be consistent with disenfranchised grieving, participants consistently report community and systemic factors as being essential to the resolution of their identity exploration process. The support, encouragement, or even neutrality of close others seems to uniquely be associated with a greater sense of connection, wellbeing, and achieved ego identity status. Conversely, those participants who experience instances of direct or imagined marginalization report feeling both more persistent feelings of sadness or loss, in addition to reticence to engage in open identity exploration. This was true whether participants' stories fit within a gender essentialist framework (knowing from a young age and feeling relief at the discovery of trans identity) or not. This suggests that participants may benefit from a clear understanding of self in relation to their role in their sociocultural context as a means of resolving issues with sadness, isolation, self-esteem, and grief.

The results of these data also suggest the high importance of early intervention and encouragement on supporting trans individuals' simultaneous identity resolution, access to identity disclosure, and wellbeing overall. That is, participants who report confusion, rejection, or lack of safety in identity exploration and disclosure around the time of trans identity discovery also report feeling experiences of grief related to systemic disenfranchisement. By contrast, those participants who report living in contexts of open support and acceptance from family, peers, and systems such as career or medical support also offered consistent themes of experienced and expressed warmth, gratitude, and wellbeing.

 One participant who illustrates the overall trend in the data as an exception that proves the rule is the case of Courtney. Courney's story is unique amongst participants in the notable absence of grieving. She reports that her career connected her to a gender-affirming therapist, that she has easy access to peer support to help her explore identity disclosure both verbally and

through public presentation, and that her family is largely accepting albeit in the process of adjusting their conceptions of her. She reports feeling as though she is "running towards this person" as quickly as she can, and is filled with experiences of joy, excitement, gratitude, and love for self and others. Courtney's story is unique amongst this sample for both experiencing perceived universal support and for reporting no personal connection to grief whatsoever. She also reports being within the identity moratorium stage, despite subjectively feeling committed to her identity label. Given trends in the data, this may be reflective of Courtney's recent (a few months prior) discovery of trans identity at the time of the interview, leaving room to explore how her role might be experienced in more contexts (such as a music festival she was excited to attend).

Based on the nature of this study design, the causality of factors cannot be inferred. However, clinicians may make tangible use of these themes to consider treatments or policies aimed at creating systems of support to better serve the trans community. These programs or policies might be aimed at providing encouragement for exploring the multifaceted nature of gender in a safe way. This may include fostering emotional safety through normalization of the exploration process, interpersonal safety through avenues of gender presentation or visibility, and physical safety by creating structures that will protect clients' anonymity firmly unless or until the individual is safe to disclose their identity to valued others.

Limitations

There were several limitations to the current research. First, the limited size of the participant pool, while necessary given the complexity of the study design, limited the transferability of the results. Most notably, the quantitative measures are typically used with larger samples and the EIPQ, in particular, is a measure that was normed on a significantly larger

sample of participants, with typical results being based on a comparison of scores among much larger sample sizes (within the hundreds). There is no standardized score denoting high or low exploration and commitment that might be applied to a single administration of the measure. Though the results of the current study seem to align with participants' subjective reports of identity resolution, it is possible that ego identity labels may have shifted with a different, or larger, sample. That said, the standardized measures were used in an exploratory fashion, such that their typical, quantitative use was not the intended use.

Another significant consideration is the way in which focus on self or others may shift over the course of the development process. Researchers such as Nourkova and Ivanova (2017) suggest that individuals who have recently undergone affirming care tend to have vivid, self-focused, and often negative memories associated with childhood. By contrast, those who experience more events or circumstances that deeply affirm trans identity also tend to report life timelines with more self-continuity and positive memories associated with their life pre-transition. The authors suggest that this may point to two distinct stages of the trans identity development process, in which focus on the self in the present moment, and derogated from the experiences of the past, necessarily precedes a deeply affirmed sense of self that makes space for positive experiences and self-consistency across the life span (Nourkova & Ivanova, 2017). Since the current study solicited the participation of individuals who report feeling resolved in their identity label, these results may have missed trans individuals who are in the former, discontinuous, self-focused stage of the trans identity development process.

The current study also was designed with conceptions of grief, self-concealment, and disenfranchisement at the center, while reliant on participants' subjective stories to provide nuance to how (or if) they had experiences that are consistent with these feelings. While some

contextualizing information was collected from participants, none of the questions specifically addressed how experiences of gender identity might be impacted by the intersection of socioeconomic status (current or past), sexual identity, or race (to name a few). While the intention of this narrowed focus was to allow the most prescient themes to emerge on their own, it is likely that opportunities for greater richness were missed by the omission of these aspects of self-understanding. Indeed, Logie and Rwigema (2014) address how White privilege may foundationally restrict both conceptions of and access to social constructs of gender for BIPOC people. For example, the authors support that modern gender identification and affirming systems are based on assumptions that womanhood is "white, passive, and feminine, therefore relegating women of color—particularly [Masculine of Center] women—as outside of these systems" (Logie & Rwigema, 2014, p. 189). This is also consistent with the work of Rood et al. (2017) who suggest that social messaging may result in internalized transphobia which impacts BIPOC trans and gender nonconforming people differentially. Future studies regarding grief and identity development may benefit from continuing to investigate how the experiences of BIPOC trans individuals may qualitatively differ from the White trans experience.

Conclusion

The current study builds on existing literature regarding psychosocial risk factors of the LGBT+ community by focusing on the trans community, specifically (Konik & Stewart, 2004). The design was constructed to support an understanding of trans identity development to discern which factors may be predominantly responsible for the perpetuation of distress, isolation, and negative mental health outcomes. With a nuanced understanding of which factors may impact trans clients uniquely, clinicians may be empowered to provide care specifically targeted at supporting the identity exploration process of trans clients while mitigating risk factors as much

as possible. The responses of participants inconsistently reflect a gender essentialist framework, in which some (but not all) participants felt limited in their ability to fully explore or disclose their identity based on not knowing they were trans from a young age. These participants' stories did not fit a gender essentialist framework, which presented barriers to gender identity exploration both internally and externally. Similarly, some participants did resonate with this framework, yet still felt a sense of sadness or loss from the expectation or need to conceal their gender in different contexts. More common themes amongst participants are related to experiences of either ostracization or support from significant social spheres.

Indeed, while the results of the current study suggest several contextual factors related to experiences of grief for self, others, and community, many themes emerged that illustrate unique opportunities for empowerment, joy, and authentic connection. These results are in alignment with both Collings (2007) and Konik and Stewart (2004). That is, participants occasionally report a sense of loss related to the life they had expected to lead before the discovery of trans identity, in addition to many other conceptual losses such as the loss of a sense of safety, trust, and the unconditional positive regard of their communities. This supports Collings (2007) assertion that grieving may be experienced in the context of a total shift in understanding of relationship to self, others, and self in relation to others. Conversely, many participants identified as being in the achievement stage of identity development also present with themes relevant to consistency of self and community regardless of shift in identity label.

Those participants who report consistent presence of valued activities, interests, or other people also tend to report more positive or joyful experiences related to gender identity exploration, resolution, and disclosure. This may also align with Konik and Stewart's (2004) conclusions regarding queer resilience, in that, despite initial distress of re-examining a

previously foreclosed aspect of self-identity, trans people may present with greater overall wellbeing than peers who have not gone through this process. The causality of this relationship (i.e., whether positive social connections are the result of trans identity or catalyst for resolution of trans identity) cannot be inferred from the data. While studies such as Konik and Stewart (2004) support the assertion that LGBT+ identity formation is a catalyst for identity achievement, this does not necessarily result in positive social relationships. Regardless, consistent social supports are often associated with experiences of wellbeing and gratitude. These results present strong evidence for the importance of community support in addressing mental health disparities within the trans community.

References

Balistreri, E., Busch-Rossnagel, N. A., & Geisinger, K. F. (1995). Development and preliminary validation of the Ego Identity Process Questionnaire. *Journal of Adolescence*, *18*(2), 179–192. https://doi.org/10.1006/jado.1995.1012

Beagan, B. L., & Hattie, B. (2015). Religion, spirituality, and LGBTQ identity integration. *Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling*, *9*(2), 92–117. https://doi.org/10.1080/15538605.2015.1029204

Bristowe, K., Hodson, M., Wee, B., Almack, K., Johnson, K., Daveson, B. A., Koffman, J., McEnhill, L., & Harding, R. (2018). Recommendations to reduce inequalities for LGBT people facing advanced illness: ACCESSCare national qualitative interview study. *Palliative Medicine*, *32*(1), 23–35. https://doi.org/10.1177/0269216317705102

Canva. (2024, October). Canva.com. Retrieved October 28, 2024, from https://www.canva.com/design/DAGU2rh1tDw/vFpsn9qY98Nl6Y56wuSAMw/edit

Chapple, H. S., Bouton, B. L., Chow, A. Y. M., Gilbert, K. R., Kosminsky, P., Moore, J., & Whiting, P. P. (2016). The body of knowledge in thanatology: An outline. *Death Studies*, *41*(2), 118–125. https://doi.org/10.1080/07481187.2016.1231000

Collings, C. (2007). That's not my child anymore! Parental grief after acquired brain injury (ABI): Incidence, nature and longevity. *British Journal of Social Work*, *38*(8), 1499–1517. https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcm055

Comstock, D. L., Hammer, T. R., Strentzsch, J., Cannon, K., Parsons, J., & Salazar, G., II. (2008). Relational-cultural theory: A framework for bridging relational, multicultural, and social justice competencies. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, *86*(3), 279–287. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6678.2008.tb00510.x

Corr, C. A. (1999). Enhancing the concept of disenfranchised grief. *OMEGA - Journal of Death and Dying*, *38*(1), 1–20. https://doi.org/10.2190/ld26-42a6-1eav-3mdn

Creswell, J. W. & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.

Deaux, K., & Stewart, A. J. (2001). Framing gendered identities. In R. K. Unger (Ed.), *Handbook of the psychology of women and gender* (pp. 84–97). John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

GLAAD. (2021, March 29). *GLAAD Media Reference Guide - Transgender*. Retrieved December 29, 2021, from https://www.glaad.org/reference/transgender

Iafrate, A. (2020). Changing the scripts: How non-binary and transgender writers rely on dominant discourses in the production of coming-out stories. *Student Anthropologist*, *7*(1), 24–28. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.sda2.20200701.0004

Joel, D., Tarrasch, R., Berman, Z., Mukamel, M., & Ziv, E. (2013). Queering gender: Studying gender identity in 'normative' individuals. *Psychology & Sexuality*, *5*(4), 291–321. https://doi.org/10.1080/19419899.2013.830640

Jones, L. (2020). 'The fact they knew before I did upset me most': Essentialism and normativity in lesbian and gay youths' coming out stories. *Sexualities*, *23*(4), 497–515. https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460719830343

Kessler, D. (2020). *Finding meaning: The sixth stage of grief* [E-book]. Scribner.

Konik, J., & Stewart, A. (2004). Sexual identity development in the context of compulsory heterosexuality. *Journal of Personality, 72*(4), 815–844. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0022-3506.2004.00281.x

Logie, C. H., & Rwigema, M.-J. (2014). "The normative idea of queer is a white person": Understanding perceptions of white privilege among lesbian, bisexual, and queer women of color in Toronto, Canada. *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, *18*(2), 174–191. https://doi.org/10.1080/10894160.2014.849165

Marcia, J. E. (2002). Identity and psychosocial development in adulthood. *Identity*, *2*(1), 7–28. https://doi.org/10.1207/s1532706xid0201_02

McNutt, B., & Yakushko, O. (2013). Disenfranchised grief among lesbian and gay bereaved individuals. *Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling*, *7*(1), 87–116. https://doi.org/10.1080/15538605.2013.758345

Mosher, C. M. (2001). The social implications of sexual identity formation and the coming-out process: A review of the theoretical and empirical literature. *The Family Journal*, *9*(2), 164–173. https://doi.org/10.1177/1066480701092011

Nourkova, V. V., & Ivanova, A. A. (2017). Autobiographical memory in transsexual individuals who have undergone gender-affirming surgery: Vivid, self-focused, but not so happy childhood memories. *Psychology in Russia: State of the Art, 10*(2), 42–62. https://doi.org/10.11621/pir.2017.0204

O'Cathain, A., Murphy, E., & Nicholl, J. (2010). Three techniques for integrating data in mixed methods studies. *BMJ*, *341*(sep17 1), c4587. https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.c4587

PFLAG National. (2024, March 26). *PFLAG National Glossary - PFLAG*. PFLAG. https://pflag.org/glossary/

Remondet, J. H., & Hansson, R. O. (1987). Assessing a widow's grief: A short index. *Journal of Gerontological Nursing, 13*(4), 30–34. https://doi.org/10.3928/0098-9134-19870401-07

Rinofner-Kreidl, S. (2016). On grief's ambiguous nature. *Quaestiones Disputatae*, *7*(1), 178–207. https://doi.org/10.5840/qd20167121

Rood, B. A., Reisner, S. L., Puckett, J. A., Surace, F. I., Berman, A. K., & Pantalone, D. W. (2017). Internalized transphobia: Exploring perceptions of social messages in transgender and gender-nonconforming adults. *International Journal of Transgenderism*, *18*(4), 411–426. https://doi.org/10.1080/15532739.2017.1329048

Shepherd, B. F., Brochu, P. M., & Stripling, A. M. (2021). Hidden grief is complicated: Identity concealment as a minority stressor and relational-cultural barrier among bereaved sexual and gender minoritized elders. *Psychology & Sexuality*, *14*(4), 596–613. https://doi.org/10.1080/19419899.2021.1970618

Smith, J., Flowers, P., & Larkin, M. (2009). *Interpretative phenomenological analysis: Theory, method, and research*. Sage. https://doi.org/10.1080/14780880903340091

Sokol, J. T. (2009). Identity development throughout the lifetime: An examination of Eriksonian theory. *Graduate Journal of Counseling Psychology*, *1*(2), 139–149. http://epublications.marquette.edu/gjcp/vol1/iss2/14

Testa, R. J., Habarth, J., Peta, J., Balsam, K., & Bockting, W. (2015). Development of the Gender Minority Stress and Resilience Measure. *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity*, *2*(1), 65–77. https://doi.org/10.1037/sgd0000081

VERBI Software. (2021). MAXQDA 2022 [computer software]. Berlin, Germany: VERBI Software. Available from maxqda.com.

Wheat, L. S., & Thacker, N. E. (2019). LGBTQ+ loss experiences and the use of meaning reconstruction with clients. *Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling*, *13*(3), 232–251. https://doi.org/10.1080/15538605.2019.1627973

Word Cloud Maker. (2024). https://geographyfieldwork.com/WordCloudMaker.html

APPENDIX A: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

(Based on Grief Resolution Index; Remondet & Hansson, 1987)

1. Can you tell me about the first time you considered that a trans identity label might fit for you?
2. Do you feel you've been able to accept that your gender could fall under the umbrella of "trans"?
   a. *If Yes*: When did this occur and how do you know?
   b. *If No*: Can you tell me more about what makes this label not fit for you?
   c. *(Based on: "Accepted the death of my husband.")*
3. When did you start to use your pronouns when speaking in the 3rd person (such as on paperwork or when telling a story)? What was that like for you?
   a. *(Based on: "Stopped saying 'we'.")*
4. Was there ever a time in which you felt comfortable reaching out to others for support? When?
   a. *(Based on: "Became able to reach out to others.")*
5. Was there ever a time in which you felt free to explore all your feelings related to the shift in identity labels?
   a. *(Based on: "Was able to do my crying and get it over with.")*
6. Was there ever a time in which you felt ready to let go of your cis identity?
   a. *(Based on: "Said Goodbye to my husband.")*
7. Was there ever a time in which you felt able to think back to before you identified as trans with fondness?
   a. *If Yes:* Can you tell me more about what that was like for you?
   b. *If No:* Is there anything in particular that keeps you from thinking about that time in this way?
   c. *(Based on: "Was able to think through what my husband's death meant to me.")*
8. Can you tell me more about your relationship with yourself now and what factors have led you to feel this way?
(Based on: "Was able to get on with my new life.")
2. Have you ever experienced barriers to feeling safe coming out in some environments, either internally or externally?
   a. *If Yes*: What were they?
   b. *If No*: What about your environment facilitated your safe exploration?
3. When you think back to a time before you started using your current gender label, what kinds of thoughts or feelings come up for you?
   a. What might you say to this version of yourself, if you could?
   4. What do you think about the relationship between self-concealment and grief, if you think there is one?

APPENDIX B: SUMMARY OF THEMES

Categories, Themes, and Excerpts Across Participant Interviews

Categories	Themes	Quotes
Introspection	Avoidance of Emotional Labor	"Yeah, sometimes I don't like to talk about it because people have a lot of, like, opinions."
		"Because then that opens up a lot of questions, some of which are not appropriate because people don't seem to know, like, the limit of what they can ask about that and it… it's just not something I want to start to deal with on a day-to-day basis."
		"Like I would totally just use they/them pronouns if I didn't think that it would cause me more, sort of, exhaustion in my day-to-day. It's just kind of tiring, correcting people."
		"I'm in a position where I'm alone in a small space with people that I don't know as part of my job… and it is just easier to avoid conflict."
		"to avoid some, you know… unnecessary discussion"
		"I don't feel free to [disclose gender]. I just do it because I know if I don't, it'll be worse."
		"At least I didn't have to look at that part of my life as much if I just let go of it."
		[Regarding decision to conceal] "Safety mostly, and not wanting to deal with a bad reaction or having to explain and educate people, which is exhausting."
	Internal Identity Exploration	"But anytime I have set out to do exploration, I have felt comfortable doing the amount that I set out to do. Again. I've been privileged with a good community."
		"And, on my own, I got more comfortable, and I got a way to enjoy, like, being able to actually get all the grief out without it affecting my decision [to disclose]."
		"And how I'm presenting myself, and I think I got so comfortable to the point that I went back to, like… I grew my hair out, and I wear dresses sometimes, and I don't really care about that stuff anymore, as I did."
		"But yes, I am comfortable with my identity being trans, and being under the trans umbrella."
		"Yeah, I'm comfortable [under the trans umbrella]."
		"I'd say be comfortable, less pressure, and less… less mis-identity."
		"There was a lot of relief that happened. I don't know that I realized how damaging it was for me to be trying to fit into a box that I didn't fit in."

"At that point I was comfortable [disclosing] since I wasn't afraid of what people might say."
"Like I said something… something seemed wrong for a long time, and as soon as I, it's like putting in the missing piece of the puzzle, as soon as I did the picture was complete."
"I don't want to grieve about [disclosing], because it's my decision. I made that long ago"
"I still look back on it from the now, always have. That's never… that's never changed."
"Oh, you never get tired of Legos, Pokémon are still cool. Yes you can grow your hair out long and you won't be a hippie, that's fine. Your family will love you, no matter what. I don't think spoiling the surprise would do anything. You figure it out when you figure it out."
"But I feel like the way I think about my path to that identity has changed a lot over the years which is something that you wouldn't be able to tell from the outside. So that's just, and I'm not sure if it impacts anything, because in the end I always end up in the same place."
"I think in my heart I always knew that I wasn't, like, binary female, and I never sort of tried to be, so I was always sort of comfortable, like knowing who I was, even though other people saw me in a certain way."
"I knew I didn't know exactly where I was under that umbrella at that time, but I… I knew that that's where I was."
"I don't think I've gone through the grief yet, and I don't know that I ever really will just because of the perspective that I have. Like, I… that person's not gone. They're the foundation to the person that's here now."
"I thought that at that age, you know, I felt like I was more of a male, you know, compared to a female"
"I don't necessarily see myself as gendered."
"I don't know if I've ever really had a good concept of being a girl or being a woman because it… it didn't make sense to me."
"No, no. I don't think I'm ever going to let go."
"But I can't really open up, I can't come up to the world and say, I want to be a woman. I am a woman. I feel like a woman inside, so I do feel frustrated. I couldn't really associate. I tended to ostracize myself from friends and I, it… it developed into depression"
[regarding the ability to ask for support] "No. but that… that applies to everything."

"I had that thought of like when I was younger, I tried to come out as trans, but it didn't work. And then, you know, I was trying to force myself to be cis, because, like I'm not like them, I'm healthy."

"It was really tough to deal with because when I didn't find that sort of safe space externally, I turned to myself, and then to realize that I was not giving myself a safe space was difficult to comprehend, because I had always thought that I was my number one advocate, and here I was not being that."

"What I feel, when I think back, I feel like I've made mistakes all my life. Living as someone there, that's not even as something that I am"

"It was tough trying to, like, switch into it but I… I persisted, and I continued doing it, doing it, until some people got used to it, and some people still have not gotten used to it."

"I'm not wanting right now, so it's hard to think about what I would have changed in the past. although I do now sort of look back on the little tidbits from my past where I say, oh, that was a hint that was a thing how did I not know how to? And I… I smile when I… when I think of them or tell stories about them because to me, I just… I'd find them amusing little Easter-egg anecdotes from my past more so than moments of for… for sadness or upset."

"I feel like I was such a scared kid, you know. And I felt like I was so lost"

"I still wear dresses… and I still enjoy it. But there's something different about being the girl"

"I was eager within just a couple of weeks of discovering that I was trans. To like… let go of that cis male definition and just be me."

"I'm full of happy emotions all the time now. And I think it's because I realized that… that-or I have that connection to my past, and I'm not just trying to rebuild my life from scratch."

"I'm running to this person. I'm trying to become this person as fast as I can because I just… I'm happy as this person and I… and I don't think I'm running away from anything. So I, like… and it ties back into the grief piece like... Because it's happening so quickly. That might be why I haven't had an opportunity to grieve"

"So it feels like that potential for another person was kind of destroyed in a way by my need to be happy and seen as somebody else."

	"But I tell my friends I love them all the time, and I never would have if I was pre-T. So I think that accepting yourself your reward is, you are rewarded with like kindness and compassion, that you didn't know that you had."
	"I had it conceptually, but it took seeing it in action, so to speak. It took encountering her physically. To see that was the label on her and that's what I wanted. So, transitive property. That was my label and that was the first time that I put that label on myself because I sat in the car and I cried and I cried And I said that that's it! That's it. There!"
	"I guess it took me a few years to sort of accept [trans identity]"
	"Because sometimes I do regret not coming out long ago, not realizing my dreams not coming out. I feel as if I wasted those years sitting down on the fence doing nothing."
	"I think it took me a long time to accept [a trans identity label]. I think I'm, like, settled in that now."
Loss of Potential Experiences	"it's a grief for the… the death of a person… of an idea of a person who is a mother and a caretaker, and a housekeeper, who wears beautiful dresses and high heeled shoes, and looks effortless and flawless in them. It can't be just me that has that one. There's… I can't speak to other people's experiences, but I'm pretty confident there are trans people in this world who are mourning in some way the cis version of themselves that didn't have a chance to be, because it would have been easier"
	"My jewelry box is a memorial. In a lot of ways to that person, because there are some very, like, beautiful feminine pieces that are laid to rest there that are just probably not coming out again. But, to, like, to go back over them and touch them and think about them. They're like… It's an act of memorialization, somehow. She was here. She came through. This is… this is the graveyard for that person, I guess"
	"For me, I feel a lot of grief around… what could have been if I had an environment that allowed me to recognize these things of myself earlier."
	"I definitely recognized that I wasn't cis at like 23 or whatever, and didn't try to get back at any point. Even if I recognize that my life would be easier. Or, it felt like it would be easier if I wasn't trans."
	"I had this entire future for myself planned. And then, by coming out, I lost that future because suddenly that wasn't going to be a thing anymore. And that felt like a massive loss. Even if what I'm going to have now is going to be better, it's going to be more authentic. I still lost a lot in that sense."

	"destroying another person by becoming Otis, becoming myself did feel like a burden that I would have to bear, and then I didn't want other people to bear that as well."
	"I, too, in a way grieve the Barbie I didn't get on Christmas just because it means I don't have that story to tell. And I grieve for me. Because the world is as the world is, and being trans is not easy. It's a lot of fun, but it's not always easy."
Metacognition	"But finally, I've accepted who I am, who I really am, and I'm grateful for it."
	[Speaking to past self] "It's going to be okay. And we're going to figure ourselves out. And it's going to get really, really good when we do… Thank you."
	"I think it was the person who got me to… got me here to survive who protected me and survived all that shit. And now I get to do me?"
	"I'm so proud of who I've become. I'm proud of standing out, you know, and accepting, you know, who I am now."
	[Speaking to past self] "Thank you." And, "It's going to be okay. Just keep going."
	"At the first time, I was afraid. I wouldn't say it. I was the kind of… "Is it me?" I was kind of confused that first time."
	"But then, as it sat with me for a little bit more, I thought you know girls don't typically wish to wake up and not be a girl, right?"
	"it kind of came with accepting that I am a feminine dude on top of being trans and being feminine doesn't negate my trans identity. And kind of accepting that allowed me to be happy with who I am."
	"No, no because I always feel uncomfortable being male and I and I don't really appreciate it, so, and I try to forget it."
	"That didn't necessarily [accept trans identity in early stages]… in the sense that I had a lot of thought to, like… this would be much easier if I wasn't. But I knew I was trans at 23."
	"but when I was going through the early parts of my transition I really felt that I needed to do it without any outside influence because I wanted to make sure that I was correct and I wasn't being persuaded by other people to do this, and that I wasn't like, I wouldn't be proving bigoted people correct by being mind… mind-controlled into this identity."
	"But mostly the feeling is internal. I feel that way internally all the time"
	"Probably 20, I think I started to play around with the idea of… definitely not feeling like the gender I was assigned. Sort of feeling gender fluid"
	"I'm not grieving whoever I used to be in the way that I want to go back"

		[Regarding looking at pre-transition self with fondness] "Not really. I think I'm much more fond of me now."
		"Yeah, I'm not usually like… reflective about the experience. I live the experience, and then I move through it as I move through it, and I don't think a lot about how I've moved through it"
		"It's not just fondness. There's… there's a massive amount of respect and… and- and full-blown love for that individual who… who got me here."
Social Environment	Family	"So, my mom, said she was referring to me as a man because it was, she was there through what happened to me. We would always be family because she was the one… she was the one to explain everything to my dad, so my dad always felt mad about me [being trans]."
		"I want to understand what is going on between me and my family."
		"It was kind of hard at first, because I was like, I feel like a disappointment to my family members. They found it hard to support me and my decision [to transition]."
		"And… and not being accepted by my family or friends. But I tend to ignore that."
		"I thought even if no one could accept me, but I think my family should accept me. So also, when I spoke to my mom about this, and she was certainly in with it. You know, she was okay with it. So, my dad was always, you know, made the point that, because of me there was always, you know, trouble."
		"My family wasn't good, you know. I grew up with, like, rather explicitly violent comments against trans people before from my family members- my father in particular- before I even came out."
		"Looking back, I wish that I… not that I didn't come out, but I wish that I never had had to come out to [my family], and they had always known."
		"So I need it, I solicited for their support, family support, because I was close, quite close to them so wanting your support kind of opened my mind to accepting myself fully."
		"So, just out of respect for my kids, I… What if there's a situation where I'm going out with them? I always ask if I can go out as me, or if they want me to go out as like… dressed as a man. And… and behaving as a man just for that situation."
		"I think it's just a love for my kids that influences [the decision to self-conceal], and the… the desire to respect them and give them the time that they need, so maybe… maybe their grief influences it, but not mine."

	"I was very fond of my prom dress because… I chose it because my grandmother and I made it… I was a girl who was fond of being one that in that moment. But, by the end of the night, I was wearing a vest and pants, so it couldn't have been that long"
	"I noticed that I was uncomfortable with my gender, and I used to have always back then that I wish I was female just like my siblings, because I have 3 sisters. And growing with them I tended to behave more like them."
	"My parents were good in that, like, there's never any pressure as a small child to, like, to wear dresses. You have to act like a girl. You can't play rough, you can't play dirt. Blah blah blah so it's like, I just don't think I really had a concept of gender like not that my parents were trying to raise, like, a genderless child or anything I think they just, like, did not care."
	"the few friends I have around me, you know. they accept me for who I am. The family, you know, close to me, I think they also accept me"
	"a really, really young kid especially because that's where a lot of good memories with my family are, like with my brother and my sister, so I kind of in a way I experience my childhood through them, and enjoying their memories of being in my life."
	"being a man is-is, was kind of one of my dreams, like, being in charge of the family, and [unintelligible] that was one of the things that really made me to make that decision [to disclose]."
	"people are starting, my family people are starting to address me as a… a man and someone who is the head of our family and someone who they can trust"
	"My first ever concrete memory I have is waking up and sobbing to my mom that I was a boy. Like, absolutely, like, crying, like, cause she said, 'Good morning my beautiful girl.' And I was like, 'No, you don't get it. No, I'm a boy.'"
	"I'm happy to use mister and him [pronouns] because I learnt, I grew up to understand that a… a man is the head of a family, so for me answering to him, I'm very happy with it."
	"I grew up in a rural area and I was lucky enough to have an accepting family and accepting friends and an accepting community. But no system or environment is perfect."
Medical Systems	"The beard is going to grow whether I get the shot or not. And I don't get shots or anything. And I… I… Medicalization is not central to trans experiences. But, when it's… when it's not, it's because I'm… I'm not trans, I'm intersex …Or, I'm not trans, I'm just existing."

	"Sometimes I fall comfortably within, like a world where I'm like, "Yeah, I'm some kind of trans." I'm free-range gay. But sometimes I internally quibble because I have, uh, polycystic ovarian syndrome. So, whether I'm really trans or whether I'm, like, intersex."
	"Having the privilege of… of living where I live the government facilitated [legal transition] quickly. And as long as you threw money at them, which I was also privileged enough to have you could… you could get that done fairly… fairly quickly. I still had to go through certain medicalized processes and approvals, but again I also had access to those but it meant I did reach out to a lot of people very early."
	"So, I have a gender dysphoria therapist. And I started seeing her about 2 months after trying… after I started realizing who I was, like, the military, they connected me with one really quickly"
	"I finally got top surgery at the end of April, which was amazing. Very, very affirming. Definitely, in this place of being in a much better… better place than I was prior to that. It changed my relationship with my body and, like… Just, like, even, like…. an even better one."
	"So medically transitioning was my way of exploring it, especially because my endocrinologist has been so kind and patient with me."
	"Definitely would have been when I started, like when I had that first T shot. That felt like, it felt like the point of no return, but in a good way."
	"I've been thinking about taking some surgeries to change some parts and do I, like, I try to, like, make that decision yet, but I've been thinking quite a lot about it."
	"I know it was when I wake up, and I see a kind of changing in my body."
Exploration of Role in Society	"it's still a part of that environment that had taught me hate in the first place. And I just couldn't really fathom a world where I came out as trans and where they would be accepting. Not because they had ever given me any signs that they would be hateful."
	"And I told my mom, but then I had it like a terrible panic attack, because the people at my school were not accepting of queer people at all."
	"I'll give you some of when I first stepped out into college, you know. You know, that fear of rejection"
	"I feel like my experience has been… I'm trying to… Very isolated and… but isolated in a way where there's so much positivity. So much acceptance. So much encouragement. That

	I haven't experienced much in the way of hate, or anything else, or lack of understanding, or… or any of that yet."
	[Regarding comfort with disclosure] "Within the context of, like, support for my friends, yes. Publicly, No."
	"But I wasn't out in my hometown, so I would have started while that university, I think, when I was 19"
	[Speaking to past self, regarding interacting with others] "Be kind, because kindness doesn't have a gender"
	"I always yield to the acceptance point, because maybe I want to feel accepted, accepted by other women. I appreciate it, so sometimes I don't tell them that I'm a trans woman. But most times it is disappointing that they get to find out I'm a trans woman."
Peers	"Yeah, men wanting your body won't make you any more of a woman than you are now, because you're just not."
	[Regarding feelings before starting to disclose publicly] "just feeling sad about it, and feeling miserable about it, but not being able to express that because it wasn't safe to do so."
	"I feel close to, most of my friends are female, so I feel more close to the female part than the male part"
	"he sort of encouraged me, you know, to come out, you know, open, you know, being proud of who I am"
	"I felt like, you know. I deserved more, you know, speaking about relationships [a close friend had] given me advice, and I felt like I had more to do"
	"The friend of mine was like, "Oh, what you're describing sounds like one of my friends that's like this." And I was like, "Oh, I didn't know that was a thing." And so it kind of has helped to give me language, and I think it helps a lot of us to have like a network of people you know, to identify with that are like you. Having a similar experience to you to kind of validate what you're going through"
	"being here among women. Being that more than I wanted to be, because I'm into women's clothing and… and more of a makeup artist so getting to be identified as a woman has really inspired me a lot, and I'm happy."
	"Once… once I came out, I started the process of coming out… selectively coming out, I guess. I… I yeah, I had no issues at all going to people for help."

		"my friends; females. I… I reached out to them a lot, and they have been so supportive and they've got my back"
		"Most of the time it's when I'm with them like since they know about me, and it's not a new thing. I'm very free then"
		"I think there's a lot of stigma in the community about being gay enough or queer enough for anything to meet. I don't know like a standard, I guess, to be allowed to use certain labels. That's kind of how it feels, I guess, for people that are exploring."
		"I felt pretty free because there's quite a big website, quite a big, queer community there and then I moved to Halifax the year after, in 2017, to start a new school program, and I felt less safe moving to a new city and meeting new people. And I kind of went back into my shell a little bit, so I felt freer prior to that."
		"it was hard at first. After, you know, confiding with someone and, you know, he gave me the assurance, and I think from there it was pretty good."
Queer Identity and Education	Disclosure as Empowering	"But at the time I would often spend time at his place, and they were constantly calling me the dead name and using the wrong pronouns. So, I think that argument with him was when I really put my foot down and said, I'm not being delusional. This is how I feel and I'm actually trans."
		"I would say it was within like 2 months that I was talking to some of my closer friends as a woman. Using the feminine pronouns, using the name that I wanted to use. And they were all very accepting of it, and very encouraging."
		"that's when I realized that I've surrounded myself with some amazing people. Like, I did a really good job at picking my friend group. I mean, I didn't get to pick my family. But, I've… I've had nothing but support from my family. And I… I realized when I came out to my kids that I've raised my kids really well"
	Sexual Identity	"It's kind of all wrapped up in my whole queer identity, which has been sort of a big question mark over time, and it's kind of been building on that, I guess, but not really subscribing to labels."
		"Me, like, am I a queer person? Am I a trans person? And the biggest answer I came out with was, "I'm a person who has an AFAB body that grows beard, and that positions me as queer, and I've got to decide what to do about it."
		"Like, at first it was coming out and being like "I'm gay. And that explains everything." That's why I like monsters and stuff and don't have to go further than that. I can just, like, I'm still a cis person. I'm just gay until you think that way, either."

		"I thought maybe it would be a fetish thing or something to that effect, and the first time I was dressed as a… as a woman. I realized that I felt like I belonged in my body… And the… after that there was- other than the standard fears of, you know, "What does this mean?" There was no question in my mind that I was portraying myself as the wrong person my whole life."
	Terminology	"Well, I'd say that the world's moving forward and things will get better in the future, as the Internet inevitably gives us all the terms and... and introduce… introduces us to other people in the world. And kind of, you know, I… I think that's probably played a large role in bringing whole communities together, you know."
		"It's definitely something that I internally fumble through. I listen to other people's experiences and try to follow through my own experience. And then just sort of tell people, like, this is who I am."
		"we went out with some friends, and we met some new people, and we talked, you know"
		"So then I kind of looked into it more. I met a trans person talk to them about it. And then I was like, Okay, yeah. yeah, that's what this is, because it…it just lined up too perfectly not to be."
		"I think I was confused and I think I… because I wasn't trans in the way that I wanted to be male. I didn't think that there was really any room for me to go from female, you know. Like, I didn't know there were other options."
Marginalization	Discrimination	"There would be kind of discrimination between o-o-o-other people, you know, but here that kind of thing is not…yeah. So there is, the environment is really helping."
		"I never felt like a normal girl when I was like… well... Is what I knew I was like... bisexual at the least. and just that on its own excluded me from it. Can't be more normal, heavy finger on them in any of now. I got called a dyke a lot which has got to do something to your little brain to be aligned with masculinity in that way right from the get go."
		[Regarding difficulty in finding community] "I was looking for an understanding force. So people of, a, of a kind of gender as me… We're shy, they can not… when things like that happen they don't feel rude because they think they will be discriminant, and they will push them away."
		"You second guess other people's motives or thoughts. You start to second guess your own identity because of discomfort or the mental gremlins that get in there. And I… I will admit that I've been my own barrier, some cases. And then, finally, I, like, I think, a lot of trans

	people experience. And again, especially in rural areas, is barriers in-in… when it comes to medical… medical issues. Being a trans person, not that my… my medical needs are, there's some uniqueness to it. But in in general I… I still… still get the common cold, I still get a yeast infection. I still break my nose like just like anyone else. But when a doctor picks up your file or looks at you and it says trans on it sometimes they don't treat you as well."
	"I'm not really comfortable showing myself, because of all the old folks and the black people, they hate our community, our people, and the way they look at these people is quite different from the way other people look at them"
	"And she, that one was kind of saying, 'Who is that… that black monkey?' I-I- I feel very bad. That is the reason I say telling people my real gender and I'm a trans person, that it might bring a kind of discrimination… discrimination between me and other people."
	"And you know how the black background is, and how… how, we are, we blacks are, we don't really believe in all those things. It's just a very new thing, and there's, under-representation, in the black community and there's a stigma around those kind of situations that happen and make people not to talk about it"
	"It's quite rough, especially… especially in the black community. And I don't know. I… I feel like it's because, majorly, because it's a new thing in the community."
Dysphoria	"Of course. It is never… it is always with great sadness to conceal. Feels like lying, feels like lying to a loved one. Because really it is, it's lying to yourself."
	[Regarding grief of concealment] "Because grieving is going to make you sad, is going to make you, is going to affect your mental health in your self-esteem like it affected mine."
	"But, basically, I said something along the lines about how I didn't relate to, like, the idea of being a girl. Like, it just didn't make sense to me. And, like, I just didn't feel it."
	"Maybe I'm making mistake or something. Or maybe I'm over-reaching and then later… later on I discovered that that's not the case"
Ostracization	"I did accept when I was thirty, I think in that two years ago, but I… it was not easy trying to accept the facts because of the people around me say I can't."
	"'this guy here was a-a- a lady, but now he's now a man.' So, I, when I listen to them, sometimes we just, you know, pretend like I'm not… I'm not hearing what they're saying, so I will say that I will, I'll have to let go of the sex I had from birth and start this one"
	"And I hear other people misgender folks. And then, you know, laugh. I don't think maliciously, but they're like, "Oh, right. it's… it's 'he' I forgot," and kind of, like, make a

		weird, awkward deal about, you know, backtracking on misgendering someone and that makes it feel not safe for me, and I don't think they realize that I think they think like joking about it, that it makes it funny and inclusive for everyone."
		"I think there's some grief and letting go of the safety of just kind of trying to fit the mold you were put in rather than scooch out of it, and the different ones. You know, to the chagrin of your parents and people that are close to you, because I think, even… like close friends sometimes are like, "No, that's all wrong. You're not this or that," you know. They think they know you better than you know yourself sometimes"
		"High School was very homophobic, very transphobic. Aggressively so. So, that was an obvious, like, social barrier. It's definitely created an internal barrier. So I internalize a lot of those things."
		"It wasn't safe to come out because I felt like, if I did, I would be targeted even more than I already was"
		"When you actually feel like, maybe this is actually a mistake, or something, or like you have done something wrong. So the grief comes after disclosure, if the environment you disclose yourself to isn't a comfortable one."
		"A condition where people that I know aren't good with it, and are not understanding, like they don't really, they don't really think that way, the way you think."
		"Not until 2 years ago, I think. And, it's because one of my coworkers was scared to come out and work, and so I did it first to kind of break the bubble."
		"That fear of rejection, you know, and losing the few friends I had, and, you know, safety concerns."
	Safety	"If [disclosing] is something that will actively put me in danger, there's no way I'll talk about it, or if [the interaction] is something that will be very short lived."
		"It doesn't feel good. But, I will lean into it. If it means I get out of the situation safely."
		"I'm comfortable enough with myself, and how I am that the only reason I conceal is for safety, whether I'm traveling, whether I'm engaging with the medical system. If I'm going into new environments where I am not familiar with the politics, attitudes, or people I will conceal to self-protect, and a lot of cases that's physically protect."
		"Maybe a bit in the background, in the moment. All I'm thinking about is literally, like, safety procedures to get out of the situation"
Presentation	Desire to Present Comfortably	"I preferred female clothing and I didn't feel comfortable being male. And also I didn't feel comfortable wearing male clothing. So that's how it started."

"It's feeling insecure…. Lots of unknowns. Always feeling judged. I was feeling like I had to present myself in a certain way to try to not stand out. To try to not be singled out in a situation."

"When I choose not to issue performative femininity. That's when I feel like my cis self is dead in so far as the cis self ever existed."

"Experimenting with your expression, and, like, going out. Being a little freak is part of the whole experience. So, I just always, yeah explored it that way, like, I just be out working here until I find the right weird."

"every day when I get up and I can dress my body in a way that I feel comfortable with, and I don't feel like I'm wearing the right clothes, but doing it wrong somehow. Every time I can put on makeup in a way that helps my face look to others the way it looks in my own head. When I can interact in spaces in the way I feel like I should be treated and interact with them that is to say, as a woman, that brings me joy it brings me euphoria it brings me happiness."

"When it started to feel uncomfortable to go out in public and have my partners referring to me as "she" when I was really aware that other people were perceiving… not that… something other than that. Before I ever, like, accepted any pronoun other than she/her, I had my partner at the time referring to me as "that one.""

"It must really hurt to not have the freedom that I have to flip between and in and out, and feel totally fine in pants or in a dress, or… but I do notice that I still shave if I want to be really… really… and that's something that I don't… Hmm… I feel I... I am trying my best way to like, answer your questions, yeah… I like me, but I'm not everyone's flavor."

"I present myself in much more of a feminine way. And it's just… it comes naturally. And I just I… I look at this person and I just… I love this person, and it's… it's easy and… and- and so empowering."

"I think, I just, you know, then I love, you know, dressing up male. Like a guy"

"now that I look more outwardly masculine, it makes me feel more attached to my gender to look outwardly masculine with stubble"

"I'm no more female, that was the reason I decide to [disclose], I prefer answering to mister or him."

"I can fully express myself, as female, now like, more than when it started. And I feel confident with myself generally now"

Taking on Emotional Labor	"So, very quickly I became a leader in the trans community in my area. So. I don't want to say fake it until you make it. But I… I didn't really have time to question whether or not that label was… was correct, and whether or not I was comfortable with it, and whether or not. I… I didn't really have… have the… the… the… the privilege of time to think about whether… to think about whether or not that was true. It just was. As soon as I got handed the label I was trans. I was under the umbrella. That was okay. Go because you have to go help other people."
	"I did not want to make the very sweet but not very complex people in my community have to think too hard about it… So yeah, uncomfortable. Not necessarily unsafe… Yeah, it's… it's packed myself back in the closet for that one."
	"So if someone close [expresses confusion about gender diversity], and so I will say that when a trans person is, let me say, a kind of natural thing that can happen to anybody."
	[Speaking to past self] "it's going to be shit. But, like, at least you'll be used to it"
	"So first it was the name change, and then when they got used to that, then we changed the pronouns, and they found that process easier, even though I found it very painful. But I would rather have had that sort of, like, slow story and pain than to just kind of almost, like, break apart my family like that"
	"we grieve the hardship from, you know, adjustment of this process, you know, as, you know, everything involved, you know, trust to navigate, you know, understanding, you know, this new person you've become"
Public Perception	"When it's written on your face with the beard, you don't really have a choice about whether or not you're coming out."
	"I had to go home and be kind of like "A young man over there? But I'm a girl. So, I'm that's a trans person?" You know… Yeah, yeah"
	"There are a lot of situations where I want to, like, conceal or hide. And when I get into a situation where I have shaved my face, and I am just in a feminine way, and people cannot immediately perceive that I live, like, the life that I live. That… that feels bad, too. Like cause I… I still feel like the bearded Lady, even when other people can't see it."

APPENDIX C: TABLE OF THEMES

Avoidance of Emotional Labor: Avoidance of disclosure of trans identity, based on recognition of and intention to avoid the emotional labor of educating others about trans identity.

Desire to Present Comfortably: Desire to present publicly in alignment with internal reality, resulting in positive feelings when possible and discomfort when concealed.

Disclosure as Empowering: Disclosure of trans identity resulting in greater self-acceptance and empowerment.

Discrimination: Concerns regarding being treated poorly based on the disclosure of trans identity.

Dysphoria: Negative or uncomfortable feelings related to expectations for expressions of a gender identity that does not resonate internally.

Exploration of Role in Society: Recognition of wider socio-cultural context and exploration of how trans identity may fit within this larger framework.

Family: Recognition of the role of family relationships in either supporting or hindering trans identity development and disclosure.

Internal Identity Exploration: Exploration of emotions or reactions to gender, expression, and shifting identity labels occurring within the self.

Loss of Potential Experiences: Recognition that an alternative self may have lived differently and been fulfilled by factors not currently valued or spared concerns that are currently predominant.

Metacognition: Internal monitoring of thoughts and perspectives, particularly related to what a shift in identity label might tangibly mean.

Medical Systems: Recognition of how the medicalization of trans identity development may present as a major support or barrier depending on access or interest.

Ostracization: Concerns about social exclusion or isolation based on public disclosure of trans identity.

Peers: Recognition of ways that peer engagement in the identity exploration process may present as barriers or supports to identity development and disclosure.

Safety: Concerns regarding bodily safety and autonomy when disclosing trans identity in different environments.

Sexual Identity: Recognition of how queer sexual identity label impacts experience, presentation, and expression of gender identity including occasional confusion related to which queer identity label might fit best.

Taking on Emotional Labor: Presenting, disclosing, or educating others on trans identity as a means of community support as well as personal identity exploration and solidification.

Terminology: Exploration that occurs through learning about definitions of LGBT+ specific communities, concerns, or labels and recognizing that these may describe internal experience.

Public Perception: Identity exploration occurring in the context of unintentional, nonverbal communication of gender diversity.

APPENDIX D: DATA SUMMARY TABLE

Mixed Method Matrix

Participant	Racial Identity	Ethnic Identity	Gender Identity	Multi-GIQ-Feeling	EIPQ Status	Themes
Lexi	Black	Non-hispanic	Trans Man	Feeling as a Man	Foreclosure	Avoidance of Emotional Labor (1), Desire to Present Comfortably (1), Exploration of Role in Society (1), Family (2), Internal Identity Exploration (2), Metacognition (1), Ostracization (1), Peers (3), Taking on Emotional Labor (1), Terminology (1)
Taylor	Black American	Non-hispanic	Trans Femme	Feeling as a Woman	Foreclosure	Desire to Present Comfortably (1), Discrimination (3), Dysphoria (1), Internal Identity Exploration (5), Medical Systems (1), Metacognition (1), Ostracization (3), Peers (3)
Fen	White	Metis	Agender	Feeling as Neither	Achievement	Avoidance of Emotional Labor (1), Exploration of Role in Society (2), Family (1), Internal Identity Exploration (1), Loss of Potential Experiences (3), Medical Systems (1), Metacognition (3), Ostracization (1), Sexual Identity (1), Terminology (1)
Ave	White	White	Genderqueer (Bearded Lady)	Feeling as Both	Moratorium	Avoidance of Emotional Labor (1), Desire to Present Comfortably (4), Discrimination (1), Family (1), Internal Identity Exploration, Loss of Potential Experiences (2), Medical Systems (2), Metacognition (1), Peers (1), Public Perception (3), Sexual Identity (1), Taking on Emotional Labor (1)

Otis	Caucasian	White Canadian	Transman	Feeling as a Man	Diffusion	Disclosure as Empowering (1), Exploration of Role in Society (2), Family (3), Internal Identity Exploration (3), Loss of Potential Experiences (1), Medical Systems (2), Metacognition (3), Safety (1), Taking on Emotional Labor (1)
Spike	Black	African American	Transman	Feeling as a Man; Feeling as Neither	Foreclosure	Desire to Present Comfortably (1), Discrimination (3), Family (5), Medical Systems (1), Metacognition (1), Ostracization (1), Taking on Emotional Labor (1)
August	White	White	Genderqueer	Feeling as Both	Achievement	Avoidance of Emotional Labor (3), Internal Identity Exploration (3), Metacognition (1), Ostracization (3), Peers (3), Sexual Identity (1), Terminology (2)
Courtney	Caucasian	Protestant Canadian	Female	Feeling as a Woman	Moratorium	Desire to Present Comfortably (2), Disclosure as Empowering (2), Exploration of Role in Society (1), Family (2), Internal Identity Exploration (5), Medical Systems (1), Metacognition (2), Peers (1), Sexual Identity (1)
Alice	White	Canadian	Trans Woman	Feeling as a Woman	Achievement	Desire to Present Comfortably (1), Discrimination (1), Dysphoria (1), Family (1), Internal Identity Exploration (9), Loss of Potential Experiences (1), Medical Systems (1), Safety (1), Taking on Emotional Labor (1)
Marshal	White	Metis	Nonbinary	Feeling as Neither	Moratorium	Avoidance of Emotional Labor (2), Desire to Present Comfortably (1), Dysphoria (1), Exploration of Role in Society (1), Family (1), Internal Identity Exploration (4), Loss of Potential Experiences (1), Ostracization (1), Peers (1), Safety (2), Taking on Emotional Labor (1), Terminology (1)

Amelia	Black	African American	Transwoman	Feeling as a Woman	Foreclosure	Desire to Present Comfortably (1), Dysphoria (1), Exploration of Role in Society (1), Family (4), Internal Identity Exploration (5), Metacognition (2), Peers (1)