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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO  
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SAN MARCOS

Gender Variance On Campus: A Critical Analysis of Transgender Voices

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree Doctor of Education

in

Educational Leadership

by

Lee M. Mintz

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2011

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The Dissertation of Lee M. Mintz is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

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Chair

University of California, San Diego  
California State University, San Marcos

2011

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my mentor, my supervisor, and my friend, Dr. Susan Shuckett. The last time we saw each other, you said about my dissertation defense, “I will be there!” And you are. You helped make me the person I am today and the person I am still to become. You are greatly missed.

This project is also dedicated to my mom and brother, Linda and David Mintz, for your unwavering support and unconditional love. To my dad, Al -- TWNDNHADCT. Finally, to my soulmate, Gertrude the Pomeranian, thank you for sitting on my computer, playing on my drafts, and squeaking your ball in the middle of a good sentence.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

SIGNATURE PAGE .....	iii
DEDICATION .....	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS .....	v
LIST OF FIGURES .....	viii
VITA.....	ix
ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION.....	x
CHAPTER 1.....	1
Introduction .....	1
Statement of the Problem .....	5
Strategies of Inquiry, Purpose of the Study, and Research Questions.....	6
Overview of the Methods.....	7
Significance of the Study .....	9
Defining a Common Language.....	10
Preview of the Literature Review.....	14
Organization of the Study .....	15
CHAPTER 2 .....	17
Interpretive Paradigms/Theoretical Frameworks.....	17
Literature Review: Transgender Population, Social Construction of Gender, Transgender Identity Development, and Encouraging Relevant Dialogues .....	24
Transgender Students on Campus.....	32
Belonging.....	35
Analytic Approaches.....	39

Summary.....	44
CHAPTER 3 .....	48
Purpose of the Study and Research Questions.....	48
Research Design .....	49
Positionality.....	55
Limitations and Ethical Considerations.....	56
CHAPTER 4 .....	57
Results .....	57
Definition and Identity.....	58
Disclosure .....	69
Societal Practices.....	73
Campus Practices.....	80
LGBT.....	86
Change.....	88
Document Analysis.....	94
Summary .....	98
CHAPTER 5 .....	99
Discussion .....	99
Results Review .....	99
Exploring Definition and Identity.....	101
Discussing Disclosure of the Transgender Identity.....	108
Interpreting Societal Practices.....	110
Exploring Campus Practices.....	116

Discussing LGBT.....	122
Exploring Change.....	123
Interpreting Paradigms and Theoretical Frameworks.....	130
Critical Leadership and Moving Forward.....	138
Limitations and Future Considerations.....	142
Conclusion.....	144
APPENDIX A .....	147
Consent to Participate in Research.....	147
APPENDIX B .....	149
Interview Questions.....	149
APPENDIX C .....	151
Journal Topics.....	151
REFERENCES .....	152

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 5.1. *Critical Transgender Theory*.....132

## VITA

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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Gender Variance on Campus: A Critical Analysis of Transgender Voices

by

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Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

University of California, San Diego, 2011

California State University, San Marcos, 2011

Professor Lorri Santamaría, Chair

Transgender college students face discrimination, harassment, and oppression on college and university campuses; consequently leading to limited academic and social success. Current literature is focused on describing the experiences of transgender students and the practical implications associated with attempting to meet their needs (Beemyn, 2005; Beemyn, Curtis, Davis, & Tubbs, 2005). This study examined the perceptions of transgender inclusion, ways in which leadership structures or entities include/exclude transgender students, and effects of inclusive/exclusive language on transgender students through student's own words and experiences. Consistent with

methods to utilize critical theories, students participated in individual interviews regarding their experiences on campus and reviewed campus documents. Findings indicate that while participants of this study did experience some negative reactions on campus, by allowing them to tell their stories we are allowed glimpses into more important (and less talked about) facets of their lives including stereotypes of the transgender community, privileges of being transgender, and the need for individual identification. Critical theory, critical race theory, and feminist theory allowed for deeper analysis of knowledge and truth and the creation of critical transgender theory. Critical transgender theory encourages the questioning of the gender binary, the categorization of transgender people as “other,” and the impact that challenging this categorization has on the transgender population.

## CHAPTER 1

“Every day that I look in the mirror, I hate myself.” My heart went out to him. Him. The pronoun easily comes to my mind. Born biologically female, the student in front of me identifies as male. Well, “girly man” to be exact. (personal communication, August 2, 2007). To protect his anonymity, I will call him Ben. Ben is hurting. He sits across from me and slowly explains the challenges and struggles that he is facing; challenges in his head, challenges in his relationship, challenges on campus...challenges in the world. I listen because that is what he needs. I listen because that is all I know how to do.

As an educational leader and student affairs professional, I strive to help all students. I see myself as a resource on campus, available to assist any student in a time of crisis. I have sought out new experiences, attended conferences, and asked the difficult questions. As a person that is not part of many populations on campus, I work hard to understand the concerns of others and be a supportive ally. Many years ago, I began to learn about the transgender community and the issues facing gender-variant students on college campuses. I began to teach about these issues to students in an attempt to deconstruct the myths that surround this community, open the doors of communication about this population, and create more allies on campus. Although a complex topic, I felt I had a foundation of knowledge. Yet, as Ben sat across from me and shared his story, I was at a loss for words. Despite the research and self-educating that I had done, I did not know how to guide him. I quickly tried to think of resources on campus to which I could refer him; yet, despite working on my campus for six years, I could only think of one person that might be able to assist Ben. My initial relief from

thinking of a referral source soon vanished as I began to realize how few resources exist on many of our campuses for transgender students (Beemyn, Curtis, Davis, & Tubbs, 2005; McKinney, 2005).

Most of the literature that exists about the transgender population places transgender in the same category as lesbian, gay, or bisexual – an incorrect placement that assumes that gender issues and sexual identity issues are related (Beemyn, 2003; Paxton, Guentzel, & Trombacco, 2006). Including the “T” with the “LGB” assumes that trans students have the same experiences as lesbian, gay, and bisexual students. While the “T” has been grouped with “LGB,” many individuals, organizations, and colleges have done so symbolically, without proper education about or outreach to the transgender community (Beemyn, 2003). Furthermore, studying the LGBT community as a whole without specifically studying the transgender community can lead to inaccurate findings and teachings about the transgender community. For example, a study of transgender college students by Rankin and Beemyn (2005) indicated that 44% of transgender respondents experienced harassment. That same study indicated that less than 33% of LGBT participants experienced harassment (Rankin & Beemyn, 2005, as cited in Beemyn, 2005). Furthermore, few empirical studies report how harassment impacts the academic achievement of LGB or T students in particular, although there are many studies that report how harassment negatively impacts student learning (Eisenberg, Neumark-Sztainer, & Perry, 2003; Juvonen, Nishina, & Graham, 2000). Following the trend for grouping LGB and T students in the same studies, it is likely transgender students’ academic achievement is negatively impacted by the reported levels of harassment experienced by other students. In another example, a study entitled

“Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students: Perceived social support in the high school environment” by Munoz-Plaza, Quinn, and Rounds (2002) indicates that transgender students were included in the conducted study. However, out of the 12 students that researchers interviewed, none identified as transgender – despite the misleading title. In another empirical study conducted by the Gay Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN), “less than 10% of the students identified as transgender” despite the title, “Shared Differences: The Experiences of Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Students of Color in our Nation’s Schools” (Diaz & Kosciw, 2009). When grouped with gay, lesbian, and bisexual respondents, results of the studies could be different.

There exists a considerable range of estimates regarding what percentage of the population is made up of transgender people. Sources estimated that 0.25% to 10% of the general population indicated they are transgender (Carroll, Gilroy, & Ryan, 2002; Cichocki, 2007; Macropoulos, 2006). There are several reasons that providing an accurate count of the transgender population is difficult, if not impossible. Formally, the United States Census does not include “transgender” as a category (Macropoulos, 2006; United States Census Bureau, 2007). Informally, there exist compelling and understandable reasons why transgender individuals do not claim their gender identity. Accurate statistics about transgender people would require this population to willingly identify as transgender and risk discrimination, violence, and further isolation. Despite rising levels of media coverage, transgender people are not only not recognized; they are ignored (Labossiere, 2007). Because they often fall outside the range of “normalcy,” they are invisible. According to Lee Maranto (2003), a transgender man living in Santa

Cruz, California, “the fact that there continues to be so much invisibility and silence around this issue keeps it pathologized. Because there isn’t enough information in the mainstream media to substantiate that I’m normal, I’m still out in the margins.” (as cited in Letellier, 2003, p. 44).

Although colleges strive to create inclusive and socially-just campuses where students have equal opportunities for academic success, students arrive to campus from a variety of environments, including the often discriminating and discerning hallways of high school. Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) youth experience high levels of peer isolation and separation (Bettcher, 2007; Lee, 2000; Hill & Willoughby, 2005). Much of this isolation stems from individuals being fearful of their peers (Burgess, 1999; Rotheram-Borus, Rosario, & Coopman, 1991). As a result, suicide, suicidal ideation, and mental health condition rates are high amongst this population (Feldman & Bockting, 2003; Health Outreach & Advocacy Program, 2007). Violence against transgender students is prevalent as well. Feelings of being unsafe and the fear of being attacked not only damage physical and mental health, but they have direct educational consequences as students choose to miss school to protect their safety. This can result in limited educational advancement (Eisenberg, Neumark-Sztainer, & Perry, 2003; Lee, 2000).

In addition to difficult interactions in educational and peer environments, transgender students must also wrestle with the challenges of self-identifying to their families. According to Teague (1992), many transgender people disclose their gender identity to their families hoping to receive support. However, in disclosing their identity, they are often met with disapproval, mistreatment, and familial detachment. In studies

of LGBT youth, Pilkington and D'Augelli (1995) and Grossman, D'Augelli, Howell, and Hubbard (2005) found that parents often respond negatively to their child's non-traditional gender identity once it is revealed.

Transgender students are on college campuses. They are attending orientations. They are withdrawing from classes. Many of them have come from environments, be it familial or educational, where they have been abused, harassed, and ignored. Many have given up and, as a result, many have not enjoyed the benefits of educational advancement. According to Lee (2000), 23% of LGBT youth drop out of high school. They will never make it to a college campus. Yet, despite harrowing pasts, transgender students triumphantly arrive to college. Faculty, staff, and students need to create positive experiences for transgender students that promote holistic education and increased graduation rates. Ultimately, college campus leadership, including structures (policies) and entities (people), must strive to create and foster a safe and accepting environment for transgender students and help them understand that the college environment can be different from the negative experiences of the past. Transgender students can exist in a community that assists with their academic progress rather than detracts from it. Applied critical leadership practices in higher education settings can encourage, support, and sustain a community more inclusive of transgender students, likely resulting in increased academic success (Santamaría & Santamaría, 2011).

#### Statement of the Problem

Limited literature currently exists about transgender college students. The literature that does exist is mainly descriptive; describing the experiences of transgender students and the practical implications associated with attempting to meet their needs

(Beemyn, 2005; Beemyn, Curtis, Davis, & Tubbs, 2005; Beemyn, Domingue, Pettitt, & Smith, 2005). A theoretical framework -- particularly regarding how campus experiences affect transgender college students -- is missing, however can be exploratorily viewed through the funnel-like lenses of constructivist critical feminist theory, critical race theory, and critical leadership. In terms of content, while some experiences of transgender students have been studied (for example, by the above cited authors), no connection has been drawn between these incidents and how they affect the overall college experience as related to retention, feelings of acceptance, sense of belonging, academic success, nor the role leadership practices play in creating a more inclusive environment for transgender students.

One powerful subset of information that is also missing from the published literature on the transgender population relates to the specific use of oppressive and exclusive language by students, educational leaders and student affairs professionals and the effects of this language on students. Whether intentionally or unintentionally, many non-transgender identified people exclude trans people through written and verbal language. This exclusion may have detrimental effects on the self-worth, self-esteem, and feelings of mattering and belonging that a student might feel on a college campus. By focusing on the negative effects of exclusive language, as well as the power of the individual to change that language, each person can make a concerted effort to lessen the oppression towards transgender students.

#### Strategies of Inquiry, Purpose of the Study, and Research Questions

“A research design describes a flexible set of guidelines that connect theoretical paradigms first to strategies of inquiry and second to methods for collecting empirical

materials” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 25). The purpose of this study is to critically examine the perceptions of inclusion of transgender students, to examine the ways in which campus leadership structures or entities include or exclude transgender students, and to examine the effects of inclusive and exclusive language on transgender students through students’ own words and experiences. This study addresses the following research questions:

1. In what ways do transgender students feel that their transgender identity is accepted on their campus?
2. In what ways have the participants’ campus leadership structures or entities demonstrated inclusion or exclusion of their transgender identity?
3. What are the effects of intentionally and/or unintentionally oppressive written and spoken language on transgender students?

Through the use of qualitative interviews and narrative analysis framed by constructivist critical feminist theory, transgender students involved in this study were offered the opportunity to tell their story (Ladson-Billings, 1997). While I examined commonalities, differences, and implications of these stories, telling one’s own story can often be empowering as well as insightful.

### Overview of the Methods

Consistent with qualitative research and methods informed by critical theoretical frameworks, in order to gain information regarding the perceptions of inclusion, methods of inclusion or exclusion, and the effects of intentionally and/or unintentionally oppressive written and verbal language on transgender students, self-identified transgender college students from the campuses of San Diego State University, California

State University, San Marcos, and University of California, San Diego were interviewed. Each individual interview was digitally voice recorded, transcribed, and cross-checked for common themes. Questions included demographic inquiries such as age, gender identity, and years attending a particular college. Questions focused on that individual's realization of their transgender identity, their openness about that identity, the feeling of inclusion or exclusion on campus, and their impressions of whether they have been exposed to written and/or verbal inclusive or exclusive language as related to their transgender identity. Also, consistent with strategies of inquiry and interpretive paradigms used in qualitative research, the interview sought information regarding the positive or negative effects of this language on the individual's sense of mattering, belonging, retention, and safety (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

Participants were additionally asked to analyze the language used in campus documents and note examples of inclusion or exclusion of transgender students. These documents were available on each campus' website and were provided to participants. They were asked to indicate wording in the documents that evokes feelings of inclusion or exclusion when read.

Narrative analysis was used to interpret the data collected from the participants in this study. Through the use of narrative analysis in conjunction with such methods as interviewing and document review, the researcher analyzed the stories told by the participants and subsequently created knowledge from the data that was collected (Eng, 2006; Reason, 2001; Savin-Baden & Van Niekerk, 2007). As strategies of inquiry used in qualitative research explicitly connect researchers to often specific methods of collecting and analyzing materials, as has been described, I have taken particular

precaution in regard to representation and legitimization as they relate to the individuals who participate in this inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

Critical pedagogy is the explicit complementary macro-theoretical framework which guided this inquiry process. As such, it gave the original research a design and fundamental structure other researchers can replicate or build upon in the future. Critical theory was selected as the lens through which to guide and frame this work because like the current study on “Gender Variance on Campus: A Critical Analysis of Transgender Voices,” it challenges the current educational reality, identifies the actors to change it, and provides both clear norms for criticism and achievable practical goals for social transformation (Kincheloe & McClaren, 2000; McClaren, 2005; Wink, 2004).

Additionally, the current inquiry, in alignment with critical theory, addresses the need to overcome institutional forms of domination that may impede the academic realization for transgender students in higher education from students’ perspectives gleaned from their stories and direct experiences to inform leadership practices resulting in educational change (Ladson-Billings, 1997).

#### Significance of the Study

Given that much of the research on the transgender student population involves physical and emotional abuse, suicidal ideation/rates, and lack of acceptance of this population as a whole, I believe that this study not only fills a gap in the research, but provides an opportunity for each person to make a conscious change towards the acceptance of the trans population (Feldman & Bockting, 2003; Health Outreach & Advocacy Program, 2007). This study addresses the college experience as viewed through the eyes of transgender students. They had the ability to tell their stories and

offer insight as to what leads to feelings of inclusion, exclusion, mattering, and sense of belonging for transgender participants on a college campus.

By studying language on a college campus purported and encouraged by leadership structures and entities as related to the transgender student population, one can assess the following matters: 1) do transgender students perceive language on their college campuses to be exclusive or oppressive of their transgender identity? 2) if the language is perceived to be exclusive, what (if any) effects does this have on their self-esteem, self of belonging, and sense of safety on campus? and 3) do students believe that the effects of this language on their identity differ depending on whether the oppressive language was used intentionally or unintentionally? By studying the use of language and the effects on transgender students. my hope is to encourage the individual to look at the oppression they are creating, understand the effects of their individual actions on trans students, and be motivated to change their language. Reducing or eliminating exclusive language will have a positive emotional effect on transgender students.

#### Defining a Common Language

According to Burdge (2007), “whatever the forum, we must be capable of sophisticated conversations on gender if we hope to cure the social diseases of sexism, homophobia, heterosexism, and transphobia” (p. 248). To identify these prejudices as “social diseases” encapsulates the detrimental effects that these biases are having on our society – biases that have been socially constructed. We need to have these courageous conversations (Kane, 2001). According to Margaret Wheatley (2002), human conversation is the oldest and easiest way to cultivate change. Courageous conversations have led to desegregation, appreciation, and the election of the first African-American

president of the United States. It is possible to deconstruct powerful social structures by the application of change-oriented leadership practices.

### *Sex versus Gender*

The terms *sex* and *gender* are often and incorrectly used interchangeably despite differing definitions (Sausa, 2002). *Sex* is defined as the two major forms of individuals, female or male, based on reproductive organs and structures (Merriam-Webster 2008; Sausa, 2002). *Sex* is biological. One's sex is determined by biology. *Female* relates to the sex that produces eggs and can give birth. *Male* is defined as an individual that produces sperm in order to fertilize the eggs of a female (Merriam-Webster, 2008). As demonstrated by these definitions, the determination of sex relates to biological anatomy and function.

*Gender* is constructed by the demonstration of cultural, psychological, and behavioral, traits *typically* associated with one sex (Merriam-Webster, 2008). Unlike sex, gender is subjective and determined by the characteristics that are associated with sex. For example, for decades society has determined that characteristics such as being gentle, nurturing, caring, and compassionate are female traits (Kane, 2001). However, as stated by Merriam-Webster, these are traits that are "typically" associated with one particular sex, meaning that traits can and do transcend the male/female division. To be nurturing, caring, or compassionate is not necessarily determined by biology. Gender is a set of traits that may or may not correspond to biological sex, meaning that one's gender may or may not match biological sex (de Beauvoir, 1952; Kane, 2001; Sausa, 2002).

### *Gender Identity*

*Gender identity* refers to one's sense of being female, male, both genders, neither gender, or otherwise gendered (Burdge, 2007). The determination of whether a trait is typically male or female has been constructed by society (de Beauvoir, 1952). Furthermore, society has assumed that a person's gender and sex must be the same. A person that is biologically female is assumed to have a female gender. A person that is biologically male is assumed to have a male gender. Yet, gender need not nor does it correspond to sex. Gender roles are stereotypical (Safir, Rosenmann, & Kloner, 2003). Stereotypes have been created by society, thus gender roles have been created by society. Therefore, the self should determine gender identity and whether one feels that the traits and characteristics possessed are male, female, male and female, or neither male nor female.

### *Transgender/Gender Variant*

*Transgender* refers to those who identify and express a gender identity that does not correlate with their biological sex (Burgess, 1999; Lovaas, Baroudi, & Collins, 2002; McCarthy, 2003; Sausa, 2002). If a person's gender identity does not correspond with their genital anatomy at birth, they are transgender (Burdge, 2007). Leslie Feinberg (1998), transgender author and activist, stated that "our lives are proof that sex and gender are much more complex than a delivery room doctor's glance at genitals can determine, more variegated than pink or blue birth caps" (p. 5). *Transgender* is an umbrella term used to describe any person with a gender identity that does not completely match biological sex and who may express gender in nontraditional ways (Beemyn & Curtis, et al., 2005; Bilodeau, 2005; Burdge, 2007; Carroll et al., 2002; Lombardi,

Wilchins, Priesing, & Malouf, 2001; O’Neil, McWhirter, & Cerezo, 2008; Ryan, 2004; Sausa, 2002). *Gender variance* is also an umbrella term intended to include all forms of gender identity and expression, whether a person identifies with a specific gender, both genders, or neither gender (Ressler & Chase, 2009). Underneath the transgender and gender variant umbrellas exist numerous specific gender identities including transgender, transsexual, intersexed, cross-dresser/transvestite, gender-queer, gender-neutral, and gender-fluid (Carroll et al., 2002; Lombardi, Wilchins et al., 2001; Ryan, 2004). Some transgender individuals shy away from identifying labels while others embrace them (Savin-Williams, 2006 as cited in Ressler & Chase, 2009). Therefore, we must be cognizant and respectful of individual gender identity and expression of that identity.

For the purposes of this paper, *transgender* and *gender-variant* will be used to refer to all persons who self-identify under the transgender or gender-variant umbrella terms. However, it is important to recognize the individual identities that exist within the transgender community. While *transgender* will be used as an all-encompassing term, acknowledgement must be given to individual identities and the importance of having the freedom to self-identify. Although we are finally trying to make strides in dissecting and understanding the transgender identity, we cannot ignore the differences that exist within the community. Similar to Ladson-Billings and Donnor’s (2005) assertion that “Euro-American epistemology has forced [African Americans, Native Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans] into an essentialized and totalized unity that is perceived to have little or no internal variation” (p. 284), transgender people must not be lumped into one group or become bound by generalizations. Again, although this document will refer to the

*transgender* population as a whole, this is not meant to de-individualize members of that community.

### *Sexual Orientation*

Sexual orientation and gender identity are often believed to be the same or have related meanings (McCarthy, 2003; Sausa, 2002). Renn (2007), Burdge (2007), Paxton, Guentzel, and Trombacco (2006), and Sausa (2002) clearly define the difference between *sexual orientation* and *gender identity*. As the acronym LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) is indiscriminately used, Renn (2007) distinguished between sexual orientation (LGB) and gender identity (T). While these populations are often combined, it is important to understand that sexual orientation and gender identity are different. Sexual orientation refers to the emotional and sexual attraction that individuals feel for one another. Gender identity refers to one's sense of being female, male, both genders, neither gender, or otherwise gendered (Burdge, 2007). A person's attraction to a particular sex has no relationship to that person's own gender identity, as the two are not dependent on each other. A person's internal determination of their own gender identity is not related to the sex or gender of the person they are sexually attracted to. As an example, a person who identifies as male might be attracted to women. This attraction to women is irrelevant to the fact that the person internally identifies as male. A sense of self is not related to a relationship to others.

### Preview of the Literature Review

In recognition of the notion that problems cannot be empirically explained absent a conceptual system, I realized I could not investigate the identified research problem from all perspectives simultaneously. Approaching the research problem from a

theoretical framework established the perspective through which the researcher viewed the problem and provided clarification for the research process. The perspective that most adequately provided focus to the research design and process involved in planning and carrying out the current study was that of critical theory. This theory encompasses critical race theory and an emergent leadership facet of the theory: critical leadership, which helped to frame the leadership implications in the inquiry. This framework will be further described in the literature review followed by a review of the content literature on the transgender population, the social construction of gender, transgender identity development, and the importance of encouraging relevant dialogues about this population in order to better meet their needs.

#### Organization of the Study

Transgender college students face discrimination, harassment, and oppression on college and university campuses . These conditions contribute to transgender students' limited academic and social success. This chapter outlined the importance of collecting research as related to transgender college students in order to increase inclusion and sense of belonging. Definitions and discussions of sex, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, the gender binary, and transgender identity have been included to demonstrate society's construction of the exclusion of transgender people. Chapter two of this proposal will explore the literature on that oppression, the causes of that oppression, and offers suggestions as to how to alleviate the discouraging campus climate. Exclusion of transgender college students, including exclusion through language, as demonstrated by Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman (1995) can have detrimental effects on a sense of belonging or mattering on campus; effects that lead to high levels of

depression, suicidal ideation, and suicide. Chapter three will provide a description of the research plan as well as an overview of the methodology that will be used in this study. Chapter 4 details the results of the study through the use of narrative analysis. Chapter 5 describes the significance of the results including reference to existing literature. In addition, Chapter 5 describes the implications of using critical theory, critical race theory, and feminist theory, as well as the introduction and demonstration of critical transgender theory. The study's limitations and applications for use are also presented in Chapter 5.

## CHAPTER 2

Despite the dearth of literature on the transgender population, specifically the transgender college student population, foundational research does exist (Beemyn & Curtis, et al., 2005; Bilodeau, 2005; McKinney, 2005; Renn, K, 2007). As well, there exists a theoretical framework with emergent leadership aspects which extends a qualitative line of inquiry that other researchers can reference, replicate, or build upon.

### Interpretive Paradigms/Theoretical Frameworks

Critical theory and critical leadership are the theoretical frameworks that situate this literature review. Lincoln and Guba (2000), assert that the complex discourse of qualitative research includes “an ontology based on historical realism, an epistemology that is transactional, and a methodology that is both dialogic and dialectical” (p. 174). Kincheloe and McClaren (2005) add layers of poststructural, postmodern, feminism, critical pedagogy, and cultural studies to the complexity of critical theory. In other words, critical theory is based on the notion of interpretive paradigms which seek to address the kinds of beings humans are, and the nature of reality (ontology); the relationship is between the inquirer and the known (epistemology), and the way we know the world or gain knowledge of it (methodology) (Guba, 1990, p.18). Critical theory assumes two ideas: societies in the West are not necessarily democratic and free and that context specific practical and pragmatic knowledge are needed to produce action and therefore transformational change that is counter-hegemonic in nature (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Critical theory asserts that people are socialized into power relationships, relations that instill dominance and subordination into society. According to Kincheloe and McLaren (2005), critical theorists understand “that all thought is fundamentally

mediated by power relations that are socially and historically constituted; that facts can never be isolated from some form of ideological inscription; that the relationship between concept and object and between signifier and signified is never stable or fixed and is often mediated by the social relations of capitalist production and consumption” (p. 304). Current societal hierarchy was created for the benefit of some and at the detriment of others. This hierarchy determines the social treatment of marginalized groups. Critical theory challenges these hierarchies and the “facts” that society has been conditioned to accept.

Knowledge is directly correlated with power. “Knowledge” and the attainment and expression of such often indicates the power that is held by the individual or group. Critical theory mandates that we question what constitutes knowledge; why something is considered true, fact, or proper. Critical theorists challenge assumed knowledge as we – whether through individual realization or critical pedagogy, strive to correct oppression by deconstructing the origin of “knowledge.” Knowledge is therefore ever-evolving, morphing, and shedding light on “truth” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005).

Critical theory greatly drives the foundation of this study as it relates to the transgender college student population. Society and current “knowledge” about the transgender community not only oppress this population, but often ignores trans people as the dominant population in society is non-transgender. Critical theory asserts that there exist competing interests between groups and, by design, one group must be dominant while the other is subordinate – there are winners and losers (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005).

A subset of critical theory is critical race theory, which includes aspects of feminist theory and also serves to frame this literature review. Critical race theory, and therefore this study, questions the need for these competing interests and the insistence that certain groups are ostracized and victimized. Critical race theory focuses on the “dominant order” and the need to maintain power relations (Ladson-Billings & Donner, 2005). *Critical feminist theory* analyzes gender relations: how we think about or do not think about gender relations including male domination (Flax, 1987). Those who practice critical feminism reevaluate existing gender dynamics by “deconstructing notions of reason, knowledge, or the self and to reveal the effects of the gender arrangements that lay beneath their ‘neutral’ and universalizing facades” (Flax, 1987, p. 626). While these theories focus on race and gender respectively, inferences can easily be drawn between race and gender identity as transgender individuals are dominated by nontransgender people.

For example, Oboler (1995, as cited in Ladson-Billings & Donner, 2005) profiles a scene from Rebecca Gilman’s (2000) play *Spinning into Butter*. The scene features an interaction between a college student and a dean in which the dean is pressuring the student to identify as a particular race. When the student disagrees, the dean chooses a different race for the student to identify as. The student argues about the importance of labels and categories, ultimately concluding that one must be able to “name oneself” as that individual sees fit. Beemyn (2005) and Sousa (2002) argue that when, for example, a transgender student is forced to choose from the male and female gender options on forms, they are disempowered. Similar to Gilman’s (2000) play, transgender students are constantly forced to identify into a category that does not allow them to self-identify.

Similar to Oboler (1995, as cited in Ladson-Billings & Donner, 2005), Beemyn (2005) and Sausa (2002) affirm that a lack of ability to self-identify invalidates a student's identity. Critical race theorists are often moral activists committed to an interactive social justice and equity agenda for historically racialized and genderized others (Ladson-Billings & Donner, 2005). Critical race theory uses multiple interpretive methodologies and "enacts an ethnic and ethical epistemology, arguing that ways of knowing and being are shaped by one's standpoint, or position in the world" (p. 186). Critical race theory calls for cross-racial coalitions in order to stimulate transformational democracy that might be realized for example, in a reconstructed university system that could eventually become home for racialized or genderized others (Bishop, 1998; Smith, 2005).

Critical leadership is a direct application of critical theory and addresses the action-oriented aspect of critical race theory (Singleton & Linton, 2006). This type of leadership practice occurs when educational leaders are able to assume a critical lens for race, gender, culture or other difference congruent to their context first and before they make largely collaborative consensus-based leadership decisions (Santamaría & Santamaría, 2011). Today, educational leaders in higher education are in need of such context specific practical guidance and support in order to lead their constituencies and facilitate change.

The Master Plan for the State of California is all but defunct while we are amidst the worse budget crisis ever. Meeting the multifaceted needs of students has become a cumbersome task in light of these larger more urgent issues, however, for student affairs professionals and educational leaders supporting and retaining a healthy student body is the most important task at hand. Leadership structures and entities in higher education

are not currently on board in terms of supporting many students who are traditionally underserved, and perhaps most overlooked are students who identify as transgender (Beemyn, 2005; McKinney, 2005; Sausa, 2002). It is a known fact that status quo leadership practices are not supportive of transgender student needs judging by the outcomes reported in the data available (Beemyn, 2005; McKinney, 2005). Applied critical leadership may have a better shot. Traditional leadership will not get us through the next decade in terms of educating young adults who are transgender.

Educational leadership theory, critical feminist theory, leadership for social justice, and perspectives on change offer foundational and alternative theoretical approaches to constructive ways of thinking about educational leadership for the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Capper, 1993; hooks, 1990; Santamaría & Santamaría, 2011; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003; Terrell & Lindsey, 2009; Van Nostrand, 1993). These works capture and reflect important research and critical conversations challenging assumptions about leadership and approaches to educating the current and upcoming generations of learners in U.S schools which consider race, gender, and oppression affecting everyday life in educational contexts. In Nee-Benhan's (1998) seminal feminist perspective, the voices of culturally and linguistically diverse educational leaders are captured working hard at *choosing change* to shape their work as opposed to *choosing to change* in response to their work.

Santamaría & Santamaría (2011) honor the scholarly leadership and progressive perspectives regarding educational leadership for change, believing now is the time to consider a more direct approach; one that begins with intentional applied context specific educational leadership, rather than status quo approaches. The contexts the researchers

are most interested in are the ones they believe are most transformational and those “spaces” where known and often hegemonic forms of leadership stop short: contexts where power and privilege intersect and where issues of race, gender, language, and culture are issues related to the realization of student success. The Santamarías’ suggest a call for educational leaders who are non-traditional in their worldview and experience, leaders who take different, unique and more critical approaches perhaps based on their own non-traditional success in education arenas. People who have succeeded in education despite race, gender, cultural and linguistic odds -- which would predict otherwise, representing a current more progressive face of educational leadership. These individuals are what the researchers call: *critical leaders*, people who use educational leadership to invoke viable change.

At the very least critical leaders are intent on raising academic achievement for all learners in their context, provide parameters for preparing *critical* citizens, and foster inclusive, heterogeneous classrooms with access to core curriculum for every learner (McKenzie, Christman, Hernandez, Fierro, Capper, Dantley, Gonzalez, Cambron-McCabe, & Scheurich, 2008). Although it is important to recruit and support critical leaders in educational administration programs, many critical leaders are current members of educational organizations. There are particular skill sets critical leaders need in order to be successful in addressing issues related to power, access, and academic achievement in their context. First, they need to be able to recognize and fully

understand critical issues<sup>1</sup> being raised. They should be able to name the issue, reflect on the issue, and be ready to act on the issue (Wink, 2004). Second, they should be able to convince others the issues are, in fact, issues, as individuals tend to have extreme 'blind spots' in these areas, which is why some of the issues remain as such (Lindsey, Martinez, & Lindsey, 2008). Third, critical leaders need to be able to create and sustain the psychological/physiological safe space for critical conversations, reflections, and actions to take place (Maslow, 1943; McKenzie, et al., 2008; Santamaría, under review, EAQ). Critical leaders have been found to work along a continuum toward cultural competence and share their vision, practice, and expectations with their constituencies (Institute for Educational Leadership, 2005; Lindsey, Martinez, & Lindsey, 2007). They recognize, encourage, expect, and support culturally responsive practices and approaches as a means of addressing inequities in the classroom and are able to expand and apply these principles in their own leadership practices (Ladson-Billings, 1995; 1997; Santamaría & Santamaría, 2011).

Critical leadership is essential at this juncture in our educational history. It is so significant, it suggests a host of other crucial leadership competencies (e.g., listening, facilitating, transforming thought processes). What is important to understand here is that the effective critical leader must *choose* change (as opposed to choosing *to* change) and be 'trained' in some way well beyond technical elements that are so often valued once a leader enters a system.

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<sup>1</sup> Critical issues are issues related to ways in which power becomes domination related to education, knowledge attainment, and social opportunity. Critical issues often involve race, language, socioeconomic status, gender expression, academic diversity ---and other context variables associated with social justice and educational equity (Bell, Adams, & Griffin, 2008).

## Transgender Population, Social Construction of Gender, Transgender Identity Development, and Encouraging Relevant Dialogues

As a complement to the preliminary theoretical framework, in terms of content, this review focuses on the transgender population, the social construction of gender, transgender identity development, and the importance of encouraging relevant dialogues about this population in order to better meet their needs. There are several important themes in the current literature including: defining the difference between sexual orientation and gender identity, the gender binary, the oppression of transgender students, and the powerful picture of the mental health issues that can be caused by a lack of acceptance, rights, and basic human needs given to the transgender community.

Literature also exists that indicates that people can learn to accept and appreciate those who identify with cultures that differ from one's own culture. The impact that mattering and belonging can have on a college student's educational experience will be discussed and related to exclusion based on gender identity. A shorter literature review on narrative analysis is also included as this will be the primary analytical method used to unpack and interpret the data collected.

### *The Gender Binary*

The *gender binary* is the existence of only two genders, male and female (Lucal, 1999; Sausa, 2002). Burdge (2007) examined the construction of the gender binary and argued that the very existence of this binary is oppressive for transgender people as they are automatically forced to either choose a gender from within the binary, or exist outside the accepted binary. Further elaborating on this idea of "choosing" a gender from within the binary, Burdge articulated the idea that gender is socially constructed. Society as a

whole believes that gender is not chosen, it is assigned based on anatomy. Individuals must identify as either male or female and this gender identity must coincide with biological anatomy. Society has therefore determined that one cannot identify as anything other than male or female and to do so is outside of societal norms and acceptance. An assumption exists that to identify as male involves rejecting stereotypical female characteristics and vice versa (Lucal, 1999; Monro, 2005).

Paxton et al. (2006) elaborated on Burdge's (2007) explanation of the gender binary and commented on the socially constructed categories developing within the transgender community. The authors provided a summary of their narrative study involving their own experiences trying to gain access to this community to study and interview members of the transgender population. While the authors were only able to present their own experiences -- therefore a generalizable study was not provided -- they did articulate several important concepts they became aware of during their study, including opinions that are forming about that community. As the transgender community grows in recognition, increasing social constructs about that community are developing. Just as society has dictated that gender equals male and female, society is quickly determining that transgender exists as the single "other" gender identity (Paxton, et al., 2006).

Paxton et al. (2006) recognized that there are communities underneath the transgender umbrella. In other words, identifying the entire population simply as transgender is not sufficient. This article builds on the foundation that Burdge (2007) established by expanding on the idea that any type of social binary is inappropriate. Just as one cannot place individuals solely within the gender binary, trans people cannot be

placed within specific roles or groups within the trans community, nor should we assume only one overall community exists. Categories, labels, and language used within and about the trans community must be allowed to evolve and emphasize the importance of allowing trans people to constantly change definitions, words, and dictionaries.

### *Transgender Identity Development*

The American Psychiatric Association (APA)(1994) has classified and included Gender Identity Disorder (the psychiatric term for identifying as or being transgender) in their *Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. The diagnostic criteria for this disorder mandate strong identification with the gender that does not correspond to biological sex. In children, this identification can be manifested by a repeated stated desire to be the other sex, preference for cross-dressing (i.e., males wearing stereotypically feminine attire, females wearing stereotypically masculine attire), and cross-sex roles in make-believe play. In adolescents and adults, gender identity disorder is displayed by a discomfort with the gender role assigned to biological sex, a desire to be treated as the other sex, cross-dressing, a belief that the individual has feelings that are consistent with the other sex, and the belief that they have feelings and reactions typically associated with the other sex (American Psychiatric Association, 1994, as cited in Burgess, 1999). While officially listed as a disorder, an updated entry from the APA (2008) stated that Gender Identity Disorder (GID) *need not always* be considered a disorder. According to the APA (2008), a psychological disorder is classified as such if the disorder causes “distress or disability.” Given that some transgender people do not feel distressed or disabled, a blanket classification is not warranted (American Psychiatric Association, 2008). The existence of a GID classification is controversial as the need for diagnosis by

or listing in the American Psychiatric Association may serve as a stigmatization, assertion, or confirmation there is something wrong with a person who identifies as transgender (Burgess, 1999).

Transgender identity development occurs as early as young childhood or much later in life (APA, 2008; Burgess, 1999). Recognition and expression of gender occurs throughout one's life, therefore there is no maximum age that caps one's recognition of transgender identity. Additionally, there does not exist one set of factors or levels of behavior that distinguish a transgender person from a non-transgender person. Each transgender person identifies as such for different and varying reasons. Similarly, the depth of identifying with the gender that does not correspond to biological anatomy differs (Eyler & Wright, 1997).

One of the foundational principles of the transgender identity is that one should be free to label their own gender identity as they please. In contrast to the gender binary, a transgender person should be able to self-identify; a self-identification that may involve identifying with one gender, both genders, no gender, a gender category, or no category at all. Society should not continue to dictate categorization as the existence of the gender binary results in oppression. In order to eliminate further oppression, society must not mandate, stereotype, or encourage further labeling. For example, this paper could easily categorize authors and transgender individuals by using male and female pronouns. However, as this researcher has not inquired as to the gender identity of each author, "they," "their," and "them" are utilized to avoid gender stereotypes based on names. Ignoring the general rule of required specificity is one way in which this author can avoid gender assumptions and oppression.

Expanding on the notion of individual identification, Eyer and Wright (1997) developed a gender continuum in which individuals determined their own gender identity. A nine-point scale allowed each person to identify as fully female, a female with maleness, gender-blended, neither woman or man, a member of “some other gender,” ungendered, bi-gendered, a male with femaleness, or fully male. Gender polarity and the gender binary were therefore eliminated, as well as the idea that one must identify only with the gender that corresponded to biological sex. Transgender people exist along this continuum and do not identify solely with the gender that society has dictated must exactly match sex.

#### *Suicide, Depression, and Abuse*

The issue of invisibility, from incomplete governmental attempts to gather data that adequately describe the total population, to the more informal and nuanced social behaviors that exclude the “other,” has led to internal and external hatred of the transgender community. Harassment, discrimination, and violence faced by transgender people on a daily basis, as well as the high-risk behaviors those individuals engage in to cope with these issues are common themes throughout the literature.

Transgender people are not immune to the jokes, stereotypes, and misperceptions about their identity and community. Repeated subjectivity to these conditions discourage the creation of a positive self-image. According to Zubernis and Snyder (2007), if a person receives messages that society loathes them (or a facet of who they are), not only will they feel isolated from society at large, they might internalize these negative beliefs and engage in self-hatred. Unlike racially or ethnically marginalized groups, transgender people often lack an available community support system – a support system that can

often provide coping mechanisms and survival skills. Furthermore, trans people are dissuaded or forbidden from following certain career paths (military, teaching, religious, etc.). The exclusion of this population is both formal and informal, subtle and overt, leading to greater stigmatization.

Student academic success is determined not only by success on tests and papers. The holistic college experience often involves a similar level of educational experiences that occur outside of the classroom. Students that feel more supported on campus and feel connected to the campus community – both inside and outside of the classroom – often achieve greater academic success (San Diego State University, 2010). Given the detrimental experiences faced by transgender students, including harassment, neglect, rejection from family and friends, depression, suicidal ideation, and other stressors mentioned above, academic success of transgender students can be greatly affected (Dean, 2000).

The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU) (2003) completed a study involving 1,600 surveys of LGBT students, faculty, and staff at 14 colleges and universities. Results overwhelmingly indicated most participants experienced harassment and discrimination, feared for their physical safety, and hid their sexual or gender identity on their campuses. In a study of 50 transgender college students, Rankin and Beemyn (2005) found that 44% of participants had experienced harassment including derogatory remarks, verbal threats, graffiti/vandalism, physical threats and assaults, denial of services, and pressure to be silent (Rankin & Beemyn, 2005, as cited in Beemyn, 2005). Lombardi et al. (2001) surveyed 402 transgender participants, 59.5% of which indicated they had experienced harassment or violence by

others. Additionally, 37.1% stated they had experienced economic discrimination (being fired, demoted, not being hired, etc.). Transgender people also experience high levels of physical danger (Hill & Willoughy, 2005; Lee, 2000). Compared to non-transgender and heterosexual students, LGBT youth are four times more likely to be victims of verbal or physical assaults and, as a result, are five times more likely to miss school due to fear for their personal safety (Lee, 2000). McKinney (2005) completed a similar study of 85 self-identified transgender college students regarding their perceptions of discrimination on campus. Results indicated that most participants believed that the campus climate was hostile towards transgender students.

Parental acceptance and reaction to transgender offspring can also greatly affect feelings of acceptance (or lack thereof). Grossman et al. (2005) studied a child's perceived parent reaction to the child's revelation of a "nonconforming" gender identity. Fifty-five transgender youths were interviewed about their parents' reactions to their gender identity. Results indicated that 59% of parents had negative reactions to their child's gender identity when initially informed of this identity. Furthermore, results indicated that parents verbally and physically abused many participants because of their gender identity. According to the authors, increased levels of parental abuse corresponded to increased levels of gender nonconformity. This lack of acceptance by their own parents, combined with high levels of abuse, can lead to severe emotional consequences of depression, stress, anxiety, and suicidal ideation (Grossman et al., 2005). In addition, emotional trauma and isolation can lead to high-risk and self-destructive behaviors (Bruce, Ramirez-Valles, & Campbell, 2008; Zubernis & Snyder, 2007).

Lack of acceptance by the self and others can lead to high-risk behaviors such as substance use, lack of health care, and suicidal ideation (Zubernis & Snyder, 2007). Bruce et al. (2008) surveyed 643 Latino gay, bisexual, and transgender men about drug and alcohol use. Results showed that participants reported elevated substance use – twice as much as non-LGBT individuals reported in previous household surveys. Alcohol was used three times as much by participants in this study versus previously studied non-LGBT households. The authors argued that these high levels of high-risk behaviors are coping mechanisms for dealing with social stigmas and high levels of stress (Bruce et al., 2008). Combined with these high-risk coping mechanisms was the prevalence of inadequate healthcare for transgender people. For the purposes of this commentary, “inadequate” is used to describe healthcare that does not meet the needs of trans individuals, as well as healthcare that trans people choose not to utilize. Transgender individuals are so fearful of social stigmatization they are willing to avoid preventative and reactive medical care in order to avoid self-disclosure. Approximately 30% to 40% of transgender people have no regular physician and 45% of transgender people have not informed their primary care physician of their transgender identity (Eyler & Wright, 1997; Feldman & Bockting, 2003). Blaming the transgender patients or clients for lack of medical care is unwarranted because of the difficulty in finding LGBT-trained medical professionals and facilities (Willging, Salvador, & Kano, 2006).

As a result of the social stigma and lack of acceptance, suicide and depression among transgender youth is common. Burgess (1999) and Rotheram-Borus et al. (1991) reported that more than 50% of sexual minorities were ridiculed by their peers for their “differences.” According to the Health Outreach & Advocacy Program (2007) in Boulder

County, Colorado, 44% of LGBT youth in that county reported that they had attempted suicide. Comparatively, in that same study, 13.5% of heterosexual youth reported at least one suicide attempt (Health Outreach & Advocacy Program, 2007). According to Feldman and Bockting (2003), 32% of transgender respondents admitted to attempting suicide and 30% to 40% reported that they were currently taking medication for a mental health condition. Sausa (2002) stated that more than 50% of transgender youth attempt suicide. Grossman and D'Augelli (2007) completed an interview-based study with 55 self-identified transgender youth regarding past suicidal attempts and ideation. Results indicated that 45% of respondents seriously considered taking their lives while 26% reported at least one suicide attempt. Of these attempts and ideation, most participants indicated that their inability to accept their own transgender identity, including the lack of acceptance by others, directly related to their suicidal behavior.

#### Transgender Students on Campus

Despite the presence of transgender students on college campuses, most American colleges and universities have excluded or failed to include these students (Beemyn, 2005; Beemyn & Curtis et al., 2005; Lovaas et al., 2002; McKinney, 2005; Sausa, 2002). Many college campuses currently exclude transgender students and fail to meet the needs of these students in such areas as health care, residential living on campus, bathrooms and locker rooms, records, programming, and support. These practices not only add to a general level of discomfort for trans students, but send a broader message that the campus does not address the needs of or include this population, nor care whether or not these students experience academic success or program completion (Beemyn, 2005).

According to Beemyn (2005), most campuses do not offer health care that is supportive of transgender health needs. Many campuses do not have mental health professionals that are trained to address the needs of transgender students, including recognition that not all students fit into the gender binary, that a student may choose to identify as a gender that is different from their biological gender, and the self-esteem or behavioral issues often associated with gender transitioning. In a study of 75 transgender graduate and undergraduate college students, McKinney (2005) found that many students felt they could not receive adequate counseling on their campus. Students from small, large, private, public, two-year, and four-year universities were surveyed and most indicated they had either heard that adequate counseling was not available or they had experienced inadequate counseling. In addition, to mental health needs, students in this same survey indicated that the campus health insurance excluded such transgender health needs as testosterone injections. Beemyn (2005) stated that many colleges' health plans exclude testosterone injections and gender reassignment surgeries, therefore forcing transgender students to utilize off-campus, more expensive health care options.

Another campus concern involves residential living. Beemyn (2005) reported that few campuses have adequate living options for transgender students, resulting in most trans students having negative residence hall experiences. Many housing administrators assign a living space or roommate based on the student's birth or assigned gender. This can create difficulties and a lack of comfort with an assigned roommate who may not be comfortable living with a transgender person. This can also be problematic for the transgender student who is then forced to live in/on a room, hallway, or floor with students of the gender with which that student does not identify. Residence halls are

often divided into single-sex sections with a restroom reserved for that sex. If a transgender person is placed into an area reserved for the sex/gender of which they do not identify, they can face difficulties when using the bathroom – both in terms of their own safety and comfort, as well as creating an uncomfortable environment for others using that same bathroom.

Restroom facilities are a common source of exclusion and discomfort for transgender students (Beemyn, 2005; McKinney, 2005; Sausa, 2002). The lack of gender-neutral restrooms on campus have left transgender students with three options: use a restroom assigned to the gender of which they identify and become a possible victim of violence or harassment, use a restroom assigned to the gender of which they do not identify and therefore be forced to temporarily not identify with their chosen gender, or choose not to use the restroom while on campus and therefore risk comfort and health practices.

Records and documents are also a challenging area for transgender students. When a student transitions from one gender to another, they often have a difficult if not impossible time changing their academic records and identification to reflect their chosen name or gender identity. If a student is not able to change these facets of their identity, they are often constantly forced to explain why their name, for example, does not match official university documents. This can lead not only to discrimination, but to a sense of disempowerment for the student as their identity is not validated (Beemyn, 2005, Sausa, 2002). Forms, such as those a student must fill out to obtain housing, often limit a student to choosing between male and female. If a student does not identify as male or female, identifies as both male and female, or transitions from male to female or female

to male, these forms will not only provide an initial complication when checking a box, but the answer that is checked is often set in stone for the duration of the academic experience.

Finally, transgender students have reported a lack of supportive programming or staff on campus (Beemyn, 2005; McKinney, 2005). McKinney (2005) reported that most respondents to the survey of 75 college students indicated that while there may be “LGBT” programming on campus, the “T” is often ignored. There was also a lack of support groups or supportive faculty or staff for transgender students. Many campuses not only do not have any openly transgender faculty or staff, but do not have faculty or staff that are trained to support trans students (Beemyn, 2005).

### Belonging

The gender binary, transgender discrimination, and the staggering statistics on violence against trans individuals greatly affect the quality of life of the transgender person. Social belonging and believing one has an impact in the lives of others increases happiness and a sense of self (Elliot, Colangelo, & Gelles, 2005; Newman, Lohman, & Newman, 2007). Belonging is associated with popularity, mattering, and a positive psychosocial adjustment. Therefore, individuals have a need to matter at any cost, a need so pervasive they will often engage in high-risk behaviors rather than face isolation (Newman et al., 2007; Shuckett, 2008). Exclusion and isolation often result in anxiety, depression, and other negative emotions (MacDonald & Leary, 2005). Thus, the social isolation transgender persons face can have grave consequences. In addition to coping with their own transgender identity, trans students also experience the same stressors that non-trans students face when transitioning to college (Zubernis & Snyder, 2007).

Transgender college students face this same need to matter and belong. However, discrimination, lack of societal acceptance, and the feeling of being “different” hinder this process before they even arrive on campus. Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman (1995) identified four factors that impact a person’s ability to transition to a new environment: situation, self, support, and strategies. *Situation* refers to the general nature of the transition, including whether the event is positive or negative, permanent or temporary, sources of stress, and how an individual’s perception of the transition affects behavior. *Self* refers to characteristics of the individual including demographic and psychological resources. *Support* refers to social support, including family, friends, and intimate relationships. Finally, *strategies* refer to a person’s coping responses to the transition. As demonstrated in this paper, transgender students are generally considered to be “other” by society and the self, therefore garnering a sense of belonging is more difficult when arriving to college. The gender binary excludes “transgender” as an acceptable gender identity, leading to feelings of isolation (Burdge, 2007; Grossman & D’Augelli, 2007). High rates of violence and discrimination, negative parent interactions, and fear of rejection further lessen a sense of self, as well as all but eliminate a supportive social network (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2003; Grossman et al, 2005; Lombardi, et al., 2001; Zubernis & Snyder, 2007). Following the model presented by Schlossberg et al. (1995), the transgender student often does not have a strong sense of self, support, or strategy to assist in a positive adjustment.

Colleges and universities have an obligation to provide service to all students and provide specific outreach to those that are underrepresented and/or underserved. Hurtado (1994) defined *campus climate* as a college environment that has been affected by

history, structure, and behavior and can influence a student's psychological reaction to that environment. Therefore, the college or university and the support that is or is not offered can have an immense impact on the emotional and physical well-being of the transgender student. Given the lack of acceptance of transgender students by parents and peers, these students must look further for supportive social networks. These networks can assist not only in disseminating the negativity and stereotypes that are projected towards this community, but can assist in the development of a positive self-esteem (Zubernis & Snyder, 2007). Colleges should employ different strategies to assist trans students with the transition to college, increasing belonging and heightening self-esteem. Furthermore, the university's obligation extends to those who are not transgender. In order to eliminate the concept of "other," those in the majority must accept and appreciate all individuals, regardless of category.

Increased exposure to LGBT student can increase awareness of faculty, staff, and students as related to oppression, values, and human rights (Burdge, 2007; DiStefano, Croteau, Anderson, Kampa-Kokesch, & Bullard, 2000; Evans & Herriott, 2004; Liddle & Stowe, 2002). In an ethnographic study by Evans and Herriott (2004), four students assessed the climate for LGBT students on their Midwestern university campus. Research indicated that more exposure to the LGBT population increased awareness about LGBT oppression and encouraged action towards challenging this oppression. Participants in this study not only became more aware of their own values as they observed this community, they also became more involved in LGBT activities and served as advocates for LGBT rights. This study demonstrated that increased interaction between differing sexual and gender identities could lead to lessening oppression.

Relationships with gay, lesbian, and bisexual people often serve as the main reason that a heterosexual person chooses to become an *ally* and serve as an activist against discrimination (DiStefano et al., 2000). Perhaps relationships with trans people can also serve as a catalyst for increased allies to the trans population.

Burdge (2007) advocated for increased attention, awareness, and communication about transgender issues. Again, according to Burdge, “whatever the forum, we must be capable of sophisticated conversations on gender if we hope to cure the social diseases of sexism, homophobia, heterosexism, and transphobia” (p. 248). Burdge then analyzed the importance of gender-related language, both in society and within the trans community. Conversations about trans students in combination with greater exposure will lead to greater awareness and decreased oppression (Beemyn, 2003; Beemyn, 2005; Beemyn et al., 2005; Burdge, 2007; Evans & Herriott, 2004;).

Renn (2007) concentrated on the leadership identity of LGBT students. Results of a study involving 15 LGBT student leaders indicated that students who increased their own campus leadership also increased their public LGBT identity. When students merged their leadership, sexual orientation, and gender identities and increased organizational involvement, they became more open about their own sexual or gender identity. Their senses of self were increased. Beemyn et al. (2005) stated that rather than merely identifying the transgender community as a population that we must support, transgender students should be considered valuable contributors to our campus communities. Oppression of transgender people should be recognized; however the important roles trans students can play on our campuses and the qualities they can bring to our communities must be appreciated as well. Rather than merely accept or tolerate

this community, we must also appreciate and learn from them. Identity, self-assurance, and support from society can increase a person's sense of belonging and mattering, thus leading to a higher self of self and social adjustment (Elliot et al., 2005; Newman et al., 2007; Schlossberg et al., 1995)

Agans (2007) studied whether repeated exposure to the topics of gender privilege and transgenderism can serve as the catalyst for change in discussions about gender privilege. During orientations, programs, student leader trainings, etc., gender identity, transgenderism, and privilege were repeatedly discussed. The author used the Watt Privilege Identity Exploration Model (Watt, 2007) in order to analyze whether any change in attitude towards these topics had occurred after repeated exposure to these conversations. Watt's model offers eight different defense mechanisms that people utilize when they are challenged with discussing the difficult topic of privilege. Differences in demonstrations of these defense mechanisms indicated that increased attention to transgender issues on a college campus through formal trainings and orientations lessened the defense mechanisms that were displayed. Furthermore, increased attention also led to increased advocacy by students about this topic. Exposure to other cultures can lead to acceptance of those cultures. Acceptance can lead to a student feeling a sense of belonging.

### Analytic Approaches

#### *Narrative Analysis*

Stories are data. They detail both experience and experiences, either by recapturing a moment or period of time. When these stories are told, compiled, and analyzed, the experiences of the storytellers create meaning (Grbich, 2007; Polkinghorne,

1995; Reason, 2001; Savin-Badin & Van Niekerk, 2007). By studying experience of others, we will gain not only an understanding of others, but of ourselves (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Eng, 2006). According to Polkinghorne (1988), narrative analysis involves two components: descriptive narrative inquiry and explanatory narrative inquiry. Descriptive narrative inquiry involves the description of values and norms that were exposed during the narrative. Being that the role of the researcher is to synthesize multiple stories in order to then demonstrate meaning to readers, the researcher must also synthesize the underlying values demonstrated within a community through the telling of these stories. Explanatory narrative inquiry requires that the researcher explain why something happened. The researcher may demonstrate why something happened by using the exploration of descriptive narrative analysis, and by using other theories of behavior to make meaning (Polkinghorne, 1988; Reason, 2001).

The initial role of the researcher is to encourage, persuade, and/or lure a participant to become a storyteller. Through the use of such methods as interviewing and document analysis, the researcher can analyze the stories told by the participant and subsequently create knowledge from the data that was collected (Eng, 2006; Reason, 2001; Savin-Baden & Van Niekerk, 2007). In order to tell the story, that participant must conjure up the memory, arrange details in a particular order, and convey the emotion felt at the time of the experience. Consequently, while telling these stories, the participants will often re-evaluate that past experience, make meaning of that experience, and perhaps find a way to make that experience meaningful to others. (Polkinghorne, 1995; Reason, 2001). According to Reason (2001), the researcher interprets the collected story or stories and creates meaning from these stories so as to share that knowledge with others.

That knowledge may or may not be generalizable, yet even the analysis of one story can be educational as the reader of the compiled research will then interpret the presentation of the data and personalize the meaning of that information for the self. The researcher initially makes meaning of the story, the reader then makes meaning of the research (Savin-Baden & Van Niekerk, 2007).

The reader has several possible paths by which to relate to the proposed information. According to Schaafsma and Vinz (2007), the reader can find similarities between their own life experience and that of the storyteller and make connections to these stories through similarity, or the reader can be struck by difference. The reader may pursue a path which encourages learning through exploration of what is different. “Effective narrative gives the reader a door to open and walk through. The reader enters and must be thinking: Take me gently toward meaning; make my feet move, step by step, across the floor. Help me experience what I haven’t experienced before” (Schaafsma & Vinz, 2007, p. 277).

As an extension of that learning process, the reader may be moved to question their own beliefs, feelings, and basis of what has been deemed truth (Grbich, 2007; Savin-Baden & Van Niekerk, 2007; Schaafsma & Vinz, 2007). This type of analysis naturally blends with the critical theory interpretive paradigm that serves as the foundation for this study. Critical theory mandates the questioning of current beliefs, knowledge, and “truth” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005; Ladson-Billings & Donnor, 2005). Phillion (2002) describes a concept of *narrative multiculturalism*. Similar to traditional narrative inquiry, narrative multiculturalism studies the experiences of participants as told by the participants. However, as related to the field of education, Phillion argues that one

should be challenged to engage in self-reflection and self-analysis and develop an understanding of others by understanding ourselves. According to Phillion, “as educators, we are positioned in a critical role to facilitate and nurture an awareness and understanding of cultural diversity and an acceptance of others. We can help develop tolerance, respect, and compassion in an effort to cultivate a world community” (p. 359). Again, given the framework of critical theory, feminist theory, and critical race theory, narrative multiculturalism coincides greatly with critical theorists’ desire to “mobilize scholarship that will take a stance on behalf of human liberation” (Ladson-Billings & Donnor, 2005, p. 281).

The advantages to utilizing narrative analysis when studying the experiences of transgender college students revolve around empowerment, fluid structure (or lack thereof), and the specific benefits for the field of Student Affairs on college and university campuses. By allowing a participant to tell their own story, the storyteller is not bound by certain social structures, rules, theories, frameworks, or motives (Eng, 2006). They are simply telling their story. This process can be very empowering for the participants as they often enjoy being part of the educational or research process. Rather than serve as merely a subject from which data can be observed, they actively present the data and serve as a co-researcher (Savin-Baden & Van Niekerk, 2007). The stories can also provide insight into familial, societal and political ideologies, cultures, and structures as demonstrated either at the time of the experience, the recollection of the experience, or both (Eng, 2006). Finally, since the success of narrative analysis is not dependent upon the creation of one overarching theme or theory, the individual experience can be highlighted, thus offering proper attention to what we can learn from one person. Each

participant will share their own story as influenced by their own culture and lenses. The reader can appreciate and learn from the “purity of experience” (Eng, 2006, p. 331). According to Reason (2001), one can learn from the similarities and differences between participants as there is no “ultimate theory” that need be coined.

This final benefit to narrative analysis as described above can also serve as one of several challenges when using this type of inquiry. Narrative analysis involves studying a limited number of people, specific occasions in one person’s life, and often does not have a critically narrow focus as required by many theories. Therefore, the generalizability of the results can be questioned (Eng, 2006; Reason, 2001). While one can argue that a learning source need not be broad in order for education to occur, this remains a concern and a challenge. Given the perhaps subjective role of the researcher, another challenge involves the bias or research agenda of the researcher and how these may steer the documentation of the findings. Narrative analysis requires that the researcher have a strong voice so as to guide the synthesis, connections, and overarching themes of the collected data. However, it is possible for the researcher to focus on or omit certain facets of what is discovered depending (purposely) on the researcher’s agenda or the (unintentional) interpretation of the data (Denzin, 1997; Eng, 2006; Grbich, 2007; Savin-Baden & Van Niekerk, 2007). Finally, while much attention is given to the power of the individual telling their own story, we are also relying on that individual to tell us truthfully what their experience was. According to Eng (2006), there does exist the possibility that the participants are not accurately remembering the details of the story that is being told. More worrisome is the possibility that the storyteller is purposely not telling the truth about the experience – lying, embellishing, following a specific agenda,

or choosing to tell a story that includes the creation of a character. The accuracy of the story – and therefore the data – might therefore be questionable. However, this researcher would argue that this same possibility exists with many forms of qualitative data and those quantitative methods which involve human response.

Given the importance of allowing transgender students to tell their own stories, as well as the equally important methodical focus on the reader's self-reflection and move towards narrative multiculturalism, narrative analysis is an appropriate method of data analysis to utilize in this study. The participants of this study will not only have an opportunity to serve as educators and reflect on their own experiences, but the reader will be encouraged to, as stated by Schaafsma and Vinz (2007), experience what they have not experienced before and explore the concept of truth as obtained through discourse.

This literature review has detailed the gender binary, the categorization of transgender individuals as “other,” and the damage to transgender individuals that these “societal norms” have done. Exploring the discourse related to transgender individuals and asking why this population has been ousted naturally incorporates the use of critical theory. Lovaas (2002) believes that one should ask: “How do you know what you know?” (p. 185). Furthermore, the possibility that society can change the subordination included within discourse, as detailed by Luke (1995) and Lovaas (2002), clearly demonstrates the ability to uncategorize transgender individuals as other.

### Summary

To comprehend the intricacies of the transgender topic, one must first understand terminology and the social construction of gender. The existence of the gender binary demonstrates the immediate oppression that transgender people face, as they do not fit in

to this binary (Burdge, 2007; Lukal, 1999; Paxton et al., 2006). Through the lense of critical theory, one can begin to question the creation of and “need for” the binary. In order to fully understand the gender binary as well as the transgender identity, one must recognize the differences between sexual orientation and gender identity (Beemyn, 2003; Burdge, 2007; Paxton, 2006; Renn, 2007). Grouping the transgender population in with the lesbian, gay, and bisexual population is controversial. While the LGB population has historically accepted the trans community, using the term LGBT not only misidentifies and oppresses transgender people, but also provides misleading information about this community (Beemyn, 2005, Ladson-Billings & Donnor, 2005). Some qualities, statistics, and research that apply to the LGB population do not apply to the trans population. Furthermore, gay, lesbian, and bisexual people and spaces are not always accepting of transgender people (Doan, 2007). An assumption that these communities are the same further hinders specialized attention needed by the trans population. Understanding the transgender identity is necessary in order to then understand the difficulties faced by this population.

The urgency to support the transgender community is fueled by alarmingly high rates of self-hatred, misunderstanding, and poor treatment by others. The categorization of trans people as “other” results in high levels of discrimination, isolation, and physical abuse by peers and family (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2005; Beemyn, 2005; Grossman et al., 2005; Hill & Willoughby, 2005; Lombardi et al., 2001; Lee, 2000; McKinney, 2005). This type of treatment often leads to high-risk behavior, suicidal ideation and attempts, and a low sense of mattering (Bruce et al., 2008; Grossman & D’Augelli, 2006; Grossman & D’Augelli, 2007). However, this socially

constructed treatment of transgender individuals can be changed through critical analysis and pedagogy (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005). An understanding of the transgender identity is needed in order to then understand the difficulties faced by this population.

Agans (2007), Evans and Herriott (2004), Liddle and Stowe (2002), DiStefano et al. (2000), and Burdge (2007) explored the notion that people who are more exposed to LGBT college students increase their own awareness and perceptions of bias and oppression. This notion solidifies the connection between critical theory and the transgender student population. When college students were challenged on their beliefs, were able to question existing hierarchies, and understand the detrimental effects the “us versus them” paradigm creates, they began to tear down the walls between transgender and non-transgender people., Transgender students, faculty, and staff as well as non-transgender students, faculty, and staff are now in the position of helping others recognize the importance of social justice and internal discrimination. In addition, increased leadership identity development of LGBT students on college campuses demonstrates that as individuals’ leadership skills and skill demonstration increases, so does their own awareness, acceptance, and advocacy of their gender identity (Agans, 2007; Burdge, 2007; Evans & Herriott, 2004). Ultimately, this can lead to increased feelings of acceptance and mattering (Zubernis & Snyder, 2007).

This review focused on the transgender population, the social construction of gender, transgender identity development, and the importance of dialogues about this population. Themes in the current literature included: the gender binary; oppression of transgender students; and the effects that a lack of acceptance, rights, and basic human needs can have on the transgender community (Association of American Colleges and

Universities, 2005; Beemyn, 2005; Grossman et al., 2005; Hill & Willoughby, 2005; Lee, 2000; Lombardi et al., 2001; McKinney, 2005). However, people *can* learn to accept and appreciate those who identify with cultures that differ from one's own culture (Agans, 2007; Burdge, 2007; Evans & Herriott, 2004). This review also focused on narrative analysis, critical theory, critical race theory, and critical pedagogy. The embedded classification of transgender students as other must be explored and the labels must be dismissed. In order to do this, we must first understand that these categories, elite views, and power struggles were *created*, therefore they can be eliminated.

Limited literature exists about transgender students with current literature focusing on describing their experiences of and the practical implications associated with colleges attempting to meet their needs (Beemyn, 2005; Beemyn, Curtis, Davis, & Tubbs, 2005; Beemyn, Domingue, Pettitt, & Smith, 2005). A theoretical framework regarding how campus experiences affect transgender college students is missing. While some experiences of transgender students have been studied, no connection has been drawn between these incidents and how they affect the overall college experience as related to retention, feelings of acceptance, and sense of belonging. This study attempts to fill in a gap in the literature and offer insight as to transgender college students' college experience. Chapter three will provide a description of the research plan for this study as well as an overview of the methodology that will be used.

## CHAPTER 3

Critical pedagogy serves as the primary paradigm guiding this inquiry. Critical theory challenges current notions of educational reality, encourages change, identifies those whom can implement change, and serves as the catalyst for social transformation (Kinchellog & McClaren, 2000; McClaren, 2005; Wing, 2004). Institutional hierarchies and supremacy may impede the academic, social, safety, and holistically educational needs of transgender students. Research methods outlined in this chapter promote the opportunity for recognizing the effects of implied or implicit hegemony and consequently move towards change.

### Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

Consistent with methods to utilize critical theory, critical race theory, and critical feminist theory, this study uses a case study design using cross-case analysis in order to assess perceptions of inclusion by transgender students on college campuses. The purpose of this study is to critically examine the perceptions of transgender students as to ways in which campuses leadership structures or entities are inclusive or exclusive of gender variance, to examine the effects of inclusive and exclusive language on transgender students, and to understand whether participants feelings of inclusion or exclusion have impacted sense of belonging, retention, and academic success. Narrative analysis was used to highlight the individual story, general themes, and better understand the impact that language can have on feelings of inclusion by transgender students on campus.

This study addressed the following research questions:

1. In what ways do transgender students feel that their transgender identity is accepted on their campus?

2. In what ways have the participants' campuses leadership structures or entities demonstrated inclusion or exclusion of their transgender identity?
3. What are the effects of intentionally and/or unintentionally oppressive written and spoken language on transgender students?

Finally, through the use of qualitative interviews and narrative analysis, as framed by critical theory, transgender students involved in this study were offered the opportunity to tell their story. While I examined commonalities, differences, and implications of these stories, the telling of one's own story can often be empowering as well as insightful.

## Research Design

### *Case Study*

A case study design using cross-case analysis was selected for this particular study in order to highlight the individual story and provide first-hand in-depth narratives of experience. Yin (2003) suggested using a multiple-case study design due to the possible benefits of having the ability to study more than one case. Repetition of results at multiple sites might add to the generalizability of the study. Arguably, lack of repetition can be just as valuable when determining whether feelings of inclusion are related to specific actions at each site (i.e. what elements exist at a particular campus that have led to feelings of inclusion/exclusion versus what elements do not exist on a particular campus). Miles and Huberman (1994) stated that cross-case analysis of multiple-case studies can "deepen understanding and explanation" (p. 173). Glaser and Strauss (1967, 1970 as cited in Miles & Huberman, 1994) argued for using "multiple comparison groups to find out under what sets of structural conditions the hypotheses are

minimized and maximized” (p. 173). In this study, studying transgender students at three different campuses allowed for this researcher to gain a better understanding of what leads to feelings of inclusion and exclusion as well as the impact that language has on transgender students.

### *Research Sites*

This study was conducted at three public institutions of higher learning: San Diego State University (SDSU), California State University, San Marcos (CSUSM), and the University of California, San Diego (UCSD). SDSU and CSUSM are part of the 23 campus California State University System and have an undergraduate and graduate combined enrollment of 33,500 students and 9,200 students respectively (San Diego State University <sup>2</sup>, 2009; California State University, San Marcos, 2009) . UCSD is part of the 10 campus University of California system and has an undergraduate and graduate combined enrollment of 26,500 students (University of California, 2009). Three institutions have been included in this study in order to allow for higher rates of participation. Given the small percentage of transgender students on campus, added to the smaller number of transgender students willing to openly identify as gender-variant and the even smaller number who might agree to participate in a research study, accessing students at several campuses is crucial. This study did not compare institutions, rather it sought to understand the perceptions of the students that participate in this study. The experiences of the transgender students served as the unit of analysis, specifically focusing on what students interpret as being inclusive or exclusive of varying gender identities on their campus.

Of particular interest regarding these research sites is that none of these research sites has published any demographic information about transgender students on campus. SDSU's Enrollment Summary states that 14,180 men and 19,316 women were enrolled during the Spring 2008 semester (San Diego State University<sup>2</sup>, 2009). CSUSM lists their undergraduate profile as including 4,944 women and 3,165 men (California State University, San Marcos, 2009). UCSD simply states under their "facts and campus profile" that "female students represent 52%" (University of California, 2009). According to this published information, no transgender students exist on any of these campuses. This is, of course, not true. However, this population is ignored in published information.

### *Participants*

Participants in this study included current students of San Diego State University, California State University, San Marcos, and the University of California, San Diego. Participants included only those whom self-identify as transgender. Due to the high-risk of discrimination and intolerance towards this population, recruitment involved contacting a snowballing convenience sample of students who have identified as transgender. According to Creswell (1998), a snowball sample "identifies cases of interest from people who know people who know what cases are information-rich (p. 119)." Given the lack of visibility surrounding the transgender population, this sampling technique asked campus community members to identify students who may have wished to participate in this study. All individuals in the targeted population were afforded the opportunity to participate, however their participation was entirely voluntary. Any person who did not identify as transgender was excluded from this study as this study

was intended to study the personal opinions of and effects on the transgender population. Participants were asked to complete a “consent to participate in research” form (Appendix A) and were given a \$25 gift card as an incentive for participation. The gift card was given to each participant at the beginning of the study, therefore eliminating pressure to complete the study if they were uncomfortable and merely wanted to receive the gift card.

#### *Data Collection and Analysis*

According to Connelly and Clandinin (1990) and Eng (2006), studying the experiences of others allows for greater understanding of difference and can serve as a catalyst for increased self-awareness. Data collection methods utilized in this study were intended not only to allow readers to better understand the experiences of transgender students, but explore their own assumptions and beliefs as coupled with critical theory and the emphasized theoretical frameworks. Students in this study were asked to participate in an individual interview regarding their experiences on campus. By allowing a person to tell their own story, the storyteller is not bound by social structure, rules, theories, or motives (Eng, 2006). These stories were then studied through the use of narrative analysis. Narrative analysis allows the researcher to collect and create meaning from these stories, meaning that can consequently serve as critical pedagogy (Reason, 2001).

Participants were also asked to review campus documents, documents that are intended to represent and provide outreach for the entire student population. Through the opportunity to analyze these texts, participants engaged in their own form of critical

analysis. The researcher then drew connections between and made meaning of the participants' impressions of the texts.

### *Individual Interviews*

Consistent with the strategies of inquiry and critical theoretical frameworks utilized in this study in order to address the research questions, participants were asked to respond to a series of interview questions (Appendix B). This method of data collection allows for the representation and legitimization of each person, as well as for the relationship between the data collected from all participants. By allowing the participants to share personal perceptions and, in a sense, engage in their own form of critical analysis of the surrounding environment, a natural correlation exists with the selected interpretive paradigms and critical analysis. The interviews were held in private settings depending on location of and convenience for involved students. Follow-up interviews were conducted as necessary.

Interviews were digitally audio recorded, transcribed, and then analyzed. Students were given the option to stop the interview at any time and/or choose to leave any question unanswered. Similarly, students were afforded the right to remove themselves from the entire study at any time. Interview recordings, interview transcripts, and electronic versions of analysis were stored on my personal computers, flash drive, and external hard drive. Any paper documentation involving interviews or analysis were kept at my residence. The purpose of the individual interview was to gather in-depth information from each participant in order to answer the research questions. In order to allow for follow-up questions and further inquiry into a particular answer, the interviews were open-ended in nature (Yin, 2003).

### *Document Analysis*

Participants were asked to review several campus documents intended to pertain to, relate to, or describe the entire student body. Students were asked to indicate specific places within each document in which they felt the document was inclusive or exclusive of transgender students. They were asked follow-up questions following this analysis. These questions asked students to explain why they felt that the document was or was not inclusive of transgender students and whether they personally felt excluded in/by the document. The purpose of document analysis in this study was to explore whether the language that is used in formal campus documentation excludes transgender students and how students feel about this exclusion, if any.

### *Reflective Journals*

Participants were asked to keep a reflective journal for three one-week periods. These journals were provided to them. Three topics (one per week) were provided and students were asked to write about assigned topics (Appendix C). For example, students were asked to pay close attention to the use of gendered language in the classroom for a one week period and journal about instances in which they felt that transgender students (in general or that specific student) were included or excluded. The journal structure was intended to allow for more comfort for those students that prefer this method of communication versus the interview format. Comfort might have led to further exploration of thoughts and feelings by the individual and thus give this researcher more descriptive and insightful information. However, of the three participants, only one participant submitted a completed journal. Therefore, the use of reflective journals for this study was eliminated.

### Positionality

I believe that my position in this study will enhanced the data that I received. As a staff member at San Diego State University and a long-time advocate for transgender students, I knew one of the participants in this study. While existing relationships between researchers and participants might adversely affect data collection, I do not believe this was the case in my study. Given the sensitive nature of this topic and the negative experiences that transgender students face with other members of the community, I believe that a pre-existing relationship allowed one participant to feel more comfortable sharing their experiences and thoughts with me. Although I previously served as the staff advisor to this participant, my role as an advisor does not include academic grading or any other ability to affect their student status. I believe that the relationship that I created with this participant did not pressure or encourage him to participate, nor did this relationship compel him to answer questions in an artificial way.

I was concerned that my position as a non-transgender person hoping to elicit sensitive information from transgender students might effect the recruitment efforts of this study. I was aware that possible participants may have been wary of sharing their experiences with someone outside the transgender community. Perhaps they worried that I did not understand their experiences or that I would improperly interpret the data. In order to combat this potential problem, I informed participants of my long-term advocacy for the transgender community in order to try to alleviate this concern.

## Limitations and Ethical Considerations

### *Limitations*

The greatest possible limitation to this study could be the perception that the case study design does not allow for generalizability. With such small sample sizes coming from three different institutions in the same geographical region, one might assume that the results are not generalizable to institutions in other regions. However, I do believe that the information gleaned from even one person can inform others about the topic of transgender inclusion on college campuses. Although not a mass sample, the individual story can inform and empower others to action.

### *Ethical Considerations and Participant Support*

Licensed mental health care professionals currently employed as counselors or psychologists at each participating university were and are available for consultation with students if needed. If participation in this study evoked negative emotions for students or left them with a desire to speak with a mental health care provider, each campus designated a counselor with experience working with transgender students to be available to participants. Before the individual interview begins, students were given the name and contact information for the counselor on their campus that has agreed to help with this study.

## CHAPTER 4

This chapter details the findings of the case study performed involving three participants, all self-identifying as members of the transgender community. Each participant completed at least one interview and analyzed campus documents regarding the inclusion or exclusion of transgender students. As previously stated, a case study design using a cross-case analysis was selected for this study in order to highlight each participant's story and provide narratives of experience. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), cross-case analysis can lead to a deeper explanation and understanding of qualitative results.

The experiences of the transgender student participants serve as the unit of analysis. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) and Eng (2006) each stated that studying the experience of others allows for greater understanding and increased self-awareness. Participants were permitted to tell their own stories and studied through the method of narrative analysis. Each interview and document analysis was transcribed. Data was individually read and coded, ultimately resulting in the development of categories of information. Categories were then refined until the category was saturated (Rudestam & Newton, 2007). Identified categories will each be defined and information for all categorical responses will be summarized. Data was coded into the following six categories: Definition and Identity, Disclosure, Societal Practices, Campus Practices, LGBT, and Change.

### Results

Three transgender students participated in this study, one from each of the campuses of San Diego State University, California State University, San Marcos, and

the University of California, San Diego. One participant graduated from one focus campus and recently (two weeks before participation) began attending another focus campus, therefore he was able to give insight as to his experiences on two campuses. One participant had attended a focus campus for two months at the time of this study. The final participant has attended a focus campus for two and a half years. All three participants described their own gender identity as male; all were born biologically female. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, all three participants will be considered as female-to-male (FTM) transgender students. All preferred to be referred to as male (i.e. him, his, etc.). After conducting and transcribing the interviews and document analysis, common themes emerged that were discussed by all participants. However, given this researcher's belief in the importance of the individual story, themes discussed by one or two participants were included as well.

### Definition and Identity

#### *Definition of Trans*

Participants were asked to define the term *transgender*. One participant stated that he felt that every person is transgender. He spoke of the binary that society has created, binaries that do not actually exist. He believes that transgender is synonymous with gender-variant, meaning that any person with likes, dislikes, or characteristics of a person that conflicts with the gender binary could be labeled as transgender. For example, if a boy prefers to play with dolls rather than cars, the variance from the societal norm that boys should play with cars might make that individual transgender. He believes that transgender means not conforming with society's boundaries of gender.

Two participants believed that *transgender* refers to a person that is transgressing gender norms; gender norms being the “norms” that are typically associated with biological gender. One participant specifically stated that “trans” means “to cross over,” therefore, if one’s sex is female, the gender is ‘supposed’ to be female. If the sex is male, the gender is ‘supposed’ to be male. Transgender individuals transcend gender roles and gender expectations. This participant also differentiated between transgender and transsexual. He believes that once a person has legally, medically, and socially transitioned from assigned sex to an affirmed sex, that person is a transsexual. However, he believes that his gender did not change, rather his assigned sex changed. He believes that he has maintained the same demonstration and expression of gender, however medically and surgically his sex has changed.

#### *Trans Development*

One participant stated that he felt that trans women or girls are treated much differently from trans men or boys, meaning that boys/men that transition to girls/women suffer harsher consequences than girls/women that transition to boys/men. Boys who challenge gender norms often overcompensate for their true feminine identification by demonstrating a “certain degree of masculinity that’s aggressive and violent” (Interview A2, 2010, p. 11). Although they might eventually transition to female, they used to be aggressive, angry men. Transguys (female to male) however, when they were previously transgressing gender norms, were often dismissed as being tomboys – a much more socially acceptable way of being than as feminine men. Additionally, feminism almost encouraged this type of gender role challenge. This participant felt that these factors

allowed for increased identity-building opportunities for girls who transition to boys, whereas boys often struggle with society's refusal to allow boys to be feminine.

One participant emphasized the importance of recognizing that not all transgender people transition the same way – or even at all. He struggled with the stereotype that all transgender people take hormones and then have reconstructive surgery. He felt that it is important to recognize that we cannot categorize all trans people the same, nor can we make assumptions that all trans people physically transition. He, for example, does not plan on taking hormones, nor does he plan on having surgery – but he is still transgender.

#### *Intro to Trans and Identity*

Participants were asked to discuss their first memories of realizing they were transgender, as well as their transition process. One participant, born biologically female, believes he has always known he was “a little bit different” and has thought of himself as a boy since the age of three. He vividly recalled an incident when he was seven and attended a summer camp with his male cousin. With his short haircut and a wardrobe consisting of t-shirts, he looked like a little boy and he and his cousin “went with it” (Interview C, 2011, p. 2). The camp employees never seemed to realize his biological sex. He had a little girlfriend; they held hands.

During adolescence, he tried to figure out what was different about him. What was his gender, his gender identity, his sexual orientation? Like many transgender youth, he wondered whether he was a lesbian. But he did not feel like a lesbian. He did not feel like a woman attracted to other women. He felt like a “guy stuck in a chick's body” (Interview C, 2011, p. 3). Nevertheless, after repeatedly hearing comments about homosexuality and LGBT issues, he tried to be more feminine. He discussed the

difficulties of knowing that he was different from other people and having no one to talk to about it. He stated that he “just wanted it to go away...because then it’ll be easier” (Interview C, 2011, p. 2). This participant recognized typical adolescent difficulties of trying to be secure with a group of friends or starting to date; figuring out who one really is. Add to that the complexity of thinking you are different from other people and that you are the only one dealing with that issue. He tried to fit in, appear more feminine, just to try to make it though middle school and high school. At the time, there were no television shows or movies that could help a struggling teen cope, no characters to identify with.

Struggling with his sexual orientation and his gender identity, he could never place “what” he was...until a friend told him. This friend had taken a human sexuality class in community college and simply said to him, “you’re transgender.” She handed him her human sexuality book and for the first time, as he read, he said, “that’s me.”

Now, when asked to explain whether he could explain his gender identity, he stated, “not really” (Interview C, 2011, p. 66). He knows that he is biologically female, yet in his head he sees a biological male version of himself. When asked what makes him feel that he is male, he stated he didn’t know. He sometimes wondered if heterosexual society has influenced him. Any romance in a movie, according to this participant, is heterosexual. Since he is attracted to women, has he placed himself in the male role? Despite this curiosity, he feels this identity has been with him since he was born. He can’t explain it, but he does not believe that he could have been influenced by society at the age of three. Although biologically a female, he simply considers himself to be a heterosexual male.

A second participant believes he realized he was transgender at the age of seven. He recalls watching a television show on hermaphrodites and the show explained that hermaphrodites do not feel comfortable in their own bodies. They sometimes grow up one gender and then switch to the other gender. He asked his mom if he was a hermaphrodite -- and he got grounded. He remembers being very confused because he developed at an early age. He shared clothes with a male cousin, but was experiencing different things. Since the time he started dressing himself, he dressed as a boy, finding girl's clothes to be uncomfortable. When he started learning about differences between boys and girls, he realized he wanted to play with cars. His mom bought him Barbies and Barbie cars and he wondered why he could not play with the toys that he wanted to play with. So he made his pink Aladdin Barbie go off ramps made of books, confused as to why society genders things that should not be gendered. At the age of twelve, he again brought up the topic of hermaphrodites to his mom – and was told not to bring it up again. He recalled a traumatic event: his mom said that he needed a training bra, an item he likened to a straight jacket. He locked himself in his room and cried for three days, wondering why he needed a bra and why this was happening to him.

Growing up, he tried to suppress his masculine identity, finding it exhausting to try to dress and act a certain way. Life did not make sense. He felt that something was wrong and could not figure out what it was. In a high school health class he learned about the term transgender and thought, “okay, there you go” (Interview B, 2010, p. 5). Realizing others were struggling with the same issue was relieving. His high school boyfriend, who he stated was gay, always described him as being neither a boy or a girl. At the age of 18, he told his mom that he felt like a boy. Looking back, he feels that his

mom's strong reactions throughout his life perhaps made him suppress his true identity. Not identifying as a boy made his mom happy, therefore he wore his hair long (often pulled back) and wore makeup (which was fine because he could not see it or feel it). Yet there is the possibility that although he does not feel that his mom's reaction changed how his life has ended up, he might not have had to struggle so hard to hide his identity and perhaps he could have been happier sooner had his mom had a different reaction.

He identifies now as a male more than as a female, although he recognizes that he has feminine aspects. He chooses not to identify as transgender as he feels the term infers more of an in between status. He actively tries not to suppress "feminine" qualities that he enjoys, therefore continuing to battle society's gendered stereotypes of man. He likes to cook, he likes to sew – and he will not try to change that. He identifies as male, prefers to be perceived as male, but believes that he presents himself "more on the queer side" – and feels good about it (Interview B, 2010, p. 2). When asked to define what it means to be a queer male, he stated that he passes as male, but he is more comfortable expressing himself. He likes the color pink. He recognized that his definition of "queer" involves stereotyping homosexuals, but concedes that society has defined our need to associate things as masculine or feminine, boy or girl.

The third participant did not realize he was transgender until his friend invited him to see a movie entitled, "You Don't Know Dick," a documentary about transsexual men. Until this point, he had not heard of female-to-male transsexuals. After watching the movie, he realized the movie reflected some of what he himself was feeling. Until this time he was unsure of how he identified, although he was clear that he did not fit into any traditional categories. Identifying initially as a lesbian, he used to tell people that he

was “sporty” when asked whether he was butch or fem (a common categorization for lesbians), whereas he preferred to think of himself as androgynist, neutral, or perhaps a blend. As a child, he remembers his grandmother asking him why he could not be more like his female cousins, wearing dresses and styling his hair. Biologically female but constantly read as a male, he did not feel like he fit into the lesbian community, but did not know why. Often mistaken for a really butch lesbian, he remembered that they “scared the hell out of him” (Interview A, 2010, p. 7). He did not like their energy, nor did he want to be associated with it. Resigned to identify somewhere in the middle, he did not know that one could question their gender. He never thought he was trapped in the wrong body; he was just a lesbian. And then he saw the documentary. A year later he read a book called “Body Alchemy” which included pictures of transsexuals. That is when he knew he was transgender. He realized he was not a lesbian, that other identities existed, and he could be something other than female.

Learning about the trans community, this participant realized that he had more in common with trans men (female-to-male) than with non-transmen. The experiences of these men were similar to the experiences he had had, including his relationships with women who did not identify as lesbians. His girlfriends felt he was demonstrating the best of both worlds, looking like a boy and acting like a girl -- though still strong and chivalrous.

When he made the decision to start taking hormones and transition, he did not feel that he needed this physical transition in order to truly be himself. Rather, in his own words, he was “sick and tired of being treated like shit” (Interview A, 2010, p. 24). He no longer wanted to worry about being hassled when he went into a public restroom. He

just wanted to be “done with it.” And he had the money. As explained during his interview, his health insurance allowed him \$75,000 worth of surgeries and medical treatments related to his gender identity. After having met many transmen who had regretted not having surgically transitioned, he did not want to have regrets in the future when he now financially had the means to have surgery. He wanted to be able to sit in the Jacuzzi with his shirt off with other men. He wanted to be able to go to the gym and use open showers in the locker room. He wanted the convenience. However, transitioning to a different gender often means erasing or making invisible the history that one had while demonstrating the original gender. This participant stated that he was very active in lesbian advocacy for over 20 years, including starting three chapters of an organization. After changing his gender identity, he feels like, “I’m just this guy” (Interview A, 2000, p. 6). His change in gender identity disconnects him from the advocacy and education work he had accomplished.

### *Feelings About Self*

Participants were asked to comment on their feelings about their own trans identities. One participant stated he does not wish his gender identity was different or that he was not trans, while two participants stated they did wish they had been born biologically male instead of female. One participant – who did not wish he was born male -- stated that he did not often think about his gender identity as, now that he passes as male, his gender is interwoven in his life. He acknowledged that during the first few years after realizing he was trans he thought constantly about his identity, but now feels more at home in his own body. He also feels like less of a target for hate crimes as he appears male and no longer like a masculine (butch) lesbian. He now feels that his

appearance coincides with his gender identity and that he is no longer subject to societal opinion on transgender – as many do not realize he was biologically born a female. However, sometimes this ability to “pass” makes him feel dishonest if he has not disclosed his identity.

Speaking specifically about his own trans identity, this participant stated he felt he has had some wonderful experiences that he might not have had if he had been assigned the male identity at birth. He felt that it was a privilege to be part of the female and lesbian communities and also felt that he would have been in more trouble as a teenage boy when performing some antics he instead performed as a teenage female. It is his belief that, given society’s differing beliefs about what is appropriate and proper for male and female behaviors, gender norms dictate that consequences for females should be softer. Furthermore, this participant discussed the unique position of now belonging to the gender category that was once considered “other.” Formally identifying with the female gender allows him insight into societal views about men. Now identifying as male has made him the target of certain stereotypes and an understanding of what it is like to be a perceived male. Reactions range from an unsaid understanding when females allow males to pass them on the sidewalk to vulnerability and the invisible violence that men are involved in as they deal with feelings of rage and aggression.

This participant recognized the opportunities involved in now belonging in a different gender. There exists the ability to enter into male environments that previously were forbidden. Men can now be considered “brother” instead of “other” and exposure to the male culture can result in knowledge. He also recognized that society enforces stereotypes about men (unfeeling, uncaring, unconcerned) that are not always true.

Additionally, he felt that he could now understand and empathize with women and men, which has helped him build stronger relationships and connect people to each other. He believes that his life is “fantastic” and there exist advantages for a person who has experienced internal and external conflict – he has “risen out of the ashes” (Interview A2, 2010, p.8). However, when speaking about other trans men and women, he felt that more trans women than men feel burdened by their transgender identity.

Another participant stated that a sense of belonging is important. Growing up transgender, he felt that he did not belong anywhere. The internal struggle that he experienced, along with a deep depression and feeling like a “freak” led to suicidal ideation and one suicide attempt. He then realized he had to accept himself. He realized that being unhappy and wishing he was something other than what he was is “stupid.” Once he realized his trans identity and that there are other people like him, he felt more comfortable and now believes he should not have to change anything about himself and he likes who he is. His positive self image is now buoyed by the use of the male pronoun by others.

The third respondent stated that he used to suppress his identity, but now feels happy about it. He commented that it was often exhausting to dress or act a certain way that did not make sense to him. Similar to the above-described experience, this participant stated that – although he does wish that he was born biologically male – he felt more in tune with things because of the journey he has gone through. He spoke about the different languages that men and women have and a feeling that he knows more because he has knowledge of both languages. He also commented that he felt that since transitioning to a male, he feels societal pressure to not cry or show his emotion. He also

feels he has lost some of his ability to be emotional and have sympathy, both qualities he wishes he still had.

### *Parents*

Two participants discussed their parents and what their parents' thoughts/reactions were to learning about their child's transgender identity. One participant stated that his mom did not seem surprised with the news of the transgender identity, although stated she had hoped her child would "just be a lesbian" (Interview B, 2010, p. 6). However, this same participant when first discovering his own trans identity at the age of seven, asked his mother if he was a possibly a hermaphrodite – and she grounded him. When he brought up the idea again at age 12, she told him not to talk about it again. When asked how he now felt about his mom's reaction, he stated, "I try to be understanding of where she came from and I don't get very mad at it. Honestly, I even thought, 'Okay, what if I were in her position? What if now I had a son who wanted to be a girl and he told me that?' I would be weirded out now. So I'm not really angry about it or anything. It would have been really nice if she had put me on hormone blockers until I made up my mind or something...but that's not how it works" (Interview B2, 2011, p. 3). He indicated he had not felt he had the option of expressing his true identity (through clothes, toys, etc.) and that his mom's reaction made him suppress his gender identity for a long time. Had she not had this negative reaction, perhaps years of struggles could have been avoided. He suppressed his identity in order to make his mother happy. He chose to wear makeup and wear his hair long in order to please his mother.

A second participant speaks of the hurt he experienced from his parents' previous lack of support of his gender identity. However, they are now completely supportive of his trans identity. When speaking about his sister, he stated she has not and will not accept his identity as a male. His sister has also stated that, even if a surgical sex change occurs to make the body appear as male, she would still refer to him by female pronouns. This participant then began to cry during the interview and stated that the reaction from his sister made him feel horrible because someone that he loves does not accept him.

### *Support*

Participants spoke of the support systems they had in place in their lives that helped them make it through the process of identifying and presenting as transgender. One participant stated that he relied on a really good group of friends to transverse the difficult times. He also commented on transgender resources he found on YouTube and stated he got a lot of support from the large trans population online. When speaking about support on his college campus, he stated he had to "charm the people high up in the hierarchy" in order to make it through the process. He recalled numerous meetings with campus officials in order to make technical changes on documents and in the community.

### Disclosure

Participants were asked to discuss the transparency of their identity and to whom they have disclosed their transgender identity. They were also asked to describe characteristics of those people and detail what encouraged that disclosure. The participants varied in their levels of disclosure; some increasing disclosure based on comfort, environment, and situation. One participant spoke specifically about his process of evaluating his comfort level with a specific person before determining

disclosure. Looking at the campus environment, he self-identified as a female on his campus. He indicated that he felt he had to know the person, feel they are a good friend, or be involved in a situation or group that has previously indicated an openness to differences in gender identity. He stated that overall he is not open about his trans identity, specifically within the LGB community. He commented that it is surprising that those who often are discriminated against (lesbians, gays, and bisexuals) often discriminate against others – even though they are quite aware of the realities and feelings that being a target can bring. According to this participant, “it’s not hard enough to just be labeled gay; but within the community, if you identify with a different gender than what’s biological, people within the community discriminate against you” (Interview C, 2011, p. 4).

When speaking about his family, this same participant stated his family is aware of his transgender identity and, although they were hurtful and not accepting in the past, they are now completely supportive. They do, however, continue to use female pronouns, but this does not bother him. He does state that dating can be challenging when it comes to disclosing his gender identity. There are times when there is a mutual interest in a dating relationship, yet when that person finds out about the trans facet of his identity, they back away. He attributes this retreat not only to the “other” categorization that trans people are placed in, but to a lack of understanding that transgender can mean that the body may or may not be physically altered. For example, one might shy away from a potential partner because they do not want to date a woman they believe will physically transition to a male. However, not all trans people follow the same path; meaning that some may or may not change physical attributes. An assumption exists that

all trans people will transition in the same way, thus discouraging a relationship.

However, that path can take many different turns for many people. This participant states that, when given the opportunity, he prefers to explain to a potential partner what his transition path is or will be and whether that does or does not include physical changes.

Certain environments do not seem – according to this participant – to welcome disclosure of a transgender identity. One participant spoke of the specific work environment, career field, and educational subject he is a part of: the sciences -- a field that does not seem particularly liberal to this student. He stated that perhaps the social dynamics that exist with faculty from foreign countries indicate that identifying as transgender could be dangerous, even deadly. Similarly, the friends he had on campus within his major made discriminatory and derogatory remarks that made him uncomfortable disclosing his trans identity. To them, he identified simply as female because “I just wanted to pass the classes and get my degree. I didn’t want to deal with a teacher who wanted to kill me so they flunked me, or students in my class who all of a sudden are f-ing a-holes to me” (Interview C, 2011, p.7). This same student was about to matriculate at another focus campus. He stated that he believed he would not disclose his transgender identity to those on his new campus. If, after a semester, he felt others’ treatment of him would not change with disclosure, he might change his mind. However, from past experiences and what he had observed and overheard, he believed he would encounter negative experiences. He simply wanted to finish his degree and not be subject to discrimination. When speaking of this subject, this participant became emotional and elaborated that “I think I’m a good person, and, it’s stupid. But it really, really bugs me

that someone who doesn't know me, by hearing one thing about me, automatically hates me or treats me differently" (Interview C, 2011, p. 8).

Another participant stated he is not open about his transgender identity. He prefers – and is able -- to be seen as a biological male. While his family and close friends do know of his gender identity, his grandparents do not. His grandparents instead perceive him as a heterosexual female rather than as the bisexual male he identifies as. His determination on whether to disclose his trans identity often comes on a need-to-know basis. For example, those he has known for a long time obviously saw the physical changes that he has gone through, therefore disclosing his identity was almost a necessity. For others, he might not think of disclosing his trans identity as some people might interpret that as he is saying he is not what he appears to be. He identifies himself as male, therefore he does not want others to perceive that he is anything other than male by introducing the notion of transgenderism. Similar to the previous participant, he also stated that he determines his level of disclosure once he gets to know a person and has a feel for whether he will be treated differently once his identity is known. In his own words, "because otherwise, like, if I tell some people, they'll stop treating me like a dude because they'll be like, oh, but wait, you're not exactly one" (Interview B, 2010, p. 3). He is concerned that environments he is currently comfortable in will suddenly become uncomfortable if his trans identity is disclosed and he does not want to take that risk.

The third participant stated that he is "mostly open" about his transgender identity; his family, wife's family and all friends know. However, he stated that not all of his classmates know and only a few coworkers from previous jobs are aware of his identity. He feels that his transgender identity is an integral part of who he is, therefore

he would feel inauthentic if he did not come out. He felt that, in some situations, maintaining connections with others would be difficult, especially with those who are aware of the visible differences that have occurred since he transitioned from female to male. He also stated that he tends to socialize with other people in the trans community, therefore eliminating a need to disclose his history. Admitting that he tends to isolate himself from “regular people,” he stated that he feels that gay and lesbian people are relatively unaware of trans issues. An internal conflict sometimes exists between naturally disclosing his identity to others versus feeling compelled to do so. While he prefers to pass as a biological male (rather than as a transgender male), he states that in the back of his mind he feels that others might feel he is lying or withholding information from them if he does not disclose his trans identity. Seemingly “easy” hetero-normative questions might come from a natural conversation such as “are you and your wife going to have children?” or “were you in the Boy Scouts?,” yet his level of disclosure might lead to more complicated answers (Interview B CITE). Situations such as these mandate that he evaluate each scenario individually and decide whether or not to disclose.

### Societal Practices

#### *Societal Views*

Participants were asked to discuss their opinions on how society as a whole views the transgender population and identity. One participant stated that he felt that most of society has a negative reaction to the transgender population. He believes society has this negative reaction because transgender is considered “different.” Society has just started accepting gays and lesbians, but has not yet started accepting transgender. He feels the trans population is “either getting ignored or sloppy seconds with getting the attention, or

recognition, or educational correctiveness” (Interview C, 2011, p. 9). This participant also believed that society’s belief that transgender always means transvestites and drag queens only adds to the negative reaction.

Another participant stated that he felt society as a whole feels that it is very unnatural to be transgender. He has often heard the words ‘unnatural’ and ‘abomination’ used when others describe their feelings about the transgender population. Nature states that a person is born with a determined sex. If a person feels they are not that sex, they are going against nature, thus it is unnatural. While he is concerned about societal opinion, he is more concerned with how others’ opinions might affect him in the future. Will he lose a job opportunity because, during a background check, an employer discovers there was a name and gender change? If he does not have the job opportunity, can he prove the reasoning was unjust? In actuality, this participant stated that he would prefer if society simply did not think about the transgender population. He did, however, recognize that he possibly feels this way because he identifies as and passes as a male, therefore he would prefer that the transgender identity is not focused on. He stated that he believes many trans people would like for the population to be recognized and purposely inclusive because some people do not identify with any gender, therefore having a gender binary excludes them. He said that since he can simply check the “male” box on a form, his needs are met. However, he understood that other trans people may feel excluded by this language.

This participant also felt that society treats trans men and trans women differently, in that being a male-to-female transgender person (MTF) seems so much more difficult. Biological men have features that cannot be reversed, therefore there is more of a visible

awareness when a person who is biologically male has transitioned to female. He also felt that society is less likely to accept feminine males as opposed to masculine females and MTFs are more likely to be victims of violence than FTMs.

The third participant, like the second participant, stated that he feels he blends in to society as he passes as and identifies as male. In general, he feels society is not aware that trans people exist, especially trans guys. According to this participant, “we’re not as likely to be on Maury Povich or Jerry Springer or even Oprah. She tends to only like trans guys if they are a twin, pregnant, or under 18” (Interview A, 2010, p. 5). He also felt that those who are aware of the transgender population are disgusted by them. Society feels that to cross gender lines is “odd” and goes against the grain. As such, there should be consequences such as alienation and demonization. This participant, before his full transition, experienced contempt from others -- looks of contempt, disgust, and fear. Many people are unfamiliar with the concept of transgender, therefore perhaps a fear of the unknown or of change challenges them and they are afraid. Changes in beliefs, understanding, and paradigms can lead to questioning what a person has been taught all of their life. The foundation starts to unravel, there are untruths to what they have learned and they might wonder, “well, what else have I been led to believe is true that isn’t?” (Interview A, 2010, p. 5). Sex and gender are core beliefs, therefore when a person is shown that there exists more than just male and female sexes and there are more than two genders, a person might just think, “what?” (Interview A, 2010, p. 5). This belief that only male and female genders exist might lead some transgender people to feel they have to completely (surgically) transition to the “opposite” gender so that they at least still fit into some sort of a gender binary. Perhaps a person who is assigned female

at birth identifies as male and has a masculine appearance, might believe that transitioning to male is only option to try to fit in. He believes that for this reason, transsexuality makes more sense to many people than those who identify with both genders, neither gender, etc. As a former masculine female, he stated that he experienced 19 years of seeing contempt and disgust in people's faces – and he does not see it anymore.

This participant wondered why the human population is treated so differently from, for example, the animal or plant worlds where variety is not only accepted, but encouraged. He wondered why a female is expected to be feminine and attracted to men. Likewise, why is a male expected to be masculine and attracted to women? He firmly believed the medical community serves as a primary influence over the categorization of trans as other. He stated that the medical community was influenced largely by religious doctrine – doctrine which states “man in my image and then, from that, woman.” Thus, the binary was created. According to this participant, doctors then “started fixing it, normalizing, and creating gadgets to measure and gage things. They have this little ruler, and they go and they measure the little phallus. And if it's too little, they chop it off if it's a boy, and turn him into a girl. And if it's too big and it's a girl, they chop it off because they're like, it has nothing to do with getting pregnant...”

This participant also felt that there exists a difference in treatment of transmen and transwomen. When boys transgress gender norms, consequences can be severe, including physical assault and humiliation. When girls transgress gender norms, they are simply called tomboys. Feminism also led to more acceptance of masculine women. If a person is visibly trans, transwomen often face more negativity as it is more difficult for a

transwoman to fit into society's definition of what a woman should look like. In addition, if a man realizes he is involved with a transwoman and did not realize it, the transwoman is more likely to be a victim of violence. Given society's beliefs about homosexuality, if a heterosexual male finds himself attracted to a transgender female (biological male), he will be enraged and possibly strike out with violence. This participant states that people are killing transwomen, whereas transmen are more likely to be rejected in a nonviolent way.

One participant commented on what he called the "double-edged sword" when discussing whether he believed transgender people should be recognized. He spoke specifically about the physical dangers trans people experience and stated that, now that he passes as a male, he is less visible. By being less visible, he is less of a target for violence and discrimination. When comparing his trans (male) expression to his previous lesbian identity, he feels safer as a male rather than as a gender nonconforming "very visible dyke" (Interview A, 2010, p. 5). He now feels like less of a target for hate crimes, however he is now more vulnerable to the male on male rage that occurs between men. When discussing the use of campus bathrooms, a common area for discrimination and prejudice to occur, this participant stated he had not had any negative experiences in campus bathrooms.

### *Language*

Participants were asked to discuss language as it relates to the inclusion or exclusion of transgender students on their campus. One participant commented on the embarrassment he felt when a professor did not know what pronoun to use when referring to him. One professor called him 'he' and then immediately switched to 'she' followed

by an apology in front of the class of 300. Although a common occurrence, he does not know how to react in situations in which people use the “wrong” pronoun. He feels that, in situations such as the one that occurred in front of the class, it is the wrong time and place to explain to the person whether the pronoun that was used is acceptable or unacceptable. He stated that he often has to just “accept it and move on” even though it is embarrassing (Interview B, 2010, p. 9). At the same time, he believes that a person cannot easily change their own language (the English language) that has been ingrained in them, nor should you expect this change to happen. He feels that society is not necessarily ready to change the language that is used when referring to or indicating gender. He believes that by a person now saying “him or her,” they feel that this is inclusive as both male and female are included – rather than strictly male pronouns as were previously used. He stated he does not even believe he is gender-inclusive with the language he himself uses.

This participant also stated he is very aware of gendered pronouns and language and occasionally notices the use of exclusive language on campus. He stated that the campus often uses the biological sex that appears on the birth certificate and automatically fill in the sex/gender on forms. When referring to campus documents, he stated that documents usually say his/her when referring to a person’s gender. He did note that he found an exception when visiting Student Health on his campus. On the forms used in that department, he stated there are places to indicate preferred name and preferred gender on forms.

Another participant stated he felt that using language that is transgender inclusive was an afterthought on his campus, an afterthought he is aware of every time he is asked

to indicate whether his sex is “M” or “F” on a form. While he would prefer to check “M” to indicate his gender identity, he feels forced to check “F” as the form has asked for his sex. He does not feel this exclusion is typically done intentionally, rather he feels this is a “psychological, societal reflex kind of thing” (Interview C, 2011, p. 19).

When discussing the use of female pronouns and the female name he was given at birth, the third participant stated he does not really care when others do not refer to him as a male. When probed on why he does not care, he stated, “It’s not my job; I’m changing me, not them” (Interview A, 2010, p. 3). When referring to language on campus, this participant stated he has not heard any derogatory comments towards transgender people, but he is aware of some language that is used that is exclusive. While he was pleased that gender-neutral bathrooms were indicated on one campus map, he prefers the term “single-occupancy” to “gender-neutral” as he is not quite sure how gender can be neutral, nor does he know many people that feel neutrally about their gender. When he hears or sees language that excludes trans people, he takes this as a common occurrence catalyzed by a lack of knowledge. He will try to contact the person that is overseeing the use of that language and suggests a change -- changes that are made, he assumes, roughly fifty percent of the time. He is not sure of the exact rate of change as he often does not hear back from the person he contacted.

#### Intentionality

All participants stated that intentionality makes a difference on the impact that inclusion or exclusion has on them. If a person intentionally excludes transgender individuals, the direct message of non-acceptance is greatly felt. If no malice is intended, the participants felt this was, in a sense, forgivable. One participant expressed an

understanding that people often do things because of a lack of knowledge or experience. Another participant indicated that, while unintentional exclusion is “just kind of annoying,” if a person purposely does not want to make another person comfortable, that is a larger problem (Interview B, 2010, p. 13). One participant recognized the opportunity for further education, stating that unintentional exclusion simply means that more conversations and workshops need to happen to educate others about transgender needs.

### Campus Practices

#### *Campus Views*

Participants were asked about their experiences on their current college campus as related to their transgender identity. Specifically, they were asked how the campus as a whole views the topic of transgender. One participant stated that he felt he was simply one student amongst many, meaning that he did not feel his transgender identity stood out. While he did feel he was perhaps recognized on campus for participating in panel discussions, he did not feel he was targeted or noticed for any other reason. However, he also recognized that he did not socialize much on campus and his campus interactions were mostly limited to class attendance. He did express concerns that an LGBT Center did not exist on campus and was concerned that recognition of the needs of transgender students was lacking. While an LGBT-friendly map of campus portrayed the single sex bathrooms on campus, these bathrooms were not indicated on the regular campus map. Additionally, while an LGBT “safe zones” program did exist – meaning that training was offered about LGBT-related issues for heterosexual allies – the brochure for the program exclusively referred to sexual orientation. Gender identity was not mentioned in the

brochure. The campus also hosts an event called “The Big Gay BBQ.” This participant pointed out the obvious exclusion of transgender in the title of that event alone. He also commented on a LGBT listserv that serves the campus. No transgender-related content is on the site. He stated that the links page for the listserv contains roughly 100 sexual internet sites. No moderator monitors the content of the links. This participant intended on posting a link related to trans people and suicide prevention, but the current content of the site discouraged him from doing so.

When discussing medical care on campus, this participant commented on a walk-in appointment he had at the campus health clinic. When discussing surgeries related to his transsexual identity and his disclosure of his identity to his doctor, he stated that the doctor did not react at all to this information. He therefore did not feel judged or awkward in the situation and was pleased with the level of professionalism demonstrated by the health care facility. This participant expressed his views on another of the focus campuses and stated that he believed the other campus was much more involved with filling the needs of transgender students – an opinion that a student from that specific campus did not share. He stated that he believed the staff and graduate students of that campus had access to trans-related surgery benefits. He was not aware of any similar benefits on the campus he was currently attending.

Another participant spoke about the reactions he got from others on campus when he dressed in more masculine clothing. He was very aware of looks or long-lasting glances while on campus and assumed these looks were a demonstration of their reaction to seeing a biological female dressing masculine. He compared this challenge to social norms with “cutting open an apple and seeing an orange” (Interview C, 2011, p. 10).

These looks made him feel awkward because the other person seems to be feeling awkward. Reactions from others also made him feel that he was intruding on the female population. For example, entering the women's restroom dressed in masculine clothing resulted in reactions from those in the restroom. Their reactions made this participant feel that he was intruding in this space, even though he is biologically female. This participant also commented specifically on an interaction he had with another student who was well aware of this participant's transgender identity and preference for male pronouns. This student referred to the participant as a female and then shared with others that this was an intentional act to defy the preferences of the participant.

The third participant discussed the difficulties he had on his campus when trying to change his name and obtain certain trans-related health benefits. The campus would not allow him to change his name on his campus-issued identification card until he had legally changed his name. The ID card also contained his picture, therefore in order to use or show his ID, he was outed in a sense. Having a male appearance with a feminine name often resulted in reactions from others. He could not buy food from certain people because he was not out to them. He would leave selected food and venue and try to find food elsewhere instead of having to show his ID card to purchase the food. This student – and several others – approached the administration about having a “preferred name” slot on official records so that the preferred name would appear on ID cards, rosters, etc. The administration stated that it would take years to obtain a new record-keeping system that would allow this information to be recorded. When attempting to change his name on campus with the Registrar, he was informed that even if the campus let him change his name, he would not be able to receive his financial aid or transcripts because of the name

discrepancy. When his name legally was changed, he had to change his name in “a billion places” on campus, including financial aid, registration, identification cards, payroll – and yet he still has encountered situations where his name has not yet been changed and no explanation is given.

When discussing health care on campus, this student stated that his health benefits were supposed to cover hormone injections as he transitioned from female to male. He stated that the description of benefits states that 100% of the hormones will be covered, however this applies only to medications that are kept on site. He stated that his hormones are considered to be a special order, therefore he has to pay \$50.00 each time the order is filled.

Living in the residence halls also posed a challenge in that this student wanted to move out of a women’s residence hall and into a men’s residence hall. He had to meet with “a billion” people in order for the change to be approved and, even then, believed that he was lucky his residential supervisor would make the change. According to what he had heard, other residential supervisors would not approve that type of change.

### *Campus Resources*

Participants were asked whether they felt their campus was inclusive of trans people and whether there existed any groups that were trans-focused or trans-friendly. One participant indicated that he felt that, while all of the students and faculty might not be inclusive of transgender students, the existence of certain programs and organizations meant that the university as a whole supports trans students. Specifically, this student mentioned a queer-based social sorority and the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Student Union as programs that are inclusive of trans students. He was not aware of any

organizations on campus that were trans-focused. This particular participant was about to matriculate at another one of the focus schools, but was not aware of any groups or organizations that are trans-focused on that campus. He did believe that the Women's Resource Center on the campus of the university he was about to attend was inclusive of trans students.

Another participant was not aware of any trans-focused organizations on campus, but was aware of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Student Union and assumed that this organization was trans-friendly. He was not involved in the organization and did not attend many events as the scheduling was inconvenient for commuter students. He did believe that he read on the internet that the campus had a fraternity that accepts transgender and gay men, however he did not have any further information on that organization.

Another participant stated that there was a trans-focused organization on his particular campus. The organization is comprised of trans individuals and allies (non trans identified). He was unaware of any organizations that were blatantly trans-friendly, but believed there were Greek fraternities or sororities that were trans-friendly. In addition, the LGBT Resource Center was an important resource. They were very accepting of his gender identity and using the pronoun "he" when referring to him.

#### *Safe People on Campus*

When asked if there were faculty or staff on campus students felt they could discuss their trans identities with, all participants indicated that there was at least one person on campus that was approachable. One participant indicated that an administrator on campus (me) was the only person he felt comfortable speaking about his gender

identity with. Another participant indicated that he felt comfortable discussing his gender identity with administrators in the LGBT Center and some administrators that identify as LGBT. However, this participant also stated that – when it came to discussing gender identity issues that required some sort of change be made on campus – one has to go to the “top” and have the decision come from someone in a powerful position in the bureaucracy. When seeking change, it often means speaking to multiple people as some are unwilling to make changes that meet the needs of trans students while others are willing. This led to this particular student stating that he only talks to administrators about his trans identity if he has to. He indicated that he believed that many administrators had been trained on gender identity issues, but also stated that he felt that if an administrator disrespected him in regards to his identity, there would be appropriate consequences.

Two participants spoke about the Counseling and Psychological Services departments. Both indicated that the counseling centers had specific therapists trained to work with transgender students. They felt comfortable speaking with these counselors and felt that their interactions had been very helpful. One participant also indicated that there were several faculty members on campus he had spoken with and felt comfortable during the conversations.

#### *Academic Success*

When asked whether the way trans students are treated on their campus has affected their academic experience, two participants stated that their academic experience was not affected. One participant stated that he was unsure whether the trans response had affected him academically, however he did say that his feelings about his own

identity sometimes made him feel that he did not want to go to class. He stated that he sometimes has dysphoric episodes where he is feeling negative about his own body and did not want to get out of bed to go to class. He continued on to say that, at moments when he was feeling badly about his body, he did not want to go to class or walk to class because he felt other students would stare at him. While reflecting on the experiences of others, this participant also stated that he knows of times when trans students did not want to go to class because they did not want to have their name called incorrectly during roll.

### LGBT

All three participants discussed the inclusion of transgender in the lesbian, gay, and bisexual community. Being that LGBT inherently states that Transgender is included, all participants felt that combining gender identity and sexual orientation does not make sense. However, two seemed to concede to the greater importance of including transgender in a category with others. According to one, “until there is some movement, it makes sense to keep the queers together” (Interview A2, p. 42).

Participants felt that although the T gender identity does not necessarily belong with the lesbian, gay, bisexual (LGB) categories of sexual orientation, they did feel that transgender was included in LGBT events on campus. Although the “inclusion” sometimes only means that gender-neutral bathrooms are available, one participant acknowledged that it can be visibly difficult to include the transgender identity. With the rainbow flag serving as a symbol of LGB acceptance or appreciation, one such universal symbol for transgender does not exist. There is no flag to wave. However, when asked about the LGB community in general, participants felt that transgender individuals are

often excluded from this community. One participant stated that his campus' Safe Zone program (a program which claims to teach others how to be allies to the LGBT community) is not trans-friendly. While the program states the focus is on LGBT, only sexual orientation was discussed in the brochure. Similarly, the campus' listserv and speaker's bureau, which supposedly serve the campus LGBT community, are not trans-friendly. Another participant felt that he was accepted as a lesbian within the LGBT community, but not accepted as a trans man. For example, a lesbian feels negatively towards this trans man because she feels that he simply does not want to be a lesbian. In other words, part of the rationale behind being a trans man is a dislike of identifying as a lesbian. Another example involves sexual orientation and the trans identity. This participant experienced a gay man indicating that he did not want to date him because he "wasn't really a guy" (Interview B2, 2011, p. 8). Those who transition to a different gender are sometimes seen as giving up on their own (original) communities.

#### Within Trans Community

One participant also discussed stereotypes and categorization within the transgender community. This participant stated that within the trans community there exists peer pressure to be or act a particular way. Specifically, within the FTM community, there are divisions based on hierarchies. For example, those who have had surgeries to physically connect with their gender identity are often viewed as being from a different economic class as those who have not. As with most medical procedures, having surgery to remove the breasts, for example, is expensive. There is a class division between those who have had that surgery and those who bind their breasts as there is an assumption that a person who is binding has not saved up enough money for surgery.

## Change

### *Possibility to Change*

Participants were asked whether they believed that society might further recognize and become more inclusive of the transgender population. All three students stated that they do believe society will become more inclusive and that the language people use can become more reflective of the existence of more than two genders. However, not all were in agreement that language *will* become more inclusive. All three participants stated that they felt that individuals can avoid using pronouns and gender specific language. Yet, one felt that language will not become completely inclusive as he believed the English language is deeply ingrained and those that wish to change their language have already done so. He stated that language will only truly change if enough people are interested enough to participate; but not that many people are interested. In addition, there do exist people that are hateful towards transgender groups and deliberately do not want to change their language. He stated that, while he perhaps should think about the subject more, he does not as it does not affect him.

Conversely, one participant stated he felt that, in general, people want to be good and kind; therefore, there is a possibility for society to change. He stated that progress has been made; change is happening. He stated that he felt he lived in a country that does not have people that are trying to kill him because of his gender identity. He is able to live his life and he felt that, for the most part, the transgender community is left alone. He does feel that language can become more inclusive. He believes people should use the terms “sex” and “gender” the way they are intended to be used. He stated that people often use those terms interchangeably and do not differentiate between whether they

would like to obtain the biological sex or gender identity of a person on, for example, an application. He stressed that he is not simply “wordsmith,” but that this type of small change can make a difference. He continued by saying that it is important to recognize that not every person would like to be termed or labeled the same way. Ask a person what pronoun they would like for others to use. However, he also recognized that there needs to be patience within the trans community when understanding that non-trans people are learning to adjust. If a trans male believes he is passing as male, he might become frustrated when being viewed as transgender instead of simply as male. He might be agitated at having to explain which pronoun to use as he believes that it should be obvious. Yet, he recognizes that it is a fair question.

### *Campus Change*

When discussing transgender resources on college campuses, one participant stated that the needs of transgender college students could be different than the needs of the rest of the transgender population. He stated that the opportunity to go to college is an issue of class, therefore there is going to be a different kind of trans person on campus. Furthermore, the type of college might determine the type of trans student in attendance, therefore again changing the needs of trans students on campus. Issues faced by trans students at a community college might be different from the needs of students at a state school, a private school, an elite school, etc. In addition, individual student characteristics such as age of the trans student and past experiences of that student might vary the type of support that is needed.

Specifically, this participant felt that his current campus should have a safe zone program that is housed in a more neutral department. He stated that the Women’s Studies

department of his current campus hosts this program and that he does not feel this gives a welcoming impression as historically Women's Studies has not been a very welcoming department for trans students. He suggested changing Women's Studies to Gender Studies and including transgender education. He also suggested having a recognized center and advocate for LGBT students, faculty, and staff on campus. One person should serve on committees and meet with task forces to advocate for community members, raise concerns, and voice issues. The campus needs one person that community members know they can turn to if they are having difficulties on campus. This person can perhaps serve as a liaison to other departments or offices. A center can serve as a safe space for students to come to for respite.

Another participant stated that he felt more legislation and policy need to exist that support transgender students. In his opinion, the basic needs of a transgender person are to be called by their preferred name and to be referred to as their correct pronoun. Changing one's name on campus – which can affect roll call and rosters – should not be as difficult. His campus required that he change his name legally before he could change his name at the university. He believes that non-transgender people also need to speak up as, when left to transgender students, the student often does not want to speak up and become a target.

### *Educator*

As members of the transgender community, each participant discussed the need or obligation to serve as an educator about trans issues. When asked what each participant would tell someone if they wanted to start learning about transgender issues, one student acknowledged this is a difficult topic to teach others about as many of the transgender

population is “stealth” and does not want to be recognized as transgender. *Stealth* means that a transgender person passes as the gender of their choice and does not wish to identify as transgender. In other words, if a female to male transgender individual is stealth, this means that the person appears and is believed to be male, therefore his gender identity is typically not questioned by others. This participant, when asked about educating others, stated, “where do you start in a community that doesn’t want to be visible?” (Interview B2, 2011, p. 9). A second participant emphasized the importance of letting others know there is not one transition path all transgender people follow. He stated that transgender people are often put in box as one assumes all transgender people are going to “follow the route of A, B, and C” (Interview C, 2011, p. 5). When asked to elaborate on this route, he stated that there is an assumption that all transgender people will take hormones, have “top surgery” – meaning implant or remove breasts, and then have “bottom surgery” – meaning sexual reassignment surgery. Not all trans individuals transition the same way, nor do they all see the need to transition in the same way. This participant emphasized the need to understand the trans population should not be stereotyped, nor should one assume that all trans people are the same.

The third participant struggled with the role of being an educator as it relates to the privacy of his life. When faced with an opportunity to teach others – even by answering seemingly simple questions – he recognized the decision to come out as transgender or as an ally when deciding what to say. Which role will he play? When given the opportunity to teach, he must decide whether to inform others of his trans gender and therefore answer the question as a member of the community. Or, conversely, does he continue to pass as male and instead answer the question as an ally of

the community? Will this positionality make a difference in the knowledge gained by those asking the questions? He stated that he maintains the ability to choose when he serves as a “teacher” and owns the right to determine when he wants to educate others about transgender issues. Given the lack of knowledge by the general population, he explained that he does not allow himself to get frustrated when he finds himself in a situation in which he is not prepared to explain the needs of the trans community. For example, he stated that when a trans person attends therapy sessions, if the therapist is not well versed on trans issues, the client may spend half the session educating the therapist. If this participant maintains the ability to choose his role, he does not allow himself to become frustrated in these situations. Compare this to a presentation where this participant is asked to speak about transgender issues – he is prepared to play that role and therefore maintains control.

When asked what he would like others to know about the transgender population, he spoke of the need to understand that varying gender identities are part of the natural world. He stated, “you go to the zoo, and you marvel at all the different kinds of animals. You go to the botanical garden, you marvel at all the different kinds of plants. You go to a rose garden. Does anybody stand there and say, ‘Why can’t they all be red and big and beautiful?’ No. There’s big ones and little ones and medium-size ones and two-tones and all different colors. The objective is to cultivate a unique rose” (Interview A2, 2010, p. 3). So why, he asks, is that different for us? At the same time, he also stated during his interview that he did not necessarily believe non-trans people need to understand the needs or issues of the transgender population. Nor does he believe that everyone should be an ally to the community. He instead prefers that people simply did not try to restrict

the rights of any marginalized group – including the rights of trans people to, for example, file employment or housing discrimination claims. He states that there exists a lack of protections in this country for trans people and, while he himself cannot claim to understand all of what other people do – therefore he cannot ask that others understand all issues of the trans community – he does not do anything to restrict them.

While speaking with this participant about his role as an activist, he consistently discussed his own resolution in balancing his personal needs and the needs of the community. While he does educate others about trans needs and continues to try to advocate for the trans community, he does so in a way that almost limits his personal investment. He stated that he was an active radical for 19 years. He stated, “I was active. I was a disrupter. I was in your face. I was loud...and that didn’t stop my experience of seeing contempt and disgust in people’s eyes, and having to negotiate going to the bathroom every time I found myself in public. I don’t have any issues anymore. And when people say, well, you just took the easy way out, I’ll have no problem. That’s when people say, well, you just gave up. You took the easy way. And it’s like, it’s not that easy, really. It’s simple, but it’s not that easy” (Interview A2, 2011, p. 29). After reflection, he felt that his method of advocacy often involved wronging people. He would try to make them feel bad, shame them, and guilt them. He stated that he recognized that not all people were malicious about their exclusion, there simply existed a lack of awareness. He spoke of a specific incident in which he confronted a protester at an event in Denver. He engaged with this person and fought back with angry words. As the debate continued, the protester finally looked at him, defeated. This participant felt very, very bad. In that moment, he decided that he was done; “done tearing people down.

I'm done demonizing people. I'm done arguing. I'm done proving. I'm done. In that moment, I decided now my interest is in understanding. What happened to that guy? Why was he like that?" (Interview A2, 2011, p. 31). He now chooses to serve as a mentor and discuss his own experiences. He is a resource. Rather than trying to change everybody else to be accepting or understanding, he lives within the world he is in. He is happy; content and comfortable – but not complacent.

#### Document Analysis

Participants were asked to review several campus documents intended to pertain to, relate to, or describe the entire student body. Students were asked to indicate specific places within each document in which they felt the document was inclusive or exclusive of transgender students. They were also asked follow-up questions following this analysis. Students were asked to explain why they felt the document was or was not inclusive of transgender students and whether they personally felt excluded in/by the document. The purpose of document analysis in this study was to explore whether the language that was used in formal campus documentation excludes transgender students and how they felt about this exclusion, if any.

The first participant first analyzed the Mission Statement and Vision Statement for the Division of Student Affairs at San Diego State University (SDSU) (Appendix D). These documents were found online on the San Diego State University website. Included in the Vision Statement is the language, “promoting a campus climate that values, accepts and learns from our rich diversity.” This participant was curious as to how student affairs promotes an environment that values, accepts, and learns from a rich diversity that is

inclusive of trans. While he felt that the statement itself is very general – therefore inclusive in its generality – questions were raised about how this occurs.

The next document analyzed by this participant is known as SDSU At a Glance and is available on the SDSU Website (Appendix E). This document offers statistics about the students that attend SDSU, including the number of applicants, how many students are enrolled in certain majors, and the ethnicities, genders, and average ages of students. When asked to comment on this document, this participant stated that he would replace the word “gender” with the word “sex” when the document refers to how many men and women attend the university.

The final document analyzed by this participant was the Mission Statement for the Cross-Cultural Center at San Diego State, available on the SDSU website (Appendix F). This participant first stated that he was not aware of the Cross-Cultural Center and did not know what it was. After reading the mission statement, he felt the document was inclusive of transgender students as it specifically mentioned sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, and sex. He also stated that the mission statement states that the Center advocates for the underserved and underrepresented, but does not define who that is.

The second participant analyzed the College Portrait found online on the California State University, San Marcos (CSUSM) website (Appendix G). This document included such information as the total number of undergraduate and graduate students as well as the gender, race/ethnicity, age, and geographic distribution of enrolled students. The participant felt this document was exclusive of transgender students as only the biological genders of male and female were included. The second document analyzed by this participant included the values and mission statement related to

diversity, social justice, and equity and CSUSM website (Appendix H). The participant felt this document was inclusive of transgender students as the document specifically stated the inclusion of “people of all races, ethnicities, differing physical and mental ableness, gender, sexual orientation, age, religious backgrounds and socioeconomic status”. Since the document state *all* genders, this was considered to be inclusive of trans students.

The final document analyzed by this participant was the description of the CSUSM Cross Cultural Center as found on the Student Life and Leadership website (Appendix I). Rather than list various categories which are to be included, this document did not specifically mention any category. The document stated that the Center is committed to “develop programs that educate and spread awareness about social justice and multicultural issues, create a community of socially conscious people who actively work toward a more just and equitable world, and provide support for underrepresented and marginalized groups and individuals within the larger campus community”. The participant felt that all students were included in this statement, perhaps because of the lack of specificity of marginalized groups.

The third participant analyzed three documents available on the University of California, San Diego website. The first document was the College Profile of the university found under the Facts and Campus Profile section of the About UCSD website (Appendix J). The participant was only asked to analyze the first page of this seven page printed document. The document included total enrollment of students broken down by gender, ethnicity, home location, and age. This participant stated that the fact that the only options under Gender were male and female made the document exclusive. This

participant stated that he knew he would be counted as a female student, despite the fact that he identifies as male.

The second document analyzed was called the UCSD Principles of Community (Appendix K). This participant stated that he had read the Principles of Community before and believes that the espoused values and goals set forth in the Principles are not carried out. He stated that while the document states one thing, the campus does another. Since the campus usually considers “gender inclusive” to mean that men and women should be treated equally, this means the campus is not inclusive of all/other genders. *Gender* is mentioned several times in the document, but if the campus is not trans inclusive, he reads the word ‘gender’ as referring to men and women – even though the document does not explicitly state that. He also recognized that the document frequently said “his” and “her,” yet, at first glance, he overlooked this. While he believes the document says great things, he believes the campus system would have to change in order to work with it.

The final document analyzed was the Mission Statement and Commitment to Diversity of the UCSD Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Resource Center (Appendix L). Similar to the last document, this participant had read this website numerous times as he used to work in the Center. He stated that, again as with the last document, he believed that the document says one thing, but that the Center does another. He stated that “if you walk in there right now, all you’re going to see is rainbows...and then they have a couple of transgender books” (Interview B, 2010, p. 16). It is difficult to lump together gender and sexuality as they focus on two different things. Trying to focus on

both topics at once can be difficult. Therefore, although the document states that gender identity issues will be explored, this participant did not see that happening frequently.

### Summary

This chapter presented the results of an examination of transgender college students' experiences as relayed through individual interviews and document analysis. Through the utilization of narrative analysis, five theoretical codes were identified: Definition and Identity, Disclosure, Societal Practices, Campus Practices, LGBT, and Change. Theoretical codes were presented in relation to proposed research questions and emergent themes detracted from narratives. Participants discussed definitions of transgender, realizations of being transgender, sources (or lack thereof) of support, language, societal and campus views, academic success, and impressions of document inclusivity. Chapter 5 presents the significance of the study's results as related to critical pedagogy and the introduction of critical transgender theory.

## CHAPTER 5

### Discussion

This final chapter discusses the significance of the research findings, both as related to the existing literature and the research questions. In addition, due to the exploratory nature of the research conducted, additional significant themes have been included as well. While the research questions drove the construction of the research model, interview questions, and document analysis, the results of the study were so emergent, the additional discussion topics add crucial information to the dearth of literature that currently exists about the transgender college student population. Therefore, while this discussion might seem a departure from the driving questions of this study, the data gathered during this study is essential for increased awareness and understanding of this population. This chapter also introduces critical transgender theory, presents implications and applications for future practice, study limitations, and recommendations for future research.

### Results Review

The purpose of this study was to critically examine the perceptions of inclusion of transgender students, to examine the ways in which campus leadership structures or entities include or exclude transgender students, and to examine the effects of inclusive and exclusive language on transgender students through students' own words and experiences. Narrative analysis was used to interpret the data collected from the participants in this study. By using narrative analysis to dissect individual interviews and

document review, the stories told by participants created knowledge from the data that was collected (Eng, 2006; Reason, 2001; Savin-Baden & Van Niekerk, 2007).

Results of this study were initially guided by the following research questions:

1. In what ways do transgender students feel that their transgender identity is accepted on their campus?
2. In what ways have the participants' campus leadership structures or entities demonstrated inclusion or exclusion of their transgender identity?
3. What are the effects of intentionally and/or unintentionally oppressive written and spoken language on transgender students?

However, as stated earlier, additional crucial information was gathered during this study as well, therefore collected data not directly related to the research questions will be included as well. Through the use of qualitative interviews, document analysis, and narrative analysis framed by critical theory, three transgender college students from three different public university campuses told their story. Their stories were examined for commonalities, however differences between experiences were also analyzed as the individual story proved to be insightful as well. While specific qualitative interview questions were constructed and asked of participants, similar shared themes emerged without the guidance of specific questions, thus the creation of non-research question related data. Six theoretical categories emerged from the data collected in this study: Definition and Identity, Disclosure, Societal Practices, Campus Practices, LGBT, and Change.

## Exploring Definition and Identity

### *Definition of Trans*

Participants greatly defined the terms *transgender* as related to the gender binary. The *gender binary* refers to the existence of only two genders: male and female (Burdge, 2007; Lucal, 1999; Sausa, 2002). Similar to this existing literature, participants discussed society's determination that male and female are the only two genders and that gender is related to biological sex. Society often assumes that "feminine" characteristic such as being gentle, nurturing, caring, and compassionate must be associated with the biological female sex. Similarly, "masculine" characteristics must only be associated with the biological male sex (Kane, 2001). Participants in this study indicated that *transgender* means to transgress societal gender norms. If, for example, a boy prefers to play with dolls rather than cars, the variance from the societal norm that boys should play with cars might make the individual transgender. That individual is not conforming with society's gender boundaries. Transgender individuals transcend gender roles and gender expressions. The compiled definition of transgender in this study correlates strongly with existing literature and definitions as described by Beemyn and Curtis, et al. (2005), Burdge (2007), Burgess (1999), Carroll et al. (2002), Feinberg (1998), Lombardi et al. (2001), Lovaas et al. (2002), McCarthy (2003), O'Neil et al. (2008), Ryan (2004), and Sausa (2007).

### *Trans Development*

Discussion of gender norms continued when participants discussed two aspects of the transgender identity/community as related to society's treatment of transgender individuals and the stereotypes that exist about the trans community. One participant

struggled with the notion that society believes that all transgender people transition in the same way, or at all. For the purposes of this study, *transition* means physically altering or changing one's body to resemble or display characteristics of the assigned sex associated with the felt gender identity. For example, hormones are commonly taken by both trans men and women in order to physically change the body. Biological females transitioning to male might take hormones in order to deepen the voice, grow facial hair, or tone the body in different ways. Surgical options are sometimes available as well, including removal of the breasts for women transitioning to men or breast implants for men transitioning to women. When one hears the term *transgender*, assumptions are often made that the person has physically transitioned in some way – from hormone injections to complete sexual reassignment surgery. However, not all transgender people physically transition completely, or at all. This participant does not currently take or plan on taking hormones, nor does he plan on having surgery. However, he identifies as transgender because he is biologically a female, yet identifies with and as the male gender. Although *transgender* can often be used as an all-encompassing term, acknowledgement must be given to individual identities within the community. Similar to Ladson-Billings and Donner's (2005) assertion that race and ethnicity are often forced into totalized categories that have little variation. Paxton et al. (2006) articulated that, as the transgender community grows in recognition, increasing social constructs about that community are developing. However, this participant, as well as Paxton et al. (2006) and Burdge (2007) establish that any type of strict social classification can be exclusive and inappropriate – including a social construct that all transgender people are the same. Categories, labels, and language used within and about the trans community must be

allowed to evolve and emphasize the importance of individual recognition – even if this lacks convenience for those trying to create finite categories.

The literature in this review commented heavily on the poor treatment of transgender individuals by others (Bettcher, 2007; Burgess, 1999; Hill & Willoughby, 2005; Lee, 2000; Rotheram-Borus et al., 1991). Participants of this study similarly believed that transgender people can be victims of violence due to their gender identity. One participant stated that he believed that transwomen – meaning biological males that now identify as female – often face harsher consequences than transmen (biological females that now identify as male). According to this participant, society has been much more accepting of women that transcend female gender norms. Feminism almost encouraged women to challenge gender roles, sometimes merely being dismissed as tom boys, therefore it is more “acceptable” to transgress female gender norms. The same luxury has not been afforded to men. Men were not encouraged or allowed to act more feminine, therefore resulting in harsher consequences for men who feel feminine.

#### *Intro to Trans and Identity*

According to Burgess (1999) and the American Psychiatric Association (2008), transgender identity development can occur as early as childhood or much later in life. Two participants in this study remembered a disconnect with their biological gender at early ages: three and seven. One participant was already an adult when he realized that he was transgender. Thus, the data from this study complement the existing research about the emergence of the transgender identity. Additionally, there does not exist one set of factors or behaviors that define a transgender identity. Each transgender person identifies with the felt gender identity at different depths (Eyler & Wright, 1997). As

mentioned earlier, some transgender people physically change to resemble another gender while some do not. Additionally, identifying as transgender may involve identifying with one gender, two genders, no specific gender, a gender category, or no gender category (CITE). These varying levels of trans identification were also reflected in this study. At the age of three, one participant thought of himself as a boy and dressed in a masculine fashion. At the age of seven, another participant was questioning whether he was a hermaphrodite. The third participant initially identified as a sporty lesbian, thinking of himself as androgynist. Moving to present day, the first participant stated that he could not easily explain his gender identity and that although he feels that he is male, he does not know why. The second participant now identifies as a male and prefers to not use the term transgender as he feels the term infers an in-between status, a status which he no longer identifies with. The final participant identifies as a transsexual man. Again, as supported by the literature, there does not exist one set of factors or levels of behavior that distinguish transgender persons and each person identifies as such for different and varying reasons (Eyler & Wright, 1997).

### *Feelings About Self*

The majority of existing literature about transgender people speaks of the discrimination and exclusion that transgender people are subject to (Lee, 2000; Hill & Willoughby, 2005; Bettcher, 2007; Burgess, 1999; Rotheram-Borus et al., 1991). While reading existing research and articles, one almost assumes that transgender people are unfortunate victims of their own circumstance. After all, who would wish to live a life portrayed as nothing but difficult? However, this in-depth study of three transgender people included one who adamantly expressed happiness with his trans identity and

would not choose to have been born as the gender he now displays. This participant, now 44 years old, now passes as male, however he acknowledged that during the first few years after realizing he was trans he constantly thought about his identity – yet he did not wish that he was born male. Rather than question his own identity, he seemed to concentrate on the unfortunate opinions or teachings that society is bounded by. While he was targeted by the oppression of society, he did not necessarily bond with the victim mentality. Converse to most of the literature, he stated that he felt that he has had some wonderful experiences that he might not have had if he been born biologically male. He stated that it was a privilege to be part of the female community. He also believed that he has a unique insight into the societal views about men. Formally a person that might cross the street to avoid a group of nuisance-like men, he now understands when a woman crosses the street to avoid him. He understands female vulnerability and male rage and aggression. He has been able to unpack stereotypes about men and recognize that stereotypes are not always true. Men can have feelings, care about others, and show concern. In addition to his ability to relate to both men and women, he also sees overcoming the challenge of being transgender as an asset, believing that there exist advantages for a person who has experienced internal and external conflict. He has “risen out of the ashes” (Interview A2, 2010, p. 8).

Another participant -- who did feel that he wished that he had been born male, stated that he is now happy with his identity. Similar to the last participant, he felt that he was more in tune with the languages that both men and women use – having identified as both genders in his lifetime. He has gained valuable experience by going through the journey of realizing his identity. Both of these stories shed light on a positive side of

being transgender, one that is overlooked in the literature that currently exists. As a researcher who completed a literature review, this information is refreshing and encourages a new perspective on being transgender. While it remains important to understand the trials, tribulations, and victimization of the transgender population, the abilities to relate to both genders spoken about by these participants offers more than tales of overcoming adversity. This quality can almost be enviable and demonstrates productivity previously unrecognized.

The final participant shared a history that greatly mirrored existing literature in that he previously struggled with feeling that he belonged anywhere. The internal struggle that he experienced about his gender identity, combined with feeling like a “freak” because he was different led to suicidal ideation and one suicide attempt. According to Zubernis and Snyder (2007), if a person feels that society does not accept them, they might feel isolated and alone. In addition, they might internalize the negative beliefs of others and experience self-hatred. Listening to this participant state that he felt like a freak demonstrates the power that others have over ones own esteem. In this case, this participant attempted suicide, a reaction not uncommon in the transgender community. Zubernis and Snyder (2007), the Health Outreach and Advocacy Program (2007), Feldman and Bockting (2003), Sausa (2002), and Grossman and D’Augelli (2007) all completed studies in which high numbers of transgender or LGBT youth contemplated or attempted suicide. About these attempts and ideation, most participants indicated that their inability to accept their own transgender identity, fueled by the lack of acceptance of others, directly related to their suicidal behavior.

The American Psychiatric Association (1994) has classified and included Gender Identity Disorder in their *Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. The criteria for this disorder includes strong identification with the gender that does not correspond to biological sex. In other words, according to this manual, those who identify as transgender are suffering from a disorder. An updated entry from the American Psychiatric Association (APA) in 2008 stated that Gender Identity Disorder (GID) *need not always* be considered a disorder, but the possibility still exists. According to Burgess (1999), this diagnosis can be controversial at best and may serve as a confirmation that there is something wrong with a person who identifies as transgender. The APA seemingly categorizes transgender as “other,” thus giving society permission to exclude. For a transgender individual, this categorization can be isolating and devastating. Struggling with an internal issue as great as gender identity is only multiplied by reading in a manual that this internal issue is a disorder. Supplement the disorder classification with the discriminatory treatment by others and the negative reactions of others, the depression and suicidal ideation by transgender people – including one participant of this study – is not surprising.

### *Parents*

Two participants spoke about their relationships, support, or lack of support from their parents when they disclosed their transgender identity. According to Teague (1992), Pilkington and D’Augelli (1995), and Grossman et al. (2005), parents often respond negatively to their child’s non-traditional gender identity once it is revealed. These two participants discussed their parents’ thoughts and reactions to learning about their child’s transgender identity. Parents’ reactions of these participants’ gender identity

substantiated Grossman et al.'s (2005) finding that 59% of parents of transgender youths had negative reactions to their child's gender identity when initially informed. Both participants indicated that their parents did not have a positive reaction when told of their child's gender identity. One participant stated that when he first questioned his gender identity at age seven, his mom grounded him. When he brought the topic up again at age 12, he was told not to mention the idea again. As a result, he wound up suppressing his gender identity for many years and instead expressed himself in such a way as to make his mother happy. The second participant spoke of the hurt he experienced from his parents' initial lack of support of his gender identity. Although his parents now accept his identity, his sister continues to deny the identity and has stated that, even if a sexual reassignment surgery occurs, she will still refer to him as a female. Now supplement the disorder classification, discriminatory treatment by others, and the suicidal ideation with the lack of parent or familial support. Isolation and depression is not surprising.

#### Discussing Disclosure of the Transgender Identity

Participants were asked to discuss the transparency of their identity, to whom they have disclosed their transgender identity, and the characteristics of those people that encouraged disclosure. The participants varied in their levels of disclosure, often depending on who they were talking to, the surrounding environment, and the specific situation that was occurring at the time. Estimates of the percentage of the population that identify as transgender range from 0.25% to 10%. There are several reasons that providing an accurate count of transgender people is difficult, partly due to the omission of the transgender category from the United States Census (United States Census Bureau, 2007; Macropoulos, 2006). In addition, identifying as transgender opens individuals to

discrimination, violence, and isolation (Labossiere, 2007). Discussions of disclosure in this study added to the understanding of why the percentage estimates of transgender people vary so widely. One participant self-identifies as female on his campus. He is not open about his transgender identity and stated that in order to disclose his identity, he had to know the person that he would be telling, feel they are a good friend, or be involved in a situation or group that has previously indicated an openness to differences in gender identity – and, as will be discussed, this does not mean that he will automatically be open to someone from the LGB community. He believes that certain environments do not welcome the transgender community. For example, as a student of the sciences, he felt that this field, would not accept his trans identity. When speaking of the faculty in that field, he stated that his knowledge of the social dynamics within the countries that the faculty come from indicate that identifying as transgender could be dangerous or deadly. Other students in that major have made derogatory remarks about trans people that made him uncomfortable to disclose. To them, he identified as a female because he “just wanted to pass the classes and get [his] degree. [He] didn’t want to deal with a teacher who wanted to kill me so they flunked me, or students in [his] class who all of a sudden are f-ing a-holes to [him]” (Interview C, 2011, p. 7).

The second participant is also not open about his transgender identity. He identifies as male, not as transgender. Similar to the previous participant, he stated that he determines whether he will disclose his identity once he has a feeling as to whether he will be treated differently if his trans identity is known. The final participant is “mostly open” about his trans identity, preferring to identify as male. While completing this study, a better understanding was attained as to the difficulties of understanding how

many people identify as transgender. In this study alone, not one of the three participants always identifies as transgender. Although feeling like a male and identifying as trans for the purpose of this study, one participant often identifies as female. Two participants identified as trans for this study, yet usually identify as male – not transgender.

### Interpreting Societal Practices

#### *Societal Views*

Transgender people face discrimination, harassment, and violence on a daily basis (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2003; Rankin and Beemyn as cited in Beemyn, 2005; Lombardi et al., 2002; Hill & Willoughby, 2005; Lee, 2000). Additionally, McKinney (2005) completed a study of 85 transgender college students. Results indicated that participants believed that the campus climate was hostile towards transgender students. Similarly, participants in this study felt that most of society has a negative reaction to the idea of being transgender, sometimes believing that to be transgender is unnatural. Society has dictated that only two genders exist: male and female. Male and female genders as related to biological sex are what is considered to be natural. Therefore, to deviate from these standards seems unnatural. One participant stated that society is unaware that transgender people exist – except for those that appear on a daytime talk show as an oddity. Before transitioning, this participant experienced looks of contempt, fear, and disgust possibly due to a fear of the unknown. According to this participant, changes in beliefs, understanding, and paradigms can lead to questioning what a person has previously been taught. What have I learned that may not be true? Being that the existence of male and female sexes and identities have been ingrained as fact from an almost innate perspective, if one learns that other gender options exist, one

might question the foundation of other knowledge. As will be discussed later, beliefs set forth by this participant greatly relate to critical theory and the frameworks that drive this study.

Two participants expressed beliefs that the negative consequences associated with knowledge of the trans community by non-trans people might now outweigh the benefits of increased knowledge of the population. One participant stated that he would prefer if society simply did not think about the transgender population. The second participant commented on the “double-edged sword” as related to awareness of the trans population. Given the violence targeted towards trans people, increasing “awareness” of the population might only encourage more negativity. By being less visible, they are less likely to be a target for violence and discrimination. However, both participants recognized that they now identify and pass as male, therefore they are not necessarily affected by societal ignorance. The first participant believes that many trans people would like for the population to be recognized and, by extension, purposely inclusive. For example, despite the common myth that the male and female genders include transgender people as, for example, if a biological male transitions to female or a biological female transitions to male, they can still identify as either male or female – it would simply be the opposite of the gender they used to be. Both of these participants identify as male – not typically as transgender – therefore, their needs are met. However, as recognized by this participant, not all individuals identify with any gender, therefore having a gender binary still excludes them. Underneath the transgender umbrella exist

numerous gender identities including gender variant<sup>2</sup>, intersexed<sup>3</sup>, gender queer<sup>4</sup>, gender neutral<sup>5</sup>, and gender fluid<sup>6</sup> (Carroll et al., 2002; Ryan, 2004; Lombardi et al. (2001). This belief that perhaps awareness of the transgender population should not increase is contrary to the research findings in current research. Evans and Herriott (2004) and Burdge (2007) and Agans (2007) all found that more exposure to LGBT students increased awareness of oppression and decreased oppressive actions towards the LGBT population.

*Language, Intentionality, and Document Analysis*

According to Margaret Wheatley (2002), human conversation is the oldest and easiest way to cultivate change. Conversely, conversation and language can also lead to exclusion. Participants were asked to discuss language as related to the inclusion or exclusion of transgender students on campus. Most participants discussed the incorrect use of pronouns by others – meaning, the use of the wrong pronoun. For example, one participant discussed a classroom incident in which a professor first referred to him as “he,” then as “she,” and then apologized to him in front of 300 classmates. Again referencing the gender binary, when society moved from strict use of patriarchal

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<sup>2</sup> Gender variant – transgender.

<sup>3</sup> Intersexed - an individual who has both male and female anatomic characteristics to varying degrees or in which the appearance of the external genitalia is ambiguous or differs from that characteristic of the gonadal or genetic sex (Mosby, 2009).

<sup>4</sup> Gender queer - someone who transgresses boundaries of gender identity. This term is growing in popularity because it is seen as more inclusive than transgender and transsexual (Belge, 2011).

<sup>5</sup> Gender neutral – not sexually biased; avoiding references to masculinity and femininity and their cultural associations (Encarta, 2011).

<sup>6</sup> Gender fluid - Gender Fluid is a gender identity best described as a dynamic mix of boy and girl. A person who is Gender Fluid may always feel like a mix of the two traditional genders, but may feel more boy some days, and more girl other days (Urban Dictionary, 2011).

pronouns to the inclusion of women (i.e. him/her, his/hers) it seemed as though exclusion had ended. However, as previously discussed, those who identify as gender fluid, gender queer, gender neutral, etc. might associate with two or more genders or no gender.

Him/her is not all-inclusive.

All participants in this study were aware of language on their campus that excludes transgender students, often as related to forms. One participant stated that his campus often uses the biological sex that appears on the birth certificate to fill in the sex and/or gender blanks on forms. He stated that forms often say his/her or allow the option to choose either male or female. On his campus, he was only aware of the ability to enter preferred gender (and preferred name) on the forms at Student Health. Similarly, another participant also stated that forms on his campus only include the male and female options. A further dilemma exists when the form asks for one to state their sex, he is not sure whether the sought after information is actually gender or gender identity. He is not quite sure which box to check when only two options exist and those options might not be asking the appropriate question. These results are similar to those published in current research that records and documents are often a challenge for transgender students. Students can often feel disempowered when they cannot indicate their true identity (Beemyn, 2005; Sausa, 2002).

Interestingly, participants in this study did not offer suggestions as to how to make language more inclusive of transgender students. One participant stated that he believes that a person cannot easily change their own ingrained language, nor is society ready to change language used to refer to gender. He himself does not believe that he is gender inclusive with the language that he himself uses. Given the rise in popularity of

the term gender-neutral, one would think that using that term more often (gender-neutral bathrooms, gender-neutral housing) might be an option. However, one participant stated that he is not quite sure how gender can be neutral, nor does he know many people that feel neutrally about their gender. All participants seemed to be bit resigned to the idea that language might continue to be exclusive, perhaps because there is no easy answer to solving this problem. One participant stated that he usually just accepts it and moves on. Another participant who believed that trans-inclusive language was an afterthought on his campus, also stated that he did not feel that exclusion happens intentionally. While he is aware of the language that is used, he almost dismissed this usage as reflexive. Another participant, when discussing names and pronouns, and whether he is affected by the use of “wrong” pronouns stated, “It’s not my job; I’m changing me, not them” (Interview A, 2010, p. 3). If no malice is intended in the exclusion – or is done “accidentally” – participants felt that this language use was “just kind of annoying.” People often act in ways as to demonstrate a lack of knowledge or experience. If the exclusion was done intentionally, this behavior is less forgivable.

While reviewing campus documents in the document analysis portion of the study, participants noticed gender exclusive language in at least one document from every campus. Each participant examined a campus profile/facts sheet from their home campus of San Diego State University, University of California, San Diego, or California State University, San Marcos. Each of these documents indicated the total number of students enrolled on campus by gender; however in each of these documents, only the numbers of male and female students were listed. Transgender or any other gender identity was not included in these statistics, leading one to believe that either no

transgender students exist on any of those three campuses, that the campus did not bother to include the number of trans students on campus, or that enrolled students were forced to choose only between male and female when indicating gender.

Participants also reviewed the mission statement of the Division of Student Affairs, the values and mission as related to diversity, or the principles of community. All believed that the documents were gender inclusive in that either the document was general about diversity and did not state gender – therefore leaving no room to exclude certain gender identities, or that that gender identity was mentioned as a specific topic of inclusion. All participants also reviewed the mission statement or description for their corresponding university's Cross-Cultural Center. Similar to the last analysis, participants did believe that the language in the documents was inclusive, either by not mentioning gender or by including gender identity. However, all participants seemed to question whether the espoused values of all of these documents were also values in action. One participant would have preferred to see specific steps or methods that would be followed in order to achieve the inclusivity goals set forth in the documents. Given that the participants were obviously familiar with the campuses about which the documents were written, all participants were concerned about whether the universities were taking steps to ensure that their campuses were inclusive. Are the campuses walking the walk or merely talking the talk? In addition, one participant questioned what was meant by the term gender identity in the documents. When reading these words in a document, one might assume that using the term gender identity indicates an awareness of more than two genders and/or the ability to have a gender identity that is not necessarily male or female. However, as questioned by this participant, what if the

authors of these statements still merely meant the inclusion of men *and* women – not transgender?

### Exploring Campus Practices

#### *Campus Views*

Results of this study indicate that participants experienced some levels of discrimination – or believed that they would if they were open about their gender identity. However, perceived discrimination appeared to be less severe than circumstances described in current literature – maybe. As described in Chapter 1, literature often combines the LGB and T populations, therefore several studies have analyzed “LGBT” people. However, while LGBT participants might be recruited for the study, research often does not include any transgender people. Munoz-Plaza, Quinn, and Rounds (2002) completed a study entitled, “Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students: Perceived social support in the high school environment.” However, out of the 12 participants the researchers interviewed, none identified as transgender. Based on title alone, one might assume that this study can be used to gain information about LGBT students, yet the study actually only addresses LGB students. In another example, Rankin and Beemyn (2005) indicated that less than 33% of LGBT participants in their study experienced harassment. Yet, in that same study, 44% of transgender students experienced harassment. Information about transgender students can be misleading when grouped with lesbian, gay, and bisexual students. Given these existing discrepancies, keep in mind the described difficulties when comparing the current study’s findings to the already limited existing literature about the transgender population.

Rankin and Beemyn's (2005) showed that 44% of participating transgender college students experienced harassment including derogatory remarks, verbal threats, graffiti/vandalism, physical threats and assaults, denial of services and pressure to be silent (as cited in Beemyn, 2005). Lombardi et al. (2001) indicated that almost 60% of transgender participants in their study experienced harassment or violence by others. Participants in this current study did not indicate high levels of harassment by others. One participant stated that he felt that he was one student amongst many and did not feel that he was targeted or noticed on campus for his transgender identity. Another participant mentioned looks or long-lasting glances that he received on campus from others when he dressed in "masculine" clothing. Although these looks made him feel awkward (which I am not minimizing), he did not mention violence or overt harassment. Similarly, the third participant discussed difficulties on campus when trying to change his name (i.e. leaving selected venues before buying food in order to avoid showing his student identification that contained a contrasting genderized name and picture), however he did not mention incidents of harassment as detailed by Rankin and Beemyn (2005).

While these results are positive in that they demonstrate that none of the participants experienced violence, physical dangers, or harassment on their campus, all three participants indicated experience with discrimination and exclusion, some of which is consistent with current literature. When discussing health care on campus, one student stated that his student health care benefits state that 100% of hormone injections should be covered. However, full coverage only applies to medications that are kept on site. His hormones are considered to be a special order, therefore he has to pay \$50 each time the order is filled. Similarly, Beemyn (2005) stated that many college student health plans

exclude testosterone injections and gender reassignment surgeries. Additionally, Feldman and Bockting (2003), Eyler and Wright (1997), and Willging, Salvador, and Kano (2006) discussed the avoidance of healthcare by transgender people due to fear of gender identity disclosure. However, another participant in this current study had a positive experience with campus health care. During a walk-in appointment at a campus health clinic, the doctor showed to reaction upon the revealing of his transgender identity and transsexual-related surgeries. The participant was pleased with the level of professionalism demonstrated by the health care facility.

This same participant discussed three campus programs from which he felt that transgender students were excluded. San Diego State University offers a Safe Zone program which “works to ensure a campus atmosphere that is supportive, informative and welcoming to all members of our campus community. This program provides an accepting and pro-active environment for LGBTQUIA (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, gender fluid identified, queer, questioning, intersex, ally) students, faculty, staff and administrators and their allies (Safe Zones, 2011). This participant stated that the brochure for this program exclusively referred to sexual orientation while gender identity was not mentioned in the brochure. The campus also hosts an event entitled, “the Big Gay BBQ” which does not include mention of transgender students. Finally, there exists an LGBT listserv for the campus, yet no transgender-related content is on the site. This finding is similar to current research that indicates that transgender students feel a lack of support in terms of campus programming (McKinney, 2005).

Another participant discussed the difficulties he had changing his name at his home campus of UCSD. The campus would not allow him to change his name on his

student identification card until he had legally changed his name. This same card contains his picture, therefore – as influenced by social norms of appearance – the “feminine” name and “masculine” picture might evoke curiosity and a need for him to out himself as trans. Having a male appearance with a feminine name often resulted in reactions from others. He could not buy food from certain people because he was not out to them, resulting in his need to either leave selected food before purchasing it or seeking out specific vendors from which to buy food. When attempting to change his name on campus, he was informed by the Registrar that even if the name change were successful, he would not be able to receive transcripts or financial aid because of the discrepancy. He would need to change his name numerous times on campus including financial aid, registration, identification cards, and payroll in order to have accurate paperwork. Beemyn (2005) and Sausa (2002) discussed the importance of a validated identity. They discussed the difficulties students have when attempting to change records and documents to reflect their gender identity. This can lead to a sense of disempowerment for the student as well as open the possibility for harassment, not to mention the time and energy it takes when trying to change one’s name in numerous places on campus. This particular student approached the administration about having a “preferred name” slot on official records which will ensure that the preferred name will appear on identification cards, records, and rosters. Similar to Beemyn’s (2005) assertion that many campuses do not have faculty or staff that are trained to support trans students, the administrators responding to this student did not seem responsive to adopting an information system that would support this feature.

*Campus Resources and Safe People on Campus*

One out of three participants indicated that his campus had a trans-focused organization on campus while two indicated they believed that there existed at least one trans-friendly organization on campus. All three participants mentioned a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender student organization or center on campus that they believed to be trans-friendly, while one participant also mentioned a queer-based social sorority and the campus women's center that were inclusive of transgender students. While one participant gave the example that his preferred pronoun was used by staff at the LGBT center, one participant stated that he did not attend any of the LGBT organization's activities on his campus due to scheduling conflicts. However, given Beemyn's (2003) assertion that many individuals, organizations, and colleges have symbolically included transgender individuals with gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals without proper education about or outreach to the trans community, one wonders whether these LGBT organizations/centers are truly inclusive.

Participants were also asked to indicate people on their campus that they could discuss their trans identities with. Despite the large size of each campus, one participant was able to identify only one person he could discuss his identity with – me. Another participant was open to discussing his identity with LGBT administrators on campus and staff members in the LGBT resource center. The third participant indicated several positive interactions with faculty members on campus as related to gender identity. Two participants indicated that their campus' counseling center had a specific therapist trained to work with transgender students. They felt comfortable speaking with these counselors and felt that their interactions had been helpful. This contradicts McKinney's (2005)

study of 75 students of which the majority felt that adequate counseling was not available on their campus. Also contradicted is Beemyn's (2005) assertion that many campuses do not have mental health professionals that are trained to address the needs of transgender students. Although positive counseling services were only mentioned by two participants, I would like to note that at least one therapist on each campus was identified to me by their respective counseling centers as having expertise in transgender issues. Therefore, one must wonder whether adequate outreach is being done by counseling centers about the training and experience counselors have with student populations.

### *Academic Success*

Participants in this study did not greatly discuss academic implications of being transgender. In fact, two participants stated that their academic experience was not affected by their gender identity or others' reactions to their transgender identity. This result was surprising given the abundance of literature (of the small amount of literature published) describes the possibilities of negative direct or indirect academic experiences. As stated in Chapter 1, few empirical studies report on the academic achievement of LGBT students. However, there are many studies which report that harassment negatively impacts student learning (Eisenberg, Neumark-Sztainer, & Perry, 2003; Juvonen, Nishina, & Graham, 2000). Add to this the studies that indicate that transgender students experience large amounts of harassment as demonstrated in research by Beemyn (2005), Lombardi et al. (2001), and Rankin and Beemyn (2005), one might expect that transgender students experience negative academic ramifications due to harassment. However, given the lack of negative experiences suffered by transgender students in this present study, perhaps the detachment from affected academic success

makes sense. If transgender students are typically harassed and harassment can lead to academic decline, then perhaps lack of harassment has cancelled the academic decline in this study.

A second possibility might be that participants are unclear on how their academics are affected by their trans identity. One participant stated that he was unaware whether the treatment of trans individuals on his campus has affected him academically, however he did say that his feelings about his own identity sometimes made him feel that he did not want to attend class. Dysphoric episodes about his body sometimes made him not want to get out of bed. At times when he was feeling badly about his body, he did not want to walk to class as he felt other students would stare at him. Again, given the previously mentioned research indicating the high levels of harassment and negative reactions towards trans students, the concerns addressed by this participant about receiving looks while walking to class can count as a form of harassment. Therefore, despite not being identified as a cause for academic decline, negative treatment of trans individuals has impacted this participant's academic success as he sometimes does not attend class.

#### Discussing LGBT

Two of the three participants discussed their discomfort with identifying as transgender to members of the lesbian, gay, and bisexual communities – despite the fact that LGBT persons are commonly grouped together. Most of the literature that exists about the transgender population places transgender in the same category as LGB people, an assumption that espouses that gender issues and sexual identity issues are related (Paxton et al., 2006; Beemyn, 2003). As demonstrated by this study, an assumption

cannot be made that transgender students have the same experiences as LGB students (Rankin & Beemyn, 2005; Beemyn, 2005). One participant in this current study stated that he is not open about his transgender identity within the LGB community and felt that the LGB population often discriminates against those that are transgender. Another participant stated that he felt that gay and lesbian people are relatively unaware of trans issues. These findings are consistent with Doan's (2007) assertion that gay, lesbian, and bisexual people and spaces are not always accepting of transgender people. Why then, do we include transgender people in the same categorization as gay, lesbian, and bisexual? Despite this, participants seemed to concede to the greater importance of including transgender in a category with lesbian, gay, and bisexual people in order to belong to some sort of population. According to one participant, "until there is some movement, it makes sense to keep the queers together" (Interview A1, p. 42).

### Exploring Change

#### *Possibility to Change*

Participants were optimistic about the possibility that society will become more inclusive of the transgender population. All participants stated that they felt that one method of inclusion that might become widely adopted involves the use of inclusive language. Participants believed that people might use language that is reflective of the existence of more than two genders. Participants were, however, skeptical about the ease with which someone can change ingrained language.

In addition to implementing the use of gender-neutral language, one participant also suggested the importance of correctly using the terms *sex* and *gender*, terms which are often currently used interchangeably despite differing definitions. He also

emphasized the importance of recognizing that not every person would like to be termed or labeled the same way. He advocated for asking a person how they would like to be referred to. What is their preferred name? What, if any, is their preferred pronoun? Referring back to Oboler's (1995, as cited in Ladson-Billings & Donner, 2005) deconstruction of Gilman's (2000) play *Spinning into Butter*, labels and categories can be important. The student character in that play argues that one must be able to "name oneself" as that individual sees fit. Beemyn (2005) and Sausa (2002) assert that a lack of ability to self-identify can invalidate a student's identity. When discussing this idea to ask people how they would like to be identified, this same participant recognized that there needs to be patience within the transgender community towards those that are not transgender and trying to learn. Transgender people may become frustrated if asked questions about identity if they feel that they clearly pass as a specific gender. A person might be agitated at having to explain which pronoun to use and perhaps it should be "obvious."

This latest idea brings up two very interesting points. One, that transgender people must be patient when serving as educators, therefore not all of the responsibility is on the part of the non-transgender community. Second, and more challenging, is the idea that perhaps using only gender neutral pronouns is not a viable action towards inclusion. While a significant part of this inquiry has focused on the possibility and importance of using gender-neutral pronouns so as not to exclude transgender people, this last participant suggests that some trans people *prefer* to be called by specific pronouns. Two years ago I attended a conference focused on the transgender population. As I sat in the audience of the keynote speech, I was struck by the use of gendered pronouns by the

speaker. As he called on members of the audience, he would often refer to them as “sir” or “ma’am.” I then realized that the audience members seemed to enjoy the use of these titles. Some members of the audience preferred to be referred to as the gender of which they *appeared*. People often take pride in how they look, therefore if a biological female was successful in passing as male (or vice versa), they enjoyed the recognition of their male appearance. One participant in the current study mentioned (with a smile on his face) a day when he was called ‘sir’ in a grocery store checkout line. As a result, he thought, “I must look good today.”

### *Campus Change*

When participants discussed changes they hoped will occur on college campuses, one participant suggested that there does not exist one set of needs that transgender students have, therefore there is not one list of changes that should be made. He believes that the opportunity to attend college can be an issue of class, therefore necessitating different assistances. Trans students attending a community college might have different needs than a trans student attending a private college. Tuition costs can be different, backgrounds of students can be different, ages of students might be different -- needs might be different.

### *Educator*

As a person that does not identify as transgender, I was constantly aware of the lens through which I viewed this topic. Rather than assume I knew what was important to teach others about the trans community, I asked participants to share what *they* believed was the most important information to teach others. One participant responded by asking, “where do you start in a community that doesn’t want to be visible?”

(Interview B2, 2011, p. 9). Some transgender people do not want to teach others about trans issues as others might then assume that the teacher is trans. Taking pride to be stealth and appear as a specific gender, one might not want to be associated with the transgender community. Others may be eager to teach possible allies about the community. As with the use of gendered or non-gendered pronouns, there does not seem to exist an easy answer about the role an educator should play.

As discussed by Paxton et al. (2006) and the second participant in this study, it is important to teach others that not all transgender people should be grouped as the same. We should not assume only one overall community exists. Not all transgender people desire the same level of transition (if any) and not all identify with gender equally. Literature – and this participant – emphasizes the importance of allowing trans people to constantly change definitions and words and be allowed to evolve.

The third participant believed that an appropriate starting point to teaching others about this population includes understanding that varying gender identities are part of the natural world. Reflecting on Burdge's (2007) assertion that there should not exist a gender binary and that it is, in fact, socially constructed, he believes that people should challenge the binary that exists. He stated, "you go to the zoo, and you marvel at all the different kinds of animals. You go to the botanical garden, you marvel at all the different kinds of plants. You go to a rose garden. Does anybody stand there and say, 'Why can't they all be red and big and beautiful?' No. There's big ones and little ones and medium-size ones and two-tones and all different colors. The objective is to cultivate a unique rose" (Interview A2, 2010, p. 3). So why, he asks, is that different for us?

However, adding to the growing complexity related to learning about transgender issues, after eloquently discussing the deconstruction of the gender binary, this participant also stated that he did not necessarily believe that non-transgender people need to understand the transgender population. Instead of focusing on learning specifics about the trans population – or any population – he believes that people should instead focus on not restricting the rights of any people. When speaking of other populations, this participant stated that he would not pretend to know the needs of all cultures, therefore he cannot expect others to know the needs of trans people. Difficulties exist when trying to learn about other cultures and populations, never mind the challenges involved in trying to learn about *all* populations. We should therefore focus on not excluding anyone rather than try to include everyone.

Perhaps one of the most significant demonstrations about being an educator was this participant's balance between being teaching others and maintaining his own needs. He recounted a story about a confrontation with a protestor many years before. While attending an LGBT event in Denver, he walked past a protestor who engaged him: I was across the street from the main event, and I was walking through the grassy area of the Capitol itself. And somebody stopped me with some little booklet, little religious tract. And when people did that, and still when they do that, I stop and take it sometimes. I took it and I sort of looked through it, and I just felt the need to engage this person. It was Pride, and I was like, "Who the hell do you think you are? This is our day." And so I just started challenging him, and I had been through some courses through the Metropolitan Community Church called, I think they called them "Biblical Self-Defense." So I had learned which statements in the Bible were the most commonly

used against us, and how to combat that, how to challenge from a way that was not just like, "Well, you don't know me." It was sort of like, "Well, but do you know what context that was in? Do you know the Greek terms for the English words that they're using?" Things like that...so that I could engage with them on a more intellectual basis. And I hadn't really tried it out, but I had been given the tools, the weapons really. I mean, they called it "Biblical Self-Defense." It was all framed in militaristic terms. And so this guy, he just started in on me, and he threw one at me, and I threw one back at him. He threw one at me, and I threw one at him. And at the end of this, for a lack of better words, discussion, it wasn't even a debate, it was like an assault back and forth. I said something, he mentioned something about his sister being a lesbian, how he's praying for her soul. And I just nailed him. I just started, I don't even know what I said, but I was just nailing him back. I was just saying the most hurtful things to him about his treatment of his sister and how un-Christian it was, how he should be ashamed of himself. And you're supposed to love the sinner. And I was using his own language to just knock him down. And he stopped, and he just looked at me, and I don't think he cried, but I could see his whole tone changed, and he was defeated. I defeated him. And I felt so good. I was so proud of myself for doing that, because at this point I was 30 years old or 31, and I had spent all those years having people defeat me and tear me down in the name of religion, and so I just felt like I had just set my flag down. I walked away. And within minutes - I mean, it was not even minutes, it was moments - I felt very, very bad. I just felt bad. I felt like I had just done a very terrible thing. I had just done to somebody what people had been doing to me for years. Strangers. My own grandmother was very religious, very Catholic, and she tried to destroy me. It was like I had just done to him what had been done to me.

I went back; he was still there. I went back and I apologized. There was something that happened in him at that moment, because then he saw me as a person, a person who had empathy, and a person who had integrity. I had come back, I had admitted that what I had done - not who I was, but what I had done - was harmful, and that I was apologetic for it. I was never apologetic for who I was, but I was apologizing for what I had done. How I had made him feel. And I think we just had a moment of gratitude, and then we went our own separate ways. But in that moment I decided that's it, I'm done. I'm done tearing people down, I'm done demonizing people, I'm done arguing, I'm done proving. I'm done. I'm done with that kind of thing. In that moment, I decided now my interest is in understanding. What happened to that guy? Why was he like that? What motivated him to go against his own sister? So I had to figure out a different way (Interview A2, 2011, pp. 30-31).

Rather than describe what this participant felt *should be taught*, he instead described how one *should teach*. He now chooses to serve as a mentor and discuss his own experiences rather than tearing down the experiences of others. He also discussed his ability to balance his personal needs and the needs of those who might benefit from some enlightenment. While he does educate others about trans needs and continues to try to advocate for the community, he does so in a way that limits his personal investment. After serving as an active radical for many years and realizing that he continued to see contempt and disgust in the eyes of others, he decided to balance living within the world he is in rather than always trying to change it.

## Interpreting Paradigms and Theoretical Frameworks

### *Critical Theory, Feminist Theory, Critical Race Theory, Critical Transgender Theory*

Data gathered from participants clearly connect to the theoretical frameworks grounding this study. *Critical theory* asserts that people are socialized into power relationships that instill dominance and subordination into society (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Kincheloe and McLaren (2005) assert that knowledge or fact is often created in relation to power. Societal hierarchy was created for the benefit of some and the detriment of others with the hierarchy then determining social treatment of groups. Given this social hierarchy, critical theory encourages the questioning of knowledge, the way we gain knowledge, and what is reality versus subjectivity (Guba, 1990). Knowledge is therefore ever-evolving, morphing, and shedding light on what is considered to be truth (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005). Critical theory greatly drove this study as society and current “knowledge” about the transgender community not only oppresses this population, but often ignores trans people as the dominant population in not transgender.

The connection between critical theory and the transgender topic was inadvertently discussed by one of the participants in this study. When discussing his opinion on how society views the transgender population, this participant mentioned the need to question why many people only believe in the existence of two genders. This participant felt that people are often afraid and intimidated to question this information as this can lead to the questioning of other knowledge that has been taught. Changes in beliefs, paradigms, and understanding can, as stated by this participant, lead one to wonder, “what else have I been taught that may not be true?” Not until we engage in

exploring critical theory do we realize that we have the ability to question the gender binary and the establishment of only male and female genders.

Critical theory emphasizes the socialization of people into dominant and subordinate groups (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). *Critical feminist theory* analyzes gender relations: how we think about or do not think about gender relations including male domination (Flax, 1987). Those who practice critical feminism reevaluate existing gender dynamics by “deconstructing notions of reason, knowledge, or the self and to reveal the effects of the gender arrangements that lay beneath their ‘neutral’ and universalizing facades” (Flax, 1987, p. 626). Critical theory’s assertion that people are socialized into dominant and subordinate groups combined with critical feminist theory’s belief that men have been established as being dominant to women directly relate to the creation and dissection of the gender binary. The gender binary allows for a dominant and subordinate group which critical feminists would argue places men in the dominant role. Using the principles of critical theory and critical feminist theory, while questioning the existence of this binary we have no choice but to realize that transgender individuals do not fit into this binary. Furthermore, if there are power differentials within the binary between men and women, the lack of room for trans within this binary demonstrates an obvious substantial placement of trans as a lesser category – one that has no existence in the binary that has been passed down as truth. This researcher has chosen to call this assertion *critical transgender theory* (see figure 5.1).

Similarly, we can also use critical theory and critical feminist theory to deconstruct the social construction of gender, thereby adding to the evolving critical transgender theory. As stated by Kane (2001), society often assumes that women (and

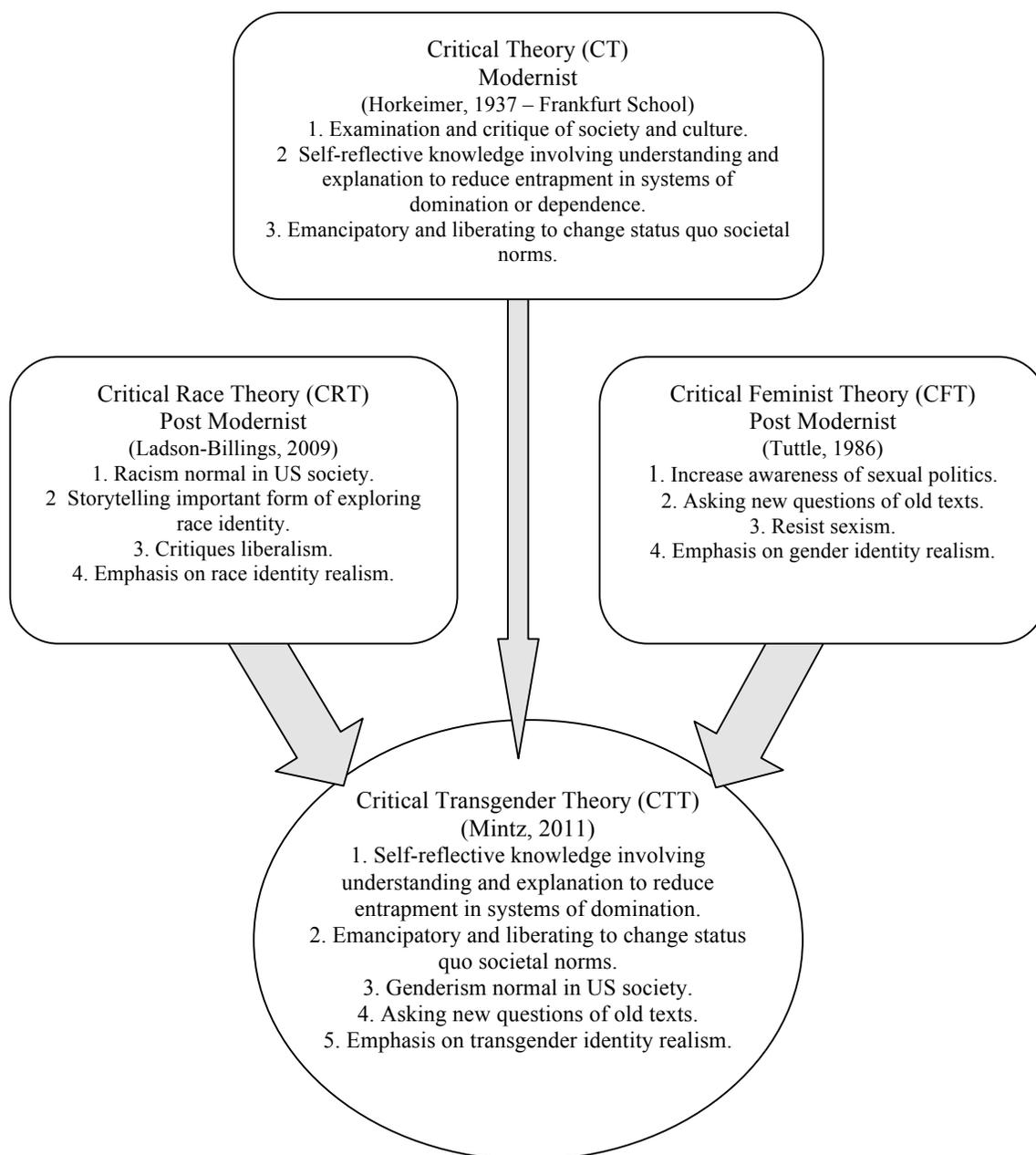


Figure 5.1. *Critical Transgender Theory*

only women) should possess feminine characteristics while men (and only men) should possess masculine characteristics. Rather than simply categorizing traits into boxes and assimilating them into a package that coincides with sex, should we not ask ourselves why we believe in masculine and feminine? By questioning masculine and feminine, we can then question why traits are classified as masculine and feminine and why it is taboo to cross gendered lines.

Critical transgender theory can therefore be utilized to examine the gender binary and ‘gendered’ characteristics. Additionally, critical transgender theory can be used to discuss other related results of this study. While limited information about this community exists (as compared to other research topics), “knowledge” is beginning to be created about the transgender population. By using critical theory and critical transgender theory, we can deconstruct and possibly question this knowledge. One participant in this study discussed the fallacy that all transgender people wish to physically transition to the opposite gender. Again, for the purposes of this study, *transition* means to alter one’s body to resemble or display characteristics of the assigned sex associated with the felt gender identity including taking hormones and having reassignment surgeries. Non-transgender people often assume, according to this participant, that all people that identify as transgender will transition. However, critical transgender theory allows one to question this “knowledge” and question why this assumption exists when clearly not all trans individuals physically transition. *Critical race theory* asserts that race and ethnicity are often forced into totalized categories with little variation (Ladson-Bills & Donner, 2005). It would seem that an all-encompassing category of transgender is being created. Critical transgender theory allows for variation

within the transgender population, variation that combats assumptions and stereotypes. Critical race theory also calls for cross-racial coalitions in order to stimulate changes in categorization (Bishop, 1998; Smith, 2005). By connecting subsets of the transgender population, hierarchies and power relations could be diminished; subsets that are currently, according to one participant, also divided by those who have had surgeries to physically transition and those who have not physically transitioned. There might exist a class division between these groups as physical changes are not financially viable for all people. Therefore, it is assumed that those that have transitioned are from a higher economic class than those who have not. Numerous assumptions (which might appear as knowledge) are rapidly being created, assumptions which will snowball into stereotypes if not deconstructed.

Feminist theory and critical transgender theory can also further question why trans individuals are subject to discrimination and exclusion (Lee, 2000; Hill & Willoughby, 2005; Bettcher, 2007; Burgess, 1999; Rotheram-Borus et al., 1991) and why parents often have negative reactions to their transgender children (Teague, 1992; Pilkington & D'Augelli, 1995; and Grossman et al., 2005). Participants in this study, as well as other researchers (Zubernis & Snyder, 2007; Health Outreach and Advocacy Program, 2007; Feldman & Bockting, 2003; Sausa, 2002; and Grossman & D'Augelli, 2007) discuss the effects of such treatment such as an increase in high-risk behaviors and suicidal ideation. One participant in this study stated that he often felt like a “freak” and attempted suicide because of the lack of acceptance of his gender identity. Critical transgender theory questions why transgender individuals are even considered to be “other.” Critical theory suggests that the isolation of transgender people establishes a

social hierarchy as non-transgender people can be considered to be superior to transgender people. Critical transgender theory encourages us to ask why. Perhaps one reason is the classification of Gender Identity Disorder in the American Psychiatric Association's (1994) *Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. Critical transgender theory questions this classification.

One of the foundational principles of the transgender identity is that one should be free to label their own gender identity as they please. In contrast to the gender binary, a transgender person should be able to self-identify; a self-identification that may involve identifying with one gender, both genders, no gender, a gender category, or no category at all. Society should not continue to dictate categorization as the existence of the gender binary results in oppression. Critical transgender theory encourages us to explore the purpose and rationale behind this categorization. In order to eliminate further oppression, society must not mandate, stereotype, or encourage further labeling. For example, this paper could easily categorize authors and transgender individuals by using male and female pronouns. However, as this researcher has not inquired as to the gender identity of each author, "they," "their," and "them" are utilized to avoid gender stereotypes based on names. Ignoring the general rule of required specificity is one way in which this author can avoid gender assumptions and oppression. Even making this small change involves the utilization of critical theory and critical transgender theory. According to the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (2001), when discussing *Guidelines to Reduce Bias in Language*, "APA is committed both to science and to the fair treatment of individuals and groups, and this policy requires authors of APA publications to avoid perpetuating demeaning attitudes and biased assumptions about

people in their writing” (p. 61). Additionally, “precision is a necessity in scientific writing; when you refer to a person or persons, choose words that are accurate, clear, and free from bias” (p. 62). However, one page later, the manual then states, “*gender* is cultural and is the term to use when referring to men and women as social groups...*gender* helps keep meaning unambiguous” (p. 63). Critical transgender theory allows us to question these “guidelines” and inquire as to why we consider this manual to be fact. Many significant published and unpublished documents are written with the guidelines written by the APA. Yet, this manual upholds the gender binary as it specifically defines gender as relating to men and women. Under the heading *Gender*, is the statement, “sexist bias can occur when pronouns are used carelessly...Be clear about whether you mean one sex or both sexes” (p. 66). Again, the APA designates only two sexes (genders). In addition, the manual speaks of *sex* under the heading *Gender* when, as described throughout this manuscript, sex and gender are very different.

Thus, critical transgender theory encourages the questioning of these guidelines and why we consider this information to be fact. Furthermore, we are allowed to question the validity of the assertions in the manual. Interestingly, under the heading *Racial and Ethnic Identity*, the manual describes the ever-changing preferences for terminology related to racial and ethnic groups. Authors of this manual state that over time, terminology can become dated and negative. Therefore, according to the manual, authors are reminded to ask participants about “preferred designations” (p. 68). Why then are we given different guidelines for writing about gender and gender identity when the concepts are clearly related?

Deconstruction of the reasons behind the subordinate status and treatment of transgender people might eventually lead to a lessening or elimination of poor treatment. This will perhaps encourage a higher level of comfort during disclosure of the trans identity to others – disclosure which is, as shown in this study, often difficult to do. Evans and Herriott (2004), Burdge (2007), and Agans (2007) found that more exposure to LGBT students increased awareness of oppression and decreased oppressive action towards this population. Perhaps this exposure served as a catalyst for unintentionally engaging in critical theory and deconstructing why differing treatment of LGBT people exist. With this reasoning, one might assume that exposure to transgender people and issues will similarly increase awareness and decrease oppression of the trans population.

### *Belonging*

Critical theory, feminist theory, critical race theory, and critical transgender theory greatly relate to a transgender student's ability to feel they belong on campus. As described in Chapter 2, Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman (1995) identified four factors that impact a person's ability to transition to a new environment: situation, self, support, and strategies. *Situation* refers to the general nature of the transition, including whether the event is positive or negative, permanent or temporary, sources of stress, and how an individual's perception of the transition affects behavior. *Self* refers to characteristics of the individual including demographic and psychological resources. *Support* refers to social support, including family, friends, and intimate relationships. Finally, *strategies* refer to a person's coping responses to the transition. As demonstrated in this paper, transgender students are generally considered to be "other" by society and the self, therefore garnering a sense of belonging is more difficult when arriving to college.

However, if the placement as other is deconstructed through critical theory, the transition to and existence on a college campus will not be as difficult. The *situation* can be positive and less of a source of stress. The resources of the transgender student will either be greater or less necessary, therefore increasing the sense of *self*. Student will be better *supported* by others and have an increased ability to utilize successful *strategies* of transition.

### Critical Leadership and Moving Forward

Critical leadership involves the action-oriented aspect of critical theory (Santamaría & Santamaría, 2011; Singleton & Linton, 2006). Educational leaders must strive to meet the needs of all students in order to retain a healthy student body. Effective educational leaders honor their constituencies when they are able to assume race and gendered lenses that may not be their own in order to meet the needs of their educational communities and contexts. Research findings indicate they can, when educational leaders deliberately choose to. Critical leadership provides opportunity for alternative and constructive ways of thinking in order to better serve our students as demonstrated by Capper (1993), hooks (1990), Scheurich and Skrla (2003), Terrell and Lindsay (2009), and Van Nostrand (1993). Santamaría & Santamaría (2011) found critical leaders to be non-traditional in their worldview and experience, who take critical and unique approaches to educating others. These individuals serve as leaders who question knowledge and invoke the kinds of change indicated as being necessary in this current study. Despite the presence of transgender students on campus, most colleges and universities do not strive to include these students (Beemyn, 2005; Beemyn & Curtis et al., 2005; Lovaas et al., 2002; McKinney, 2005; Sausa, 2002). Perhaps the population is

considered to be “too small” to be significant. The American Disabilities Act (1990) requires accommodations for students with disabilities. Small numbers of students on campus are bound to a wheelchair, yet we make accommodations for these students to enter buildings and classrooms. Determining whether to provide services to students based on population size on campus is not a valid excuse.

College campuses can remedy the exclusion of transgender students and create more inclusive campuses. This inclusion can then increase self-esteem, acceptance, and the empowerment of transgender students (Zubernis & Snyder, 2007). Often the first step to applying to college involves filling out forms. Forms are also used during healthcare intake, residence hall applications, financial aid applications, gym memberships, etc. Eliminating the male/female checkboxes can not only allow a student to properly indicate their gender identity, but can allow the campus to better meet the needs of that particular student (Beemyn, 2005). Allowing a student to write in their own gender identity does not force a student to choose between genders they may or may not identify with. Furthermore, if a student is able to indicate they are transgender, the campus may be able to anticipate the needs of that student and provide better support. By not only allowing this change to occur, but creating one process by which transgender student can change all or the majority of gender indications attached to student records, a commitment to this population is demonstrated (Beemyn, 2005; Beemyn, Domingue, Pettitt, & Smith, 2005).

Health care and faculty/staff support can also improve for transgender students. Regardless of the method, faculty and staff must first be encouraged to examine and identify their own beliefs and assumptions about the transgender community. They must

understand their comfort (or lack thereof) with these students. Only then can the process of accepting and appreciating transgender students move forward (Lovaas, 2002). The discriminatory practices of the health care providers – both mental and physical health – can have detrimental effects on transgender students (Beemyn, 2005; McKinney, 2005). Campuses such as the University of California system are moving towards including hormones and gender reassignment surgery in their insurance plans for faculty, staff, and students. By training healthcare providers on the healthcare needs of transgender students, these students will not be forced to pursue more expensive options off campus. Providing training and encouraging faculty and staff to become more knowledgeable about transgender issues on campus will also increase the available support to students (Beemyn, 2005, Sausa, 2002). Perhaps creating a way for faculty and staff members to identify as a source of transgender support will allow students to know to whom they can turn to or gain support from on campus. They will also feel more accepted on their campus. Most importantly, ask transgender students what their needs are on campus and how the campus can improve (Beemyn & Domingue et al, 2005).

Some campuses have also created gender-neutral housing options. These options allow for students to live either alone or with roommates regardless of their gender identity (Beemyn, 2005). This option does not force a student to choose a gender, live in an area for a gender with which they do not identify, or force nontransgender students to live with people who identify with a gender they are not comfortable living with. For example, Wesleyan University, Sarah Lawrence College, and San Diego State University all offer gender-neutral or all-gender housing options (Beemyn, 2005; San Diego State University, 2009). San Diego State University (SDSU) “responds to student needs and

works to develop a nurturing community atmosphere that values diversity, social justice and promotes the dignity of all people...In meeting the needs of students [SDSU housing and residential education] consistently recognizes and respects the gender identity that the student has identified. Recognizing that students are not all alike and have different needs and desires, [SDSU housing and residential education] will address these concerns on a case-by-case basis” (San Diego State University, 2009). SDSU has therefore committed to not only accommodate transgender students, but appreciates and values the needs of trans students. Simply identifying staff members that are comfortable with and/or have received training about transgender issues, and then making the contact information for these supportive staff available can demonstrate appreciation and recognition of trans students (Beemyn & Domingue et al., 2005).

Similarly, campuses have created gender-neutral bathrooms. These bathrooms allow a person to use that facility regardless of which gender they identify with. This eliminates the discomfort felt by transgender students when they are either forced to use a bathroom for the gender of which they do not identify, or the discrimination and harassment they might face when using a restroom that other students do not believe that student should be using (Beemyn, 2005). The University of Chicago, San Diego State University, Beloit College, New York University, and Ohio University are among the campuses that have created gender-neutral restrooms. Creating a gender-neutral bathroom often involves the simple changes of changing door signs and installing locks on single-stall facilities. Promotion of these restrooms on campus maps and in course catalogs demonstrates the university’s commitment to supporting the transgender community (Beemyn, 2005; Beemyn & Domingue et al., 2005).

Campuses can also include gender identity and gender expression in their non-discrimination policies (Beemyn, 2005; Sausa, 2002). Without such policies, transgender students often have no formal course of action when subjected to discrimination or harassment (Beemyn, 2002). By including gender identity and expression, transgender students will feel more protected and supported by their campuses (Sausa, 2002).

One of the foundational principles of the transgender identity is that one should be free to label their own gender identity and express that identity as they please. Campuses should not mandate or encourage further labeling. Results of this study indicate that there does not exist one correct answer as to how to refer to trans students, nor should assumptions be made about students. One participant in this study emphasized the importance of recognizing that not every person would like to be labeled the same way. He advocated for asking a person how they would like to be referred to and what their preferred pronoun is. The student is therefore empowered to self-identify and validate their own identity.

#### Limitations and Future Considerations

While this study proved successful in allowing access to the stories of three transgender college students, limitations of the study exist as well. Perhaps what can be viewed as the greatest limitation of this study is the small sample size and the participation of only one student from each of three campuses. However, as proposed at the start of this study, I maintain the belief that information gleaned from even one person can and has informed others about the topic of transgender inclusion and exclusion on college campuses. The individual story can create a call for action and empower educators to learn from the experiences detailed in this research. With that said, a larger

sample size might allow for greater generalization and a more specific sense of what is “working” or “not working” on campus.

Another limitation of this study, as detailed by Eng (2006), is the possibility that participants were not accurately remembering the details of the stories they told or were purposely not telling the truth about the experience. If participants lied, embellished, created stories, or were following an agenda unknown to this researcher, the accuracy of the data could be questionable. Similarly, this researcher could have focused on or omitted information that was discovered depending on agenda or interpretation of the data (Denzin, 1997; Eng, 2006; Grbich, 2007; Savin-Baden & Van Niekerk, 2007).

A final limitation of this study, although the research was adapted to compensate for this limitation, was the omission of proposed journal entries by the participants. Each participant was provided a journal and three journal topics about which they were asked to write about. Participants were asked to write about one topic per week for three weeks. However, at the conclusion of the study, only one of the three participants submitted a completed journal. Motivation for not submitting a journal is not known (whether participants did not want to complete the journal or whether the participant decided that he did not want the journal to be reviewed), however the lack of this additional data eliminated the ability to triangulate the data.

Given the absence of journal analysis, future exploration should consider utilizing the journal concept in future research. Explanation can be sought from current participants as to why they did not wish to submit the journals. Again, journals were provided to each participant or, if preferred, they could submit the journals electronically to the researcher. When introduced to the journals, all participants seemed willing to

complete the assignment. However, two of three participants did not submit their journals. I do believe that journaling can provide additional information as some may experience more comfort when responding to questions/topics in a written versus verbal format. If willing, current participants can be asked why they did not submit journals (i.e. did not wish to complete them, did not want to share personal information that had been written, etc.) so as to ensure a higher return rate.

Future research may also be driven by findings from this current study. Much of the current literature about the transgender population focuses on the discrimination and negativity that transgender people face. While this is certainly true, additional subject matters emerged in the data. For example, participants in this study discussed their ability to relate to both the male and female environments after transitioning from female to male. Additionally, participants discussed various ways of educating others (including critical leadership) that can be explored as related to transgender and/or many other topics. Although not the specific topics of this study, these topics emerged and were discussed. More information can be gathered if these topics were the focus of additional studies. Although important, the majority of current literature discusses negative aspects of being transgender. Participants in this study demonstrated positive facets of the population that are not discussed in the research.

### Conclusion

By focusing on three participants, in depth analysis of three members of the transgender college student population was completed. The dearth of literature that exists about the transgender population greatly focuses on discrimination, harassment, high-risk behaviors, and suicidal ideation. While included in the context of this study, these

subjects were not the focus. Although guided by specific research questions, by analyzing the emergent data that was naturally drawn out during conversation, a window to the experiences and perceptions of the transgender population was opened. Results of this study indicate how participants felt included or excluded on their college campus. In addition, participants permitted the reader to understand their processes of discovering and realizing their trans identity. In addition, participants shared their own feelings about being transgender, their thoughts on educating others, and suggestions on making campuses more inclusive.

Through the use of narrative analysis and thematic coding of interview and document analysis results, combined with exploring the foundational principles of critical theory, critical race theory, and feminist theory, critical transgender theory was created. Critical transgender theory encourages us to question our beliefs and knowledge about the transgender population, the gender binary, and stereotypes within the trans population. Given the importance of allowing language and identity to constantly evolve, the uses of critical transgender theory have not yet been exhausted. Similar to the core understanding that knowledge continues to change, so to can the evolution of critical transgender theory.

Finally, and most importantly, three inspiring individuals shared their histories, hopes, and fears as related to their transgender identities. While much can be said about the information that we garnered about these participants and the trans population, their willingness to share their own stories, in their own words, have allowed the reader a glimpse into the power of one person's story and the importance of learning from others. Not only did they share personal information, but they demonstrated through their story-

telling methods by which we can further our own learning, teach others, and demonstrate critical leadership. They provided not only their accounts of life as a transgender person, but lessons of leadership and methods by which we can lessen oppression.

## APPENDIX A

### CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

#### Invitation to Participate

Lee Mintz, an administrator at San Diego State University and a graduate student researcher in the University of California, San Diego and California State University, San Marcos Joint Doctoral Program in Education Leadership is conducting a study on transgender college students. You are invited to participate in this study because you have self-identified to me as someone that identifies as transgender.

#### Purpose

This study has two objectives:

1. To better understand how transgender students feel about the level of acceptance of their transgender identity by people on this campus.
2. To better understand how transgender students feel about the language that is used on this campus as it relates to the transgender student population.

#### Description of Procedures

You will be participating in a conversational style interview will take approximately 1 hour, and with your permission, will be audio taped.

You will be asked to write in a journal (provided for you) about three assigned topics.

One topic will be assigned each week for three weeks. You will have the entire week to write about a particular topic.

You will be asked to review campus documents.

#### Risks and Inconveniences

There are minimal risks attached to this study. However, the following potential risks may produce a physical or psychological response from you:

- You will be asked to self-disclose social identities and to answer some sensitive or personal questions. If you are uncomfortable answering any of the questions or do not wish to complete the interview, please just let me know.
- The recording of interviews and submission of journals may cause concerns about confidentiality.
- In disclosing personal information, you may worry about being identified in the study.
- Possible utilization of a professional transcription service may cause concern for confidentiality.

#### Safeguards, Confidentiality, and Voluntary Nature

The following safeguards address the above-mentioned risks and inconveniences:

- Interview responses will not be linked to your name or address, and there will be no follow-up sessions.
- Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may stop at any time.

- The name and contact information for a professional counselor located on your campus will be provided to you. This person has agreed to meet with participants should this study evoke any feelings, thoughts, or psychological needs. This person is familiar with the needs of and has experience working with transgender college students.
- The professional transcription service (if used) will not receive your name, address, or any other form of identification.
- All research materials will be coded so as not to include your name or identifying information. All materials will be kept in a safe, locked environment to ensure your privacy.

### Incentives

For participating in this study, you will receive a \$20 gift card.

### Questions

If you have any questions about this study I will be happy to answer them now. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the researcher, Lee Mintz, Interim Assistant Director, Center for Student Rights and Responsibilities, (619) 594-5896 (direct line), [lmintz@mail.sdsu.edu](mailto:lmintz@mail.sdsu.edu) or the researcher's advisor, Dr. Lorri Santamaria at (760) 750-8520.

- I agree to submit three journal entries  
 I agree to be audio recorded

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher's Signature

## APPENDIX B

### Interview/Demographic Questions

#### *Demographic Questions:*

What is your gender identity?

What is your age?

How many years have you attended SDSU?

#### *Interview Questions:*

When did you first realize that you were transgender?

Can you explain your gender identity to me?

Are you open about your transgender identity? To whom? Family? Friends? Employer?

What about these people/these environments makes you comfortable disclosing your transgender identity?

What about these people/these environments that makes you uncomfortable disclosing your transgender identity?

How do you feel society as a whole views your gender identity?

How do you feel (campus) views your gender identity?

How do you feel about your transgender identity?

When did you first learn the term “transgender?” Did you ever feel that you were “just different?”

What is your first memory of “not acting” or feeling like your biological sex?

Do you feel that this campus is inclusive of transgender people? Why or why not?

Have you been treated differently on campus because you are transgender or perceived to be transgender by others? How? How did this make you feel?

Are there any groups or organizations on campus that are transgender focused?

Are there any groups or organizations on campus that are transgender friendly?

Are you a part of any of these groups?

Are there people on campus that you feel you can discuss your transgender identity with?

What positions do they hold?

Have you attended any LGBT events? Do you feel that the T is included or excluded in that group?

What bathroom do you choose to use on campus? Have you had a negative experience in a campus bathroom because you are or were perceived to be transgender?

Do you feel comfortable specifying a different name to people on campus? Who?

Language can be very powerful in terms of how it makes us feel. How do you feel about the language that is used on this campus in terms of its inclusion of transgender students?

How often do you recognize, on this campus, written language that is exclusive of transgender students? Forms, websites, mission statements, etc.

Can you tell me about an example of this exclusive written language?

How often do you recognize spoken exclusive language?

Can you tell me about an example of this exclusive verbal language?

Do you feel that this exclusion is done intentionally? Why or why not?

Have you ever felt that your gender was excluded in a statement or purposely stated as being different from what you prefer? Can you explain? Did you say something to correct that person?

When you hear or read language that excludes transgender people, how does it make you feel?

Does intentionality make a difference on the impact it has on you? In other words, does it feel differently to you when someone purposely excludes transgender people versus unintentionally excludes you?

Do you feel that it is possible for a person to change their own language to be more inclusive of transgender people? What are some ways they can do this?

Do you feel that language will become more inclusive of transgender people? Why? How does that make you feel?

Do you feel that the treatment of transgender individuals on this campus has affected your academic success? Why or why not?

## APPENDIX C

### Journal Topics

Week 1: Please pay particular attention during your classes this week as related to transgender students. Do you feel that the transgender identity was included or excluded in the classroom? How?

Week 2: Please pay particular attention this week to any interactions that you have with other students or administrators. Do you feel that the transgender identity was included or excluded in any interactions? How?

Week 3: Please free-write about what it feels like to be transgender on your campus.

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