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THE TRANSGENDER EXPERIENCE

Amanda Lynn Mileham
amandamileham@yahoo.com

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THE TRANSGENDER EXPERIENCE

A Project
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Social Work

by
Amanda Lynn Mileham

June 2016

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A Project
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Approved by:

Dr. Janet Chang, Faculty Supervisor, Social Work

Dr. Janet Chang, M.S.W. Research Coordinator

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to gain a better understanding of transgender people and allow participants to have a voice in describing the experience of those in the transgender community. This study was conducted utilizing qualitative analysis through individual interviews with six participants. One of the major key findings of this study was the prevalence of depression among all participants. Another key finding of this study found safety among peers to be an issue for those transitioning from male to female. From the findings, it is imperative for social work practitioners to understand this marginalized community and be sensitive to the issues they face, such as: higher rates of mortality, suicide, substance abuse, and mental health issues.

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I would also like to thank the six brave participants that agreed to be interviewed for this study. The courage that these men and women hold within them is inspiring. The stories they shared are ones that I will carry with me always.

I would also like to thank and acknowledge my friends and family who provided unending support and love over the last three years. Each person that is in my life has somehow contributed to this research whether through words of encouragement or pushing me stay strong and keep working hard. I would not be here without them.

DEDICATION

To My Momma: You instilled in me a love and compassion for people that lead me to this profession and continues to guide me every day.

To My Papa: Eight years ago I told you I was lost, and you handed me the torch that lit the path to where I am today. For that, and a million others things, I will always be grateful.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The transgender community has received increasing media coverage in the last several years. With the increased visibility of the community, it is important to gain an understanding of the unique experience and challenges faced by those that identify as transgender. This chapter will identify the importance of this research, the significance of the project in the social work field, and outline the problem to be studied.

Problem Statement

At this time, it is estimated that 2-5% of the United States population is transgender; however, due to the relatively new exposure of this population, the exact number is difficult to determine. Often, this population remains hidden for many reasons that will be explored later in this study. Transgender people are best described as “denoting or relating to a person whose self-identity does not conform unambiguously to conventional notions of male or female gender” (Nuttbrock et al. 2014). Many times, transgender people express a desire to change their physical appearance to match the gender they feel is present within them. This can cause problems on many levels from psychological, where an individual becomes depressed or suicidal over their gender expression, to social, where they experience turmoil in personal

relationships (friends and family) when they decide to transition to the opposite gender.

Currently, there is very little legislation to protect the rights of transgender people. At the time of this writing, only 16 states have passed laws that prevent job discrimination based on a person's transgender status. At the university level, there is very little that can be done to protect transgender students from discrimination on campus. On some college campuses, transgender students are protected under Title IX which prevents campuses from discriminating based on sex, among other protections. As this population becomes more and more visible in the media, they have begun to experience a lot of scrutiny and harassment. One way to begin to combat this growing negative spotlight is to understand what it means to be transgender and the experiences of those that are living it.

In the social work profession, it is important to understand the transgender experience as there is always opportunity to work with this population in the field. By understanding the important issues, the struggles, and the personal stories of people that are transgender, social workers can be more competent and well-rounded in practice. Most agencies work with a wide variety of clients which may include people that are transgender. If workers were more equipped with knowledge about how to work with this population, they would have the ability to address the unique issues and the sensitive matters faced by transgender people. This population faces a disproportionate

amount of bullying in school, discrimination in employment, violence among peers, and mental health issues among the general population. Additionally, transgender issues are often put together with those in the lesbian and gay community. While both groups understand the experience of being marginalized, the overall experience is very different and deserves its own voice.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to gain an insight into the everyday lives of transgender people through the age span and across the spectrum of gender identity. The study will look at all aspects of daily life including: employment, education, relationships, and mental health as well as seek insight into the experience of transitioning from one gender to the other. The other component of this study is examining how things change after transition and the overall well-being of the person in transition. The information will be collected through a qualitative interview process in which the study subjects will be asked to speak freely on various topics.

Significance of the Project for Social Work

At this time, the transgender community is becoming much more visible to the mainstream public. As we begin to uncover the unique struggles faced by this community, we need to start addressing them and make change within the community and society in general. So little is actually known about

transgender people because they have historically been a silent minority. By conducting research on this population, it will give others a better understanding of what this community faces on a daily basis. In addition, this information may assist in helping other professionals become competent about the population and sensitive to the special needs that may apply.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This literature review will examine the research that has been collected on transgender people in recent times, the findings of those studies, and the general gaps in the literature that need to be explored. In addition, the literature review will include the theoretical framework utilized as a backbone for this study and how it relates to the study in general. Lastly, the literature review will explore how this study will contribute to the field of social work.

Prevalence of Data

In researching transgender people, it became very clear that very little research has been done in this area and the existing research has only begun to emerge in the last two years. This subject is such a new area of study and the population is so newly visible that much of the research does not cover the extent of the population, the special issues, and the challenges faced in the community. Nutbrock et al. (2014) recognized that while the research is growing, the data is still very sparse. Additionally, Lenning and Buist (2013) found that:

Although studies into the lives of trans people are still rare, those that are conducting research have begun to piece together a picture of what

the trans experience is really like and what those experiences mean to our understanding of gender and the power structures that define it. The lack of available research seems to indicate the necessity for more study into this developing topic.

Family Relationships

It is essential in a child's development to have a supportive family to ensure the best possible outcome. For those that are transgender, it is of even greater importance as these individuals face a greater amount of bullying, harassment, and violence than those in the general population. Riley, Clemson, and Sitharthan (2013) found:

Overwhelmingly, our participants expressed that they wanted parents, families, schools, and communities to have more knowledge and awareness about gender, sex and issues regarding gender variance. This expressed deficit not only appeared to factor into the negativity and hostility the participants faced on an ongoing basis but also appeared to hinder their family's ability for acceptance of gender variance.

A greater strain is placed on those attempting to transition if they lack the support of the family as it is very likely they will not have a strong support system at the beginning.

Often times, transgender people face discrimination and rejection from those outside the home, placing a great burden on them to find a community

to support them. Gamarel, K. E., Reisner, S. L., Laurenceau, J.-P., Nemoto, T., & Operario, D. (2014) found, "Because of their gender identity or gender expression, transgender people experience high levels of gender-based stressors and violence, including family rejection and hate crimes." The added stress is a contributing factor to the higher incidence of suicide, substance abuse, and mental illness found within this population.

Romantic Relationships and Sexual Orientation

Romantic relationships come with many hardships and require those involved to work hard to overcome barriers and make a lasting connection. These barriers are further complicated when a person is transgender. The stress of rejection from the world around them create more barriers when trans individuals are forming romantic relationships. Dargie, Blair, Pukall, and Coyle (2014) found,

Greater relationship satisfaction was associated with lower levels of stress for trans persons in the current study. This pattern may indicate that healthy relationships are a particularly important element in reducing stress for trans persons or that experiencing problems in one's relationship may be an important aspect to consider when addressing concerns of stress among trans identified individuals.

The research suggests that trans people that have less stress surrounding them or are better able to manage stress are able to form more stable and long-lasting unions.

In addition, those that are transitioning often report maintaining attraction to the same gender they were attracted to even after transitioning. For clarification, a male attracted to other males that transitions to female would be considered homosexual as a male but post-transition will be considered heterosexual. The sexual orientation label changes, while the attraction stays the same. Auer, M. K., Fuss, J., Höhne, N., Stalla, G. K., & Sievers, C. (2014) study found that hormone replacement therapy had no effect on a transgender person's sexual orientation. They do note that self-reported changes in sexual orientation do occur.

Mental Health Issues

One of the greatest areas of study is the mental health and well-being of transgender people. As they face many adverse experiences in self-discovery, there must be special consideration paid toward mental health. Lenning and Buist (2013) found

an individual's pain as a result of losing family is only made possible by a heterosexist and gender-obsessed culture that fosters a fear of the unknown or misunderstood and, consequently, either directly or indirectly fosters psychological turmoil in the lives of both trans individuals and their partners.

As the individual struggles to come to terms with their own identity, they must also acknowledge and process the opinions and actions of those around them. Dargie et al. (2014) found that transgender people fare much worse than those

that are cisgender (or people that identify with the gender they were born into) with higher mortality rates, greater number of suicide attempts, and greater incidences of substance abuse and mental illness. By all accounts, the transgender community is vulnerable and in need of advocacy.

Transitioning

Another topic of consideration among the research on the transgender community is the process of transitioning. For many, the process involves hormone therapy in addition to surgery to change facial features, chest size, and genital expression. This process is lengthy and often very expensive for the individual. The use of hormone therapy can have many side effects such as sudden mood changes and other symptoms one would commonly associate with puberty. Auer et al. (2014) set out to test a belief that a transitioning person's sexual orientation changes as a result of the hormone therapy. In the end, it was found that there is no clear connection between orientation and the transitioning process. While there is often a certain amount of fluidity found with people in transition, there is no evidence to suggest that hormones actually change an individual's orientation.

Summary

Through review of the current literature, it is clear that more information is needed to fully understand the transgender community. With time, more information can start to piece together the complex nature of this group. The

literature revealed basic information about the community, the mental health issues among members within the community, and the process of transitioning from one gender to the other.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Introduction

This section will explore the methods used to conduct the research study on the transgender community. The chapter will explore the design of the study conducted as well as how the subjects were selected, the instrument used to collect the data, and how the subjects were protected over the course of the study.

Study Design

The purpose of this study was to gain insight into the life of people in the transgender community. The study was conducted in a way that was intentionally general as a way to fully explore the topic. The method for this study was descriptive research as the ultimate goal to gain a greater understanding of the unique perspectives of transgender people. To gather this information, an interview was conducted with 6 members of the transgender population. Using an interview to conduct research was to ensure that the participant is able to share as much or as little information as they were comfortable sharing. This also allowed for a less formal type of data collection. While the study was aimed at gaining a general insight into the transgender community, the limitations lie in the fact that participants were not always open with subjects that made them uncomfortable. In addition, the

study was limited to participants found through snowball sampling where many of the participants are of the same ethnicity and socio-economic status creating a lack of variety of subjects. The study is attempting to answer the question: What is it like to be a transgender person?

Sampling

There was a degree of difficulty in finding participants for the study. The sample was found through non-random snowball sampling. In knowing a few transgender people, it was much easier to have access to more potential subjects within that community. Participants were selected based on their identification as a transgender man or woman and willingness to share information for the study. Participants also had to be at least 18 years or older. In addition, participants were selected to fit into two categories of “older generation transgender people” and “younger generation transgender people” to capture the range of experiences as it relates to age. The study was conducted at various times over the winter of 2016 with six participants. This sample size allowed for enough information to analyze and obtain a small picture of the community’s experience.

Data Collection and Instruments

The study collected qualitative data from the participants utilizing an interview. The questions in the interview related to the various experiences of the population such as family support, romantic relationships, the transition

process, and mental health (Appendix A). The interview guide was created specifically for this study. The participants were not required to write anything and were asked to state their answers. These answers were recorded on a tape recorder and later transcribed for analysis. The constant variable in this study was the transgender individual while the dependent variable was the experiences of the individual.

Procedures

Initially, transgender individuals known to the researcher were contacted and asked to participate. Upon completion of the interviews with known members of the transgender community, initial participants were asked if they know other transgender people that might be willing to participate. The participants were asked to contact potential connections and gain permission to release name and phone number to the researcher. The participants were contacted by telephone and asked if they would be willing to be a participant. The study was described to them along with how the data will be used and how they will remain confidential within the study. Participants were asked to set up an appointment for research to be conducted at a time and place convenient and comfortable for the participant. In addition, they were asked to participate in one interview lasting approximately one hour and were not asked to give any more time in the future. The participants were asked to meet with one researcher only.

Protection of Human Subjects

Participants in this study are identified by initials or a number to maintain their anonymity and were not asked any questions that may force them to reveal their identity. In addition, any information collected that might have a chance of revealing the identity of the participant was omitted such as city of residence or place of employment. Participants were also able to meet with the researcher in a neutral setting of their choosing to reduce the risk of being identified or singled-out. Participants were given an informed consent sheet (Appendix B) before the research began so that they were aware of how the research will be used. Upon completion of the interview, participants were given a debriefing statement (Appendix C).

Data Analysis

Once the interviews were conducted, they were transcribed by the researcher. For each interview question, answers were coded based on the type of answer given by each participant. From there, analysis was done to see if there are similar answers given as it relates to each topic. As an example, if participants were asked about forming romantic relationships each response were put into categories such as: “avoids relationships”, “easily forms relationships”, or “currently in a relationship”. Once the answers were all categorized, analysis was done to determine the similarities and the differences among those that participated. Answers were also analyzed by age and identified gender.

Summary

By conducting this research, participants revealed information about the transgender population that may not be known to many at this time.

Conducting interviews proved to be a more open forum with which to gather data. By conducting this research, many participants felt empowered by sharing their own experiences and giving a voice to a community that has historically been marginalized.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

This chapter will detail the results of this study on the transgender community. The results will be presented in five categories as follows: demographics, family relationships, romantic relationships, mental health, and the transition process. Each section will report on answers given from six participants and will include direct quotes from individual interviews.

Presentation of the Findings

Demographics

This study had six participants. Four of the participants are male-to-female (MtF) transgender individuals and currently identify as female, and two of the participants are female-to-male (FtM) transgender individuals and currently identify as male. The age of the participants ranges from 23-years-old to 60-years-old with 50% of the participants under the age of 30 and 50% of the participants over the age of 30. Four of the participants identified as white, one participant identified as black, and one participant identified as mixed ethnicity (black, white, and Native American). Participants reported educational background as follows: three participants have a Bachelor's degree, one participant has a Master's degree, one participant has completed vocational school, and one participant has a drug and alcohol certification. Four participants reported no religious affiliation, and two

participants identify as Christian. All participants were raised in a religious household.

Family Relationships

All participants reported that they had come out as transgender to their families. When asked about the family's initial reaction to finding out about the participant's transgender status, the responses were mixed with 4 participants stating the family had a negative reaction. For example, Participant 1 stated, "They didn't take it well...I thought I made a mistake coming out to them. I thought I was going to start losing everyone... I thought I might have to walk away from everyone at that point" (Survey Interview, January 2016). Similarly, Participant 4 stated, "My family was in disbelief and denial. My brothers don't acknowledge it, and my grandparents only acknowledge it in a negative context, but they never refer to me as female or by my new name" (Survey Interview, April 2016). The other two participants reported that they did not have a difficult time with their families. Participant 6 stated, "I had kept it a secret for a long time because I was afraid of how my family would be about it. I told my mom first, and she was shocked but she was actually really supportive" (Survey Interview, April 2016). Of the four participants that had a negative experience when coming out to family, three stated that their families' opinions have changed positively to some degree over time and one stated that things had not changed or had gotten worse.

I told my mother I couldn't spend time with her. She made me feel bad when I was with her. She wouldn't acknowledge me. She wouldn't accept me. And our relationship which had been extremely close for the previous 38 years just unraveled. We drifted apart, and she died a couple of years ago. (Participant 6, Survey Interview, April 2016)

When the participants were asked about the hardest aspect of family as it relates to being transgender, five out of six participants reported negative changes in family relationships and interactions. For example, Participant 3 stated "I feel as if I've disappointed them in some way. I'm not a regular accomplished guy or something so that makes me feel bad that maybe they're embarrassed or ashamed of me" (Survey Interview, January 2016). Participant 5 stated, "What is hard to deal with is that my parents are trying to keep this as a huge secret from my grandma... my cousin is getting married back home, and I don't really know what's going to happen" (Survey Interview, April 2016).

Romantic Relationships

When asked about romantic relationships, 50% of the participants reported that they were involved in romantic relationships while the other 50% reported that they were single. When the participants were asked about sexual orientation, all participants indicated that they are interested in women with three MtF participants indicating that they might be interested in dating men. For example, Participant 4 stated, "I like women. I date women. I have dated men that I was attracted to. I never give it a second thought when I'm seeking

out a romantic relationship. I never expect to end up with a guy though” (Survey Interview, April 2016). When the participants were asked if they find it difficult to form romantic relationships as a transgender person, the answers were mixed. Of those that are currently single, participants’ answers were uniform in that they have some degree of fear in dating as a transgender person. Participant 1 stated, “The danger in that is that you’re setting yourself up for possible ‘chasers’ [fetishists] who are looking specifically for people like me... and people who are violent that want to go after trans people” (Survey Interview, January 2016). Participant 6 stated, “I think that you do have to be careful when you’re a trans woman because a lot of people just want you because you’re a fetish to them so it makes you always question, ‘does this person really like me or is this just part of the fantasy?’” (Survey Interview, April 2016).

Mental Health

Participants uniformly reported experiencing issues with mental health at some point in their lives. In addition, all participants reported that they have suffered from depression. For example, Participant 2 stated, “I have had bouts of depression... I do take meds, and I stay pretty evenly-keeled right now unless I get overwhelmed and stressed out” (Survey Interview, January 2016). In addition, all participants stated that the depression was in some way associated with being transgender and not feeling comfortable expressing it openly. Participant 5 stated, “I had three suicide attempts prior to coming out

as transgender... It was all within about a two-year span of time” (Survey Interview, April 2016). Participant 1 stated,

I read all of this stuff about how they would, even in the 70s, do electro-shock therapy or conversion therapy on trans people and that was all I had to go off of. I thought, ‘I’m going to be treated like an animal the minute I open my mouth.’ I think I definitely had depression, and I would say it was a by-product of being trans. (Survey Interview, January 2016)

Participants uniformly reported seeking assistance for mental health issues. Fifty percent of the participants stated that they had a positive experience with mental health services. For example, Participant 1 stated, “I specifically searched out people that had experience with this so I knew that when I was with them, they somewhat spoke the language” (Survey Interview, January 2016). The other 50% of participants stated that they had negative experiences receiving mental health services. For example, Participant 3 stated, “He [therapist] told me about a sexual escapade he had in one of his sessions. That was creepy. I couldn’t do that anymore” (Survey Interview, January 2016). When asked if participants felt they were able to find adequate services within the community, responses were mixed with 50% of participants stating they had received adequate services. Participant 5 reported, “Actually, it has been a lot easier than I thought it would be” (Survey Interview, April 2016). Fifty-percent of the participants stated services were inadequate or

unavailable. Participant 4 stated, “Co-pays for therapists are still pretty high when you’re broke as hell. I haven’t been to see a therapist in a while, and I should be going” (Survey Interview, April 2016).

Transitioning

Each participant was asked when they realized that they were transgender. All participants responded that they had a realization about their own gender identity sometime during their childhood with answers ranging from age 3 to age 9. For example, Participant 2 stated, “Probably around 6 or 7 I knew that I didn’t want to be a girl” (Survey Interview, January 2016).

Participant 5 stated, “I knew from the time I was 8 or 9” (Survey Interview, April 2016). When participants were asked when they started living as their preferred gender, 50% of participants stated they had been living as their preferred gender for 2 years with the other participants stating 3 years, 5 years, and 10 years.

When asked which stage of the transition process they were in, participants provided a variety of responses. Participants over age 30 reported that completion of surgery is indicative of feeling fully transitioned. For example, Participant 1 stated, “I have SRS [sexual reassignment surgery] in May... It’s like an alien foreign object that’s stuck to me, and I can’t get rid of it. By all means, its needs to happen. And it’s gonna happen” (Survey Interview, January 2016). In addition, Participant 3 reported, “I’m never going to stop. I won’t stop until I get sexual reassignment surgery” (Survey Interview, January

2016). Participants under age 30 reported that they considered their transitions complete when they began to pass as their preferred gender. For example, Participant 4 stated, "I consider myself to be post-transition. I don't get misgendered. My gender markers say female. Everything that is left is cosmetic which I don't think needs to be considered part of my transition" (Survey Interview, April 2016). When participants were asked if they planned to continue with their transition through surgical procedures, the answers were mixed. Four participants stated they would like to continue with surgery in the future. For example, Participant 5 stated, "The dream would be to have top surgery this year, but in reality I'd like to have it done within the next three years" (Survey Interview, April 2016).

When participants were asked about the toughest part of being transgender, the answers were mixed. Fifty percent of the participants reported feeling like they had missed out on life experiences. For example, Participant 3 stated,

The hardest part for me is knowing that the life I've always wanted is already behind me. It's never going to happen. I'm never going to be a teenager. I'm never going to prom. I'm never going to have my first kiss from my boyfriend... And each day that passes that I don't live that is just adding to the pain that I'm going to carry with me. (Survey Interview, January 2016)

Similarly, Participant 2 stated, “I want to experience everything about being male. I want to get married. I want to experience what it’s like to be with somebody who you love and make a baby. I want the whole experience” (Survey Interview, January 2016). The other 50% of participants reported that the toughest thing about transitioning relates to gender dysphoria. For example, Participant 4 stated,

In the beginning I was bulky, and I had stubble, no hormones, didn’t know how to speak, didn’t know how to carry myself to not stand out. I didn’t know how to dress myself, no knowledge of makeup, and going out every night just feeling like people were staring at me and talking about me and judging me and not feeling comfortable anywhere.

(Survey Interview, April 2016)

Summary

This chapter reviewed the details of this study on the experience of those within the transgender community. The research was divided into five categories: demographics, family relationships, romantic relationships, mental health, and transitioning. Each category presented the major themes found among those interviewed as well as noted the differences. Participants were quoted directly within each section.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Introduction

This chapter will identify the key findings from the study done on the transgender community. Each key finding will be linked to previous research done on the topic or will be noted if the research does not currently exist. This chapter will also detail the limitations of the study. Lastly, this chapter will examine the recommendations of how this study may be used in micro and macro social work practices and in future research.

Discussion

The study identified family relationships as a key challenge of those in the transgender community with four out of six participants reporting a negative initial reaction from family when coming out as transgender. In addition, five out of six participants reported family relationships had been negatively affected over time after the participant came out as transgender. This finding is consistent with Gamarel et al.'s study (2014) that found, "Because of their gender identity or gender expression, transgender people experience high levels of gender-based stressors and violence, including family rejection and hate crimes" (p. 438).

The study identified mental health as one of the key challenges experienced within the transgender community with all six participants

experiencing depression related to being transgender at some point in time. This finding is consistent with Dargie, Blair, Pukall, and Coyle's study (2014) finding that "transgender people fare much worse than those that are cisgender (or people that identify with the gender they were born into) with higher mortality rates, greater number of suicide attempts, and greater incidences of substance abuse and mental illness" (p. 3).

The study also found that an individual's sexual orientation did not change as the result of taking hormones. All participants remained attracted to the same gender they had been before transitioning. Some participants stated they were open to the possibility of dating the opposite gender. This is consistent with Auer et al.'s study (2014) which found that hormone replacement therapy (HRT) had no significant effect on sexual orientation. They also noted that some participants self-reported some changes in sexual orientation. This is also consistent with the findings in this study.

The study identified safety issues as another key challenge for the participants that identify as female. All female (MtF) participants reported developing an additional sense of awareness of surroundings upon living as female. Participants reported feeling more vulnerable to attacks and unwanted advances because of being seen as women. In addition, female participants reported more discrimination in employment as a result being a woman and not because of being transgender. As this field of study is relatively new, there is no current data that supports these findings.

Lastly, the study found age/generation as a dominant theme when analyzing the data provided by participants. Participants over the age of 30 expressed traditional ideas about gender roles (what it means to present as a man or woman) and identified sexual reassignment surgery as the necessary step to be considered post-transition. Participants under the age of 30 expressed gender as a fluid concept that had many different expressions. In addition, the younger participants all stated that post-transition occurs when an individual is living fulltime as the preferred gender and does not relate to completion of sexual reassignment surgery. It can be assumed that these ideas are formed based on generation and accepted ideas about gender roles and the changing climate related to gender. Currently, there is no research that has been conducted to support this theme.

Limitations

In this study, a key limitation was the sample size of the study. Because of time and availability, only six participants were able to take part in the study. A larger sample size would be needed to find definitive themes and conclusions in this study. In addition, the participants were found through snowball sampling. In this study, a majority of the participants were college-educated and gainfully employed. This is not necessarily a representative sample of the transgender community.

While the transgender community has been around for a few decades, the topic has not garnered attention until more recent times. Many of the

articles and research done with this population has been done in the last two years. There is a lack of studies to support much of the findings in this study. In addition, the study used self-reported data which relies on the participants to accurately describe experiences. Some experiences may be affected by some participants' exaggeration or attribution.

Recommendations for Social Work Practice, Policy and Research

For social workers in a micro setting, it is important to understand this historically underrepresented community. Many transgender people find a lack of understanding or acceptance among those in the social work profession. In general, the transgender community faces a greater amount of violence and discrimination than those in the general population. It is important for social workers to consider the support systems of those in the transgender community and to assist in building it up as many face rejection from family, friends, and peers and have very few people to turn to for support. Transgender people also experience a higher incidence of mental health issues and suicidal ideation.

From a macro social work point of view, the transgender community is in need of advocacy in policy and practice. At this time, there is very little legislation in place to assist transgender people from discrimination in the workplace and in schools. Currently, state, county, and local governments around the country are voting on and passing discriminatory policies related to

those in the transgender community. It is important for those writing policies to consider this community when creating new policies that may disproportionately affect them.

Lastly, it is imperative that researchers continue to study and understand the complex issues surrounding the transgender community and issues of gender identity. While research continues to be conducted, there are many issues that have not been explored related to this community. It is also important to give this community legitimacy. Historically, those within the transgender community have been relatively unseen. With more research, the community may experience more visibility and begin to feel more connected to the general population.

Conclusions

In this chapter, key findings from the study have explored along with data from other studies that assist in understanding the findings. The key findings related to mental health issues within the transgender community, sexual orientation as it relates to transition, safety issues of transgender women, and age/generation issues. In addition, this chapter explored the limitations of this study. Lastly, this chapter examined the recommendations of how this study may be used in micro and macro social work practices.

APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW GUIDE

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Before interview begins: Thank participant for agreeing to be part of the study, introduce myself, describe the procedure for the participant, briefly state the purpose of the interview, and ask if the participant has any questions before the interview

Section One: Background

Sample Questions:

How old are you?

What type of work do you do?

When did you realize that you were transgender?

What phase of transition are you in?

Section Two: Family

Does your family know that you are transgender?

What was their initial reaction?

Has their opinion changed over time?

Do you feel supported by your family?

In regard to family, what is the toughest thing about being transgender?

Section Three: Relationships

What is your sexual orientation?

Are you romantically involved?

Do you have a hard/easy time forming romantic relationships?

Section Four: Mental Health

Have you ever struggled with mental health issues?

Are any of the struggles associated with your transition?

Have you found adequate services to meet your needs?

Are you currently receiving mental health services?

Section Five: Transition

If you haven't fully transitioned, do you plan to continue the process?

What is the toughest part of the transition process?

What is involved in the process?

When did you begin living as your identified gender?

Developed by Amanda Mileham

APPENDIX B
INFORMED CONSENT

INFORMED CONSENT

The study in which you are being asked to participate is designed to investigate the experience of individuals that identify as transgender. This study is being conducted by Amanda Mileham under the supervision of Dr. Janet Chang, Professor of Social Work, California State University, San Bernardino. This study has been approved by the School of Social Work Subcommittee of the Institutional Review Board, California State University, San Bernardino.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this research is to gain a better understanding of transgender people and allow participants to have a voice in describing the experience of those in this community.

DESCRIPTION: Participants will be asked to select a place to be interviewed that is convenient and comfortable. Participants will be asked general questions about their experience as a transgender person. Participants will be recorded for later use by the researcher only. Upon completion, participants will not be asked for any follow-up.

PARTICIPATION: Your participation is completely voluntary and you do not have to answer any questions you do not wish to answer. You may skip or not answer any questions and can freely withdraw from participation at any time.

CONFIDENTIALITY: The participant's identity will be known only by the researcher for contact purposes. Each participant will be identified by a pseudonym within the research to protect their real identity. The interviews will be recorded by voice recorder. The voice recordings will be stored on a password protected computer. These recordings will be used by the researcher only. All voice recordings will be destroyed one year after the research project has been concluded.

DURATION: The participants will be asked to meet with the researcher one time for a single interview. The interview should last approximately one hour.

RISKS: This study has minimal risk to participants. Some questions may relate to subjects that are sensitive in nature to the participant and may elicit an emotional reaction.

BENEFITS: This study does not provide any benefit to the participant.

VIDEO/AUDIO/PHOTOGRAPH:

i understand that this research will be audio recorded.

Initials _____

909.537.5501

5500 UNIVERSITY PARKWAY, SAN BERNARDINO, CA 92407-2393

APPENDIX C
DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

Study of the Transgender Experience Debriefing Statement

This study you have just completed was designed to investigate the transgender experience. The study will be utilized in identifying commonalities and differences among those in the transgender community and the overall experience of individuals at different places in the transition process. The research will serve to bring new light to a community that has traditionally not been studied.

Thank you for your participation. If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to contact Amanda Mileham or Professor Janet Chang at 909-537-5184. If you would like to obtain a copy of the group results of this study, please contact Dr. Janet Chang at 909-537-5184 at the end of Spring Quarter of 2016.

APPENDIX D
AUDIO USE INFORMED CONSENT FORM

**AUDIO USE
INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

As part of this research project, I will be making an audio recording of you during your participation in the experiment. Please indicate what uses of this audio recording you are willing to consent to by initialing below. You are free to initial any number of spaces from zero to all of the spaces. I will only use the audio recording in ways that you agree to. In any use of this audio recording, your name would *not* be identified. If you do not initial any of the spaces below, the audio recording will be destroyed.

- **The audio recording can be studied by the researcher for use in the research project.**

Place an X here: _____

I have read the above description and give my consent for the use of the audio recording as indicated above.

The extra copy of this consent form is for your records.

PLACE AN X HERE: _____ DATE _____

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