

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

“Sometimes They Call Me Sir”:

The Lived Experiences of Gender Transgressive Lesbians

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By

Julia Lynch Davison

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The thesis of Julia Lynch Davison is approved:

Karen Morgaine, Ph.D.

Date

Amy Denissen, Ph.D.

Date

David Boyns, Ph.D., Chair

Date

California State University, Northridge

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to all of the gender outlaws out there in the world (especially to the participants of this study) who express themselves so bravely in their everyday lives.

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ABSTRACT

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The Lived Experiences of Gender Transgressive Lesbians

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Julia Lynch Davison

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Previous studies find that gender transgressive and butch lesbian presentations are often met with hostility and violence due to homophobia and genderphobia within society. This study explores the lived experiences of gender transgressive and butch lesbian gender identities through in depth interviews with 10 participants regarding their experiences with their gender identity and gender presentation. The research questions explore personal experiences, with sexual and gender normative expectations within work, family, personal relationships, the dominant gender normative society and also the LGBTQQI (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning, Intersex) community. This study seeks to understand how life is experienced through the participant’s own standpoint, asking what is life like for a gender transgressive or butch lesbian? The in-depth interviews produced a group of significant statements, from which 22 themes emerged. These themes are presented underneath the 4 main categories of identity, experiences, community, and genderphobia/homophobia. Each theme presents the experiences gender transgressive lesbians have within the social world pertaining to their gender presentations. It is expected that this study will contribute to the existing literature on gender transgressive and butch lesbian identity in that the interviews will

provide insight into the daily-lived struggle with discrimination in many areas of their lives such as work, relationships, and community (within and outside of the LGBTQQI community).

In conclusion, I argue that the data presented in this study describes the ways in which gender transgressive lesbians pose different threats to the dominant gender system than queer or lesbian femmes, gender-blending lesbians, and some (excluding genderqueer) transgender individuals. Specifically, gender transgressive lesbians threaten the gender binary by identifying as women who have a masculine presentation, thereby undermining the “sameness” taboo at the core of the gender binary. In these ways, gender transgressive lesbians are a greater threat to the dominant gender system. It is my hope that the results of this study will also provide insight into how gender transgressive lesbians resist gender oppression through their gender identities and gendered presentations.

MY QUEER FEMME EXPERIENCE: THE RESEARCHER'S AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL ACCOUNT

I would like to start this project off with an autobiographical account of my experience with the topic of my study. Since this is a phenomenological study, I will do my best to bracket my own experiences with this phenomenon in order to ensure that I transcend my own experiences, so that the respondent's experiences are at the forefront of this study. The following account of my journey regarding this thesis topic is for the purpose of bracketing and disclosure purposes.

I identify as a Queer Femme Latina, and I have a butch identified lesbian spouse. Throughout my life with my spouse, I experience discrimination in various ways in different areas of society. I notice that when I walk outside into the world on my own, the world treats me much differently than when I walk with my spouse in the world. Much of the time we are greeted with curious stares, strange questions, confusion, and harmful actions by the people we encounter. In my experience, individuals in LGBTQQI relationships encounter a discrimination that most heterosexual couples never experience. I am aware of this difference because previously, I was married to a man in a heterosexual relationship. In my previous relationship, we were celebrated by society in many ways, through representations in the media, family approval, societal approval, various benefits, religious support, and job stability. I find that this is such a stark contrast in comparison to what I experience in my relationship with a butch identified lesbian. When I first began to notice this difference, I realized there might also be many more who are experiencing this genderphobia and homophobia from society as well.

When I began my graduate studies program in Sociology at California State University, Northridge, I sought answers to the questions I had regarding gender identity and society. My first course was “Sociology of LGBT” with Professor Teresa DeCrescenzo. I was newly “out” as a Queer Femme in my new relationship, and I felt alone and isolated. I was looking for answers pertaining to what I was going through and how that relates to others within society. I read some wonderful books in that class that helped me understand that I was not alone in my experience and that many LGBTQQI individuals struggle with genderphobia and homophobia throughout society. In this course, I learned a term that transformed the way I viewed my own experience, internalized homophobia.

Internalized homophobia are the negative feelings an LGBTQQI person feels towards themselves, due to the homophobic ideas and actions ingrained within us from various institutions within society, such as family, church and/or school. Professor DeCrescenzo taught our class that internalized homophobia could live in anyone as a product of living in a homophobic society. As a child who grew up in a Pentecostal protestant family, I suffered in silence as a queer identified youth with my own internalized homophobia.

As an adult now in a relationship with a butch identified lesbian, I have come to realize that the world treats me differently when they see I am coupled with my spouse. As a femme identified Queer cis-woman, being misidentified as heterosexual happens everyday. People mostly just assume I am a heterosexual woman and there are societal, and personal, benefits to that. However, when I go places with my butch lesbian identified spouse, people stare, question our relationship, deny us rights and disregard our

relationship. I imagine what life must be like for my partner, who at all times lives in her truth with courage. I wanted to learn more about the experiences of gender nonconforming individuals and how their everyday life is affected by society's reactions towards them. As I moved along in the sociology graduate program at California State University, Northridge, I completed course projects on the topic of LGBTQQI issues, most of them focusing on Butch/Femme lesbian dynamics. It was through this process that I realized my thesis topic would be centered on the study of gender presentation, in particular gender transgressive and butch lesbian gendered presentations.

This has been my experience with gender identity. In writing this autobiographical account regarding my experiences with my own gender identity, it is anticipated that this study (regarding the experiences of gender transgressive lesbians) will be based upon the participants' own personal perspectives, apart from my own experiences. As a Queer identified femme, I acknowledge that I am not an insider to this phenomenon, since I do not identify as gender transgressive or butch lesbian myself. I have been mindful that while studying this group, I cannot claim to know what it is like to experience life as a gender transgressive lesbian. Though our communities (butch/femme) do intersect within the LGBTQQI community, our experiences are not the same. I will do my best within this study to remember that my perspective as a queer femme is separate from the accounts of what it is like to live as a gender transgressive or butch lesbian.

Further, this is a sensitive topic, as it touches upon issues of self-identification regarding gender identity. It is my hope that I convey this topic thoroughly yet sensitively and with thoughtfulness. I approach this study with a deep respect for all gender outlaws

who walk in the world expressing their own gender identity in an authentic and brave way, and so it is my hope that this will in some way help the gender transgressive or butch lesbian community and all other gender outlaws.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

During the Butch Voices 2011 conference held in Oakland, the issue of butch gender identities and their meanings were brought to the forefront as previous committee members had split off to form their own social group titled Butch Nation. Butch Nation claimed that Butch Voices had changed the language of their mission statement from previous years. This claim focused on the exclusion in the mission statement of Butch Voices of the words “butch women,” replaced by the words “masculine of center people and their allies” (Goldberg 2011). Further, these former committee members were reluctant to sign a confidentiality agreement, which Butch Voices required in order to serve as a committee member. These reluctant members were concerned with issues of misogyny within the Butch Voices group and refused to sign, as they believed that transparency was needed within the organization. The former members claimed that Butch Voices refused to add the words “feminist” and “lesbian” into their call for submissions for the upcoming 2011 conference (Goldberg 2011). This tension between two butch identified groups has led to many questions within this community.

The tension encountered at Butch Voices was illustrative of broader tensions in terminological discussions. For example, the term “masculine of center” was created by B. Cole (2011:128), a self-identified woman of color who previously identified as butch. Cole felt that the term “butch” had limitations, in that “butch” is viewed by some to be used more frequently to describe a white working class individual. According to those who embrace the new term, masculine of center “speaks to the cultural nuances of female masculinity, while still recognizing our commonalities--independent of who we partner with.” Further, the “of center” approach looks beyond the “traditional binary of male and

female to female masculinity as a continuum” and sees the gendered self as “never truly fixed.” The term masculine of center includes female masculine identities such as “butch, stud, aggressive/AG, tom, macha, boi, dom, etc.” (128).

Those who question this new term “masculine of center,” have asked what is meant by “of center?” If this approach looks beyond the binary then why are masculinity and femininity on two ends of the spectrum? In this questioning, the masculine and feminine are still being viewed as binary (at opposite ends) and therefore can be problematic. Further, it has been questioned as to where femininity and masculinity lie on the supposed continuum? Can one be seen as more dominant and valued than the other from the positioning on this continuum? Some have also asked “are we referring to the ‘center’ of the gender binary that we are trying to erase, not support?!” (Cordova 2011:228). These questions are issues that have been grappled upon within feminist theory along with queer theory. Jeanne Cordova states that the “Genderqueer Movement offers the LGBTQ Movement a more radical future than the Transgender Movement,” as the genderqueer movement seeks to ask society to truly see a “world without the binary of male and female” (Cordova 2011:230).

It has also been stated by some individuals within the butch lesbian and queer communities that they do not identify as masculine of center. Instead, these individuals identify as woman-identified butches (Cordova 2011:228). Woman-identified butches identify themselves as women expressing female masculinities, whereas masculine of center is an umbrella term for those who consider themselves butch, including male-identified and FTM (female to male) transgender individuals. Although this umbrella term may offer a broader way of defining identity, it is feared by some that this term will

also erase other identities, such as butch or the very identities it seeks to encapsulate (227).

These issues of identity are crucial in understanding the experiences of woman-identified butch lesbians and masculine of center queer identities. However, for the purposes of this study, I will use Mignon Moore's (2006:126) term "gender transgressive lesbian" when referring to butch and masculine lesbian gender identities, as gender transgressive lesbian can be used to describe any lesbian who's gendered presentation is masculine. I have chosen to use this term within this study in an effort to be inclusive of various gender identities and perspectives. Further, most of Moore's participants were not comfortable with the label "butch" or "stud," more often these participants felt that the term "aggressive" was the term they felt most comfortable with. Moore uses the term transgressive because women in this group "transgress notions of femininity, because many do not like or use the term butch, and because transgressive is linguistically similar to the term aggressive, which many black lesbians use to denote a woman with a masculine gender display."

Definitions

For the purpose of this study I will use the term gender transgressive lesbian to describe lesbians with a masculine gender presentation, and I will also use the term "butch" for the participants who identify as such. Lesbian is defined as female same-sex desire. I also use the term cisgender (or cis) to refer to individuals who "are not transgender and who have only ever experienced their subconscious and physical sexes as being aligned" (Serano 2007:12). Therefore, for the purposes of this study, butch and femme will focus on cisgender lesbian or queer women. This study will focus on

cisgender lesbian women, or lesbians who identify as women and whose biological sex assigned at birth was female, and who also have a masculine appearance and identity.

It is important to also define and distinguish sex, gender, and sexuality while also examining how they are related. West and Zimmerman (1987:127) define sex as a “determination made through the application of socially agreed upon biological criteria for classifying persons as females or males,” such as genitalia at birth or chromosomal typing. Assignment into a “sex category” is attained through “application of the sex criteria, but in everyday life, categorization is established and sustained by the socially required identificatory displays that proclaim one’s membership in one or the other category.” Gender on the other hand “is the activity of managing situated conduct in light of normative conceptions of attitudes and activities appropriate for one’s sex category” (West and Zimmerman, *ibid*). Gender is socially constructed and the rules for doing gender are upheld in various societal institutions. In “The Kaleidoscope of Gender,” Spade and Valentine (2008:159) state:

Learning gender is complicated. Clearly, gender is something that we “do” as well as learn, and in doing gender we are responding to structured expectations from institutions in society. Every time we enter a new social situation, we look around for cues and guides to determine how to behave in a gender-appropriate manner. In some situations, we might interpret gender cues as calling for a high degree of gender conformity, while in other situations; the clues allow us to be more flexible. We create gender as well as respond to expectations for it. (P. 159)

Gender identities are the ways in which “being feminine and masculine, a woman or a man, becomes an internalized part of the way we think about ourselves” (Ryle 2012:120). Gender identity is discussed in Holly Devor’s (now Aaron H. Devor) article “Gender Blending Females.” Devor (1987:14) states that:

The dominant gender schema in Anglo-American society is predicated on a dualistic and hierarchical biological determinist model. The schema rests on the

assumption that all people are members of the male or female sex and that sex is both discrete and permanent. Further, the schema postulates that the physical fact of one's sex causes one to be a girl or woman, boy or man, and that girls and women are innately feminine while boys and men are innately masculine. Sex and gender are so firmly linked in this formulation that they have come to be seen as virtually inseparable, and although femininity and masculinity are understood by social scientists to be culturally variable, in the popular gender schema used in daily life, gender roles are also believed to be strongly tied to biological sex. Finally, the schema assumes that the significant measure in all matters of sex and gender is the presence or absence of indicators associated with maleness, thus empowering maleness/boyhood/manliness/masculinity as primary statuses and deprecating femaleness/girlhood/womanliness/femininity to secondary or derivative positions. (P. 14)

In Devor's study regarding "gender blending females," it was found that while popular opinion of sex and gender is that one's sex determines the gender identity, in fact "sex and gender can be quite separate and gender role behavior socially defines and identifies gender" (Devor 1987:35). Devor continues to explain stating,

in other words, gender is a social status: (1) persons of any sex can become boys and then men, or girls and then women, and (2) in terms of non intimate social interactions, gender is ascribed on the basis of gender role and one's sex is assumed on the basis of that information. (P. 35)

This information that Devor speaks of is society assuming that when one presents as masculine, one must be male.

Sexuality is the way in which individuals express themselves sexually, or whom one is attracted to. In Schilt's 2009 study, she describes how all three of these terms (sex, gender, and sexuality) are related forming the "heterosexual matrix" (Schilt 2009:441). The heterosexual matrix describes the idea that there are only two genders, that gender reflects biological sex, and that sexual attraction is only natural when between two opposite genders. This theory also explains how the transfer of focus is shifted from the margins (women, homosexuals) to the core (men, heterosexuals) in theorizing how the heterosexual matrix promotes gender inequality. Furthermore, this theory examines how

the heterosexual matrix perpetuates gender inequality in that it is based on a system which is “hierarchical, which means there is a consistently higher value on masculinity than on femininity” (Schilt 2009:442). This theory is important to this study, as it sheds light on the lived experiences of gender transgressive lesbians whose social gender upsets the assumptions of the dominant gender order.

The phenomenological approach to this study explores what everyday life is like for individuals who live outside of the dominant gender order. This study reveals how gender transgressive lesbians experience the world they live in, especially in areas such as (but not limited to) work, family, friendships and romantic relationships. The study also provides insight into how they perceive society’s reactions and actions towards them regarding living outside of the gender norm. Further, this study examines the reality of how discrimination affects their daily lives.

While it is important to define key gender terms, it is also important to recognize the variety of terms (and the various meanings of the terms) used by lesbians to describe gender transgressive lesbian identities. For example, “butch” is sometimes used to refer to an LGBTQ individual who self-identifies with more “masculine” traits, and “femme” to a “feminine identified person of any gender/sex” (Green 2004). However, the term “butch” is also more specifically associated with white lesbians from a previous generation (Moore 2006:126). “Aggressive/AG/Stud” is a self-defining term more commonly used by an “African-American masculine lesbian” (Green 2004), whereas “Macha” is also a self-defining term more commonly used by a Latina masculine lesbian. The term “boi” may be used as a self-identification term of a masculine lesbian who has a

youthful and boyish presentation. This term is also used for other LGBTQ identities (such as younger gay men).

Each identity contains various forms of expression in presentation, mannerisms, and gendered expression. In addition, there may be similarities and/or differences in the interpretation of each gendered presentation. Therefore, it is important to distinguish between (self-defined) gender presentations and (other-defined) gender perceptions or interpretations. For example, an individual may be perceived as a “boi” to an outsider due to their boyish presentation, however this individual may self-identify as “aggressive,” or “butch.”

Throughout this study, I also use the term “gender outlaw,” transgender activists Kate Bornstein and Leslie Feinberg coined this term. As stated by Cartel, Hempel, and Ryan (2007:2) gender outlaw is defined as:

an individual who transgresses or violates the “law” of gender (i.e. one who challenges the rigidly enforced gender roles) in a transphobic, heterosexist and patriarchal society. (P. 2)

The participants of this study are considered gender outlaws in that they do not conform to societal norms regarding gender identity and gender presentation. As stated by O’Brien (2009:366), gender outlaws can face various forms of “material consequences such as discrimination, societal marginalization, and physical violence” from society. Further the determination as to why they are considered “outlaws” is in that:

Society has constructed sex, gender, and sexuality along the lines of a binary. Therefore, one is supposed to be either male or female, masculine or feminine, heterosexual or homosexual. A gender outlaw violates one or more of these binaries in some way. (P. 366)

A gender transgressive or butch lesbian can be considered a “gender outlaw” as they “may be a person who ‘does’ or ‘performs’ gender in a way that does not reinforce

[conform to] the gender binary.” As stated from a participant named Esther within my study, “the history of all our gender outlaws is very near and dear to me.” Thus, current “gender outlaws” recognize the history of struggle among the “gender outlaws” who came before them.

Statement of Research Question

As stated previously, gender transgressive lesbians undermine the assumptions of the dominant gender order within society. Therefore, this gender identity is sociologically significant and important to study from a phenomenological perspective. This study asks the following questions: What are the daily-lived experiences of gender transgressive lesbians (i.e. individuals who identify as butch, masculine, stud, or boi)? How do they prefer to be perceived by others? How do others behave toward them in their daily interactions in regards to their gender identity? Can a shared experience regarding this gender identity be found among a gender transgressive lesbian community? Are there opposing or shared interests within a gender transgressive lesbian community? How do they experience their relationships both inside and outside the gender transgressive lesbian community? Further, I argue that gender transgressive lesbians pose different threats to the dominant gender system than femmes, gender-blender, and transgender individuals.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

History of Butch Gender Identity in the U.S. from the 1940s-present day

Historically, U.S. butch lesbian identities became more widely known in the 1940s and 1950s after World War II, during a time when women's roles were changing in the United States and globally (Levitt and Hiestand 2004:612). For lesbians, a butch gender identity enabled women to "pass" as men and gain employment, as well as establish a place within the lesbian community. Most lesbians who adopted a butch or femme gender identity at the time were of the working class. While femme's during this time could often pass as being heterosexual, heterosexuals often saw butch women as "masculine" and labeled them as lesbian, which often lead to discriminatory practices being utilized against butch lesbian women. According to Lillian Faderman (1991:175), many middle and upper class lesbians decided to exclude themselves from acquiring a butch identity due to the harm it would cause to their status, since during this time there were frequent bar raids in which an individual's identity became public through reporting. Having a butch presentation led to these individuals being profiled by law enforcement in police raids due to their appearance automatically creating suspicion that they were lesbians.

During the 1960s, most feminists viewed the butch/femme dynamic as imitating patriarchal relationships. Many heterosexual and lesbian feminists at the time claimed that butch women were claiming male privilege while femme lesbians were said to be perpetuating female objectification (Levitt and Hiestand 2004:612). As Crawley (2001:177) states, radical feminism in particular sought to eliminate masculinity altogether, and furthermore, butch was viewed in this lens as seeking to dominate the

femme in a relationship much in the same way as heterosexual men were seeking to dominate women. So while butch was considered to be “chauvinistic,” femme was also considered to be un-liberated in body and mind (178). It was during the 1960s, that many butch and femme lesbians either backed away from the feminist movement or began to take on a more androgynous appearance in order to maintain their place within the feminist-lesbian community (Levitt and Hiestand). In Levitt and Hiestand’s (2004:612) study on the ways in which butch lesbians conceptualize their own gender identity, one of the respondent’s states, “the stronger feminism got the more that [butch gender presentation] was looked at as sexist and not cool. [In my androgynous phase] I secretly identified as butch...I started identifying as butch [openly] probably in the mid-1980’s.”

While feminists were critiquing patriarchy in the 1960s, many lesbians (including butch lesbians) felt overlooked by the feminist movement. Queer feminists Adrienne Rich (1980:631) and Chrys Ingraham (1994:212) both critique the ways in which feminists historically have ignored lesbians in their social critiques and theories. Queer feminists make the point that patriarchy is not only driven by an androcentric (male or masculine centered) view but also one that is heteronormative. Heteronormativity is a term, which describes the idea that heterosexuality is the normal orientation for people. There has been evidence that lesbians have not only been marginalized within the heterosexual feminist community, but also within the LGBTQQI community. Queer feminists, in particular, focus on lesbians rather than the gay community as a general community. They consider lesbianism as a solely female experience and as being differentiated from gay men, as this lumping together of gay and lesbian issues is viewed as erasing the female experience.

Chrys Ingraham (1994:212) states that various feminist theorists assume heterosexuality as a natural and universal condition. Ingraham elaborates on Althusser's idea of the "imaginary," stating that there is a heterosexual imaginary, which hides the fact that heterosexuality structures gender, and does not allow for the analysis of heterosexuality as an organizing institution. Ingraham believes that society protects heterosexuality through the institution of marriage, and this can be seen through the benefits given based on marital status instead of other factors such as citizenship. From a materialist feminist standpoint, heterosexuality is used as a way to enforce that some people are granted more "class status, power and privilege than others." Ingraham states that sociologists need to question:

Not only how heterosexuality is imbricated in knowledges, but how these knowledges are related to capitalist and patriarchal social arrangements. How does heterosexuality carry out their project both ideologically and institutionally? How do so many institutions rely on the heterosexual imaginary? Considering the rising levels of violence and prejudice in U.S. society, how are we to understand the social and ideological controls regulating sexuality? What would a critical analysis of institutionalized heterosexuality reveal about its relationship to divisions of labor and wealth, national and state interests, and the production of social and economic hierarchies of difference? And, finally, how will sociology change if we shift away from a heteronormative or heterocentric sociology through a critique of heterosexuality? (P. 212)

Furthering this view, in "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" (1980:632), Adrienne Rich focuses on the belief held by society that women are naturally sexually oriented toward men. This idea is termed by Rich as compulsory heterosexuality, which describes the belief that lesbian existence is deviant and also invisible. Rich also focuses on the concern that when women choose other women as lovers, comrades, and as other important statuses within their lives, this relationship is invalidated and forced into hiding.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the judgments from the 1960s and 1970s feminists believing butch and femme lesbian identities were rooted in misogyny and patriarchy began to dissipate (Faderman 1991:299). It was during this era that butch, femme, as well as gender blending lesbian identities began to resurface and were more often expressed within a feminist framework. These changes led feminists and the LGBTQQI community as a whole, into developing a less traditional view of butch/femme gender identities. It was during the 1980s and 1990s that LGBTQQI gender identity was expressed more freely, with butch and femme identities being accepted within feminist frameworks.

Crawley (2001:178) states that it was also during the 1980s and 1990s that lesbians politically aligned more so with the gay or queer movement than with heterosexual feminism. Levitt and Hiestand (2004:616) state that most of the respondents in their study claim that the lesbian community has become “increasingly tolerant and supportive of butch-femme relationships, and they found validation of their butch identities within it. Several participants noted, however, that often communities are more affirming of butches than of femmes.” As one participant states, “I think it’s [sexism] reflected in society as a whole.”

Some groups (not only in the lesbian community) still maintain the stance that butch/femme gender identities are an imitation of heterosexual patriarchal relationships. However, as Eves (2004:491) states, the gender identity for “femme” is not at all viewed as being passive. Both butch and femme individuals in various studies, state that the identity of femme is viewed as a “strong, sexual and even aggressive identity and this distinguishes it from ‘straight’ femininity.” While this view assumes that heterosexual women are passive, which can be critiqued, Weber’s study seeks to find the differences

between heterosexual femininity and lesbian femme identities. Weber further elaborates this point by stating that many assume that the butch took on the “husband” role while the femme took on the “wife” role. Weber states that the possibility of the butch/femme dynamic being more complicated than just being an imitation of stereotypical heterosexual gender roles has been largely ignored (Weber 1996:272). Butch and femme identities can utilize heteronormative structures to “challenge” those identities and “can use gendered difference in a creative way to construct new butch and femme subject positions” (Eves 2004:491).

As Crawley (2001:179) states, butch and femme identities can be viewed not as gender roles but as “gendered constructions that attempt to claim power from an oppressive, dominant gender structure that benefits heterosexual men” (179). In other words, “butch and femme are forms of lesbian gender that attempt to break down the gender structure of dominant society” (179). Butch and femme lesbian identities break down the gender structure of the dominant society through expressing their gender and sexuality in ways that are viewed by the majority of society as deviant (outside of gender norms). While gender transgressive lesbians present in masculine ways, they are also presenting within the context of a woman’s perspective of masculinity. This masculinity is different from cisgender male masculinity, as many gender transgressive lesbians have experienced sexism within their lives. Gender transgressive lesbians provide a different type of masculinity, while not always within a feminist identity; it is through their experience of being a woman within a patriarchal society that they provide their own separate expression of masculinity. The gender transgressive lesbian breaks down the gender structure of the dominant society through expressing both a presentation of

masculinity, while also being woman-identified. For the gender identity of femme lesbians, they are expressing femininity within a lesbian or queer context; this disrupts the dominant society's view of gender in that their femininity is expressed outside of a heteronormative society.

Currently, the gender identities of lesbians are quite diverse; identities such as aggressive, stud, macha and boi are common terms used to describe the spectrum of lesbian gender identities. These terms are viewed (by some) as "less racially and class specific than butch" due to the term "butch" as historically being used as a mainly "white" and "working class" identity (Cole 2011:128).

Gender Transgressive Lesbian Presentations

For many gender transgressive lesbians it is not the presentation, dress, or style that makes the lesbian a butch, rather, it is an "energy or essence" (Levitt and Hiestand 2004:610). Yet as the body is used to express one's gender identity, fashion and style become important in the construction of gender identities (Eves 2004:493). In some cases, this presentation of a masculine self becomes a way of showing pride and demanding acknowledgment (Eves 2004:493). Eves states that while it is important for some lesbian gender identities to challenge heteronormative culture, homophobic reactions have led to violence and threats against the more visible gender transgressive lesbians.

Furthering the idea that butch and femme lesbian gender identities differ from the dominant gender structure within society, Eves (2004:495) states that lesbian gender identity and presentation identifies butch and femme styles as being shaped by a different

position entirely than heteronormative presentations. Eves elaborates that although butch and femme presentation are:

framed by the dominant discursive formation, [these identities] may have some transformative impact, establishing new subject positions and (sub) cultural spaces. Butches and femmes use specific interpretative and aesthetic repertoires in a variety of ways to create lesbian space and make their desire visible. (P. 495)

Eves (2004:495) further states that there is a butch aesthetic, which can be close to the presentation of transgender, where the distance between “gendered style and physical body” is blurred, and that this makes it more likely for a lesbian to be viewed as male (Eves 2004:494).

Mignon Moore (2006:125) also studies Black lesbian physical presentation.

Moore creates three categories into which participant’s presentations could be described based upon questionnaires, interviews, and observations. The first is femme, second is gender-blender, and the third is transgressive. The category of femme describes a presentation of self, which includes the wearing of clothing and/or accessories that display a sense of femininity. This gender presentation is limited to how the individual looks physically, and is not necessarily connected to any specific personality traits or ideologies about gender or gender display.” The category of gender-blender describes a style associated with an androgynous lesbian presentation, however it is also distinct from it; as a gender blender presentation does not de-emphasize femininity or masculinity but instead combines both elements into one presentation. Moore uses the term transgressive in describing a lesbian gender presentation that is masculine. Transgressive women are described as wearing “men’s clothes and shoes and coordinate these outfits with heavy jewelry, belts with large, masculine buckles, and ties or suspenders for a more dressed-up look” (125). Moore (2006:125) also states that the clothes “are never form

fitting.” Transgressive women are also likely to have their hair “dreadlocked, braided in a cornrow style that is close to the head, or worn very short” (126).

In regards to relationships, Moore (2006:129) finds that it is highly unusual to see a black lesbian couple in which both individuals display a masculine style. Moore finds that black lesbians in New York use gendered presentations to “structure social interactions, and the order of these social interactions maintains social control in the community. In order to attract a person with a certain gendered style, one must possess a complementary gender display” (129). Further, Moore discusses how modern women have a significant range of styles which are considered “acceptable, so the categories of femme, gender-blender, and transgressive have the most meaning when they are presented in a context where lesbians are present” (129). For example heterosexual women may wear masculine clothing as well, so gender transgressive lesbian presentations are more clearly expressed within lesbian social circles, so there will be no mistake as to their sexual orientation. Moore concludes that displaying a transgressive gender presentation does not mean that the participant does not identify as a woman “in a society where men still have the greater advantage” (134). Moore elaborates that transgressives “believe that men are constantly granted more status and authority because society continues to advance an ideology that privileges male leadership of important societal institutions and that awards men an earnings advantage” (134).

In Levitt and Hiestand’s (2004:620) study on butch-identified women’s views regarding their own gender identity, there are several transgender participants who identify more with being a man than with being a woman. Levitt and Hiestand state that butch women can be described as part of the transgender community in that they fall

outside of the traditional categories of male and female, however, all respondents are clear that just because one identifies as a butch does not mean that they want to be a man or imitate a man (610). Weber (1996:275) states that the respondents of her study were also adamant in their conviction that they “do not want to be men, nor do they wish to ‘play’ at being men. They are women and they are content to be women” (275). Being butch is described as an “independent gender, which, is often unrecognized, discredited, and disregarded, which forces them to be viewed through the lens of masculinity” (Levitt and Hiestand 2004:610). To the participants, it is in the absence of this recognition that commonly causes butch identified individuals to be misidentified as a man or called “sir” in public places (611). Also, those who self-identify as butch do not fall neatly into a gender category or stereotype, as one respondent states “Because someone’s butch doesn’t mean that they aren’t the one who likes to cook and clean...It’s as individual as the women are” (613). Further, it is incorrect to label gender transgressive lesbians as transgender, as most of them do not identify with this term.

As Eves (2004:483) describes, it is crucial that the researcher is sensitive to labels, as there are many individuals who identify differently, including those who “consciously manipulate gender codes” (483). For example, in some studies, participants prefer the term “queer” over “lesbian,” while there are those who also reject being labeled as “butch.” Gayle Rubin (1992:468) explains that the label “butch” has been used in describing a subculture within the lesbian community, referring to the various masculine of center gender identities. Therefore, it is important that we study how individuals define their own gender experience.

Homophobia and Genderphobia

Homophobia and genderphobia are important to study, as Levitt and Hiestand (2004:611) state most of their respondents experience homophobia from a very early age. Participants in another study conducted by Hiestand and Levitt (2005:61) regarding butch gender identity formation, also felt “uneasy” during childhood. In most cases, the participants’ parents tried to force their children to conform to a heteronormative gender identity. The parents tried everything from enforcing a strict dress code, to forcing their daughters to attend therapy (Levitt and Hiestand 2004:611). Further, most respondents stated that their childhood was “filled with guilt and shame” (611). Many of the respondents believed in childhood that they were “meant to be a boy” and that they were a “mistake” (611). These respondents’ also state that they had to struggle with this confusion alone and that religious messages filled them with fear of “burning in hell forever” (611). For Levitt and Hiestand’s respondents, the struggle continued into high school and young adulthood. Many describe instances of harassment and ridicule in school (612). Hiestand and Levitt (2005:61) state that most respondents in their study express that they were called names such as “queer,” and ridiculed throughout their childhood from classmates (61).

Levitt and Hiestand (2004:616) reflect that many of the respondents in their study have been harassed in the workplace for their butch identity. Further, many respondents state that they experience harassment on the street as well, such as being:

called derogatory names, chased, threatened, chastised, and sent out of women’s restrooms or activities. Participants described being stared at, having parents pull children away from them, having men act threateningly, and having people be rude to them in general. (P. 616)

Herek (1999) and Levitt and Horne (2002) state that it has been documented that gay men who appear to be more feminine and lesbian women who appear to be more masculine are subjected to higher levels of violence and discrimination “than those who conform to gender expectations” (Hiestand and Levitt 2005:77).

For those who identify as both a person of color and as a gender transgressive lesbian, the intersectional experience of these identities has led to a higher level of discriminatory actions against them; due to racism, misogyny and homophobia. As Moore (2006:132) suggests, issues of race and class are crucial in understanding gendered presentations. In regards to the intersection of class and the gender transgressive lesbian experience, Moore finds that the middle-upper class black lesbians are reluctant to display a transgressive gender presentation. Further, Moore finds that black middle-class lesbians look down upon transgressive gender presentations: “at parties, women who wore athletic jerseys, do-rags on their heads, or baseball caps were said to lower the quality or status of the event, and other lesbians would react to their presence in a visibly negative way” (132).

In regards to the intersection of the female expression of masculinity coinciding within a lesbian identity, Moore (2006:132) finds, “There are dangers in representing black masculinity, particularly through the female form.” Moore continues,

transgressive women are rebelling against strong conventional norms, and their emphasis on self-expression above conformity attacks the core of male dominance and invites openly punitive responses from others. But more than that, a non-feminine gender presentation in women may cause men to question the meaning of their own masculinity. (P. 132)

When Moore asked a participant why she thinks men react to her presentation with hostility, she states “because they’ve spent their whole lives with one idea of who they

are, and then they look at us with our men's shirts, our men's shoes, and realize gender is something that is taught" (Moore 2006:133).

CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Previous studies emphasize the importance of defining lesbian gender identities not as imitative of heteronormative gender roles, but as independent gender identities. As Crawley (2001:178) states, various studies question whether lesbian identity is rooted in sexual (essentialist), gender (construction), or performance (erotic play) theories. Thus, there are three theoretical perspectives that are used in the literature to describe masculine of center and butch identities-essentialist, constructivist, and performative.

The essentialist (or sexual according to Crawley) approach to gender identity is the view that gender identity is biologically inherent and unchangeable in the individual (178). These studies “tend to view butch and femme as one's essential (essentially lesbian) sexual identity and butch/fem interaction as a ‘natural’ result of these innate interests” (Crawley 2001:179). According to various studies, many lesbians, view their gender identity as innate (Eves 2004:483) or as “influenced by innate factors” (Levitt and Hiestand 2004:618). For example, in Weber’s study of masculine of center gender identities, all of the respondents state that being butch is innate and that their self-definition has nothing to do with their relationships (Weber 1996:276). Instead, most view their lesbian gender identity as static and not dependent upon outside factors.

However sociologically, it has been argued that presentations while occurring in a social context are consciously presented for others within society. Symbolic interactionists, such as George Herbert Mead (1934:173), believe there is interconnectedness between the self and the social world. Mead’s theory conveys that individuals have an “I” and a “me” within social experiences, the “me” is the part of ourselves, which foresees how others in society will react to our presentation, and

therefore this allows us to conduct ourselves in a way that is desirable for how we want to be perceived within social interactions. This “me” part of ourselves is therefore a social construct, and modified by our interactions within society; we become an object to ourselves. This self also has various sides and performances based on whom we are interacting with, so while we may present ourselves one way within a certain social group, we also present ourselves in a different way to a different social group.

Further, in opposition to the essentialist perspective, the constructivist perspective regarding butch/femme identity has been viewed by early radical feminism as being based upon socialized gender roles, which perpetuate the patriarchy. However, more modern constructivist perspectives view butch/femme gender identity as gendered constructions that demand power from the oppressive gender heterosexual structure (Crawley 2001:179). An example of this is the way in which butch/femme lesbian gender identities work against heterosexist prescriptions for women.

In comparison to both essentialist and constructivist theories, the performance perspective view butch/femme as erotic play rooted in styles “rather than identities or essences” (Crawley 2001:180). This perspective views gender expression as fluid and not as strict as previous eras. Lillian Faderman (1992:591) suggests that butch/femme in more recent decades are a performance which are in opposition to “drab clothing styles introduced by radical feminism and that feminisms have created a more egalitarian setting for butch/femme interaction such that butch/femme is now based on erotic play more than power relations” (591). However, Moore (2006:115) states that studies have found that African American lesbian identities, unlike studies on white lesbian identities, are gender presentations which are not merely (or solely) rooted in sexual play, as these

identities, once formed, remain consistent over time (115). Other authors have suggested that butch/femme gender identities are indeed feminists in themselves, as they are a “means of combating dominant gender norms” (Case: 1989:181). As stated by Case (1989:298),

In recuperating the space of seduction, the butch-femme couple can, through their own agency, move through a field of symbols...playfully inhabiting the camp space of irony and wit, free from biological determinism, elitist essentialism, and the heterosexist cleavage of sexual difference. (P. 298)

Further, butch/femme gender identities provide a critique to male domination. As Case expresses, the fact that two women can create “erotic sexuality without men falsifies the heterosexist ideal that sexuality is and must be about men” (Case 1989:181).

While the essentialist viewpoint assumes that it is nature that determines how an individual expresses a particular gender role, constructivist theorists and feminist theorists view essentialism as ignoring social influences on gender identity. To assume that any gender expression is natural is to assume that all gender expression is natural (including cisgender heterosexual expressions). This essentialist argument is commonly used by both those who support LGBTQQI rights, and also by conservatives who seek to block equal rights for LGBTQQI citizens. Conservatives make the essentialist claim that heterosexual, and cisgender (individuals who have a match between the gender they were assigned at birth, their bodies, and their personal identity) expressions are natural for all humans. While some who support LGBTQQI equal rights adopt a similar essentialist argument, claiming that LGBTQQI individuals are “born this way,” and that this lack of choice should then prove that they deserve equal protections under the law. Therefore the essentialist argument is used to both “legitimize” and “de-legitimize” gendered expressions within society. The question from a constructivist viewpoint is then, why is

the LGBTQQI community required to naturalize their gendered expressions in order to legitimize them and attain equal rights?

Constructivist and performative theories have degrees of similarity in that both approaches focus on gender identity not as essential but instead as socially constructed. Judith Butler weaves together both constructivist and performance theories, as she not only views butch/femme gender identity as performance, but views all gender as a performance. Butler (1996:313) writes, “gender is a kind of imitation for which there is no original; in fact, it is a kind of imitation that produces the very notion of the original as an effect and consequence of the imitation itself” (313). Butler sees all gender, as a performance in which there is no normal. Also, Butler states that heterosexual gender performance is viewed and is reproduced and felt as being natural, thus heterosexuality is a construction which is seen as being “essential and dominant” (314). Therefore Butler views butch/femme gender identities as performance constructions, however they are a dissident performance to dominant heterosexual performances. In the book “Female Masculinity,” Halberstam (1998:276) extends upon this idea by stating that butch identities create a whole new type of masculinity. Furthermore Halberstam elaborates:

We tend to identify the pattern as moving only in one direction, however, rather than seeing the possibilities of an active matrix of exchange between male and female masculinities. Exchanges between male and female masculinities, I suggest, have the potential to go both ways. The question, then, might be not what do female masculinities borrow from male masculinities, but rather what do men borrow from butches? If we shift the flow of power and influence, we can easily imagine a plethora of new masculinities that do not simply feed back into the static loop that makes maleness plus power into the formula for abuse but that re-create masculinity on the model of female masculinity. (P. 276)

In this case, gender transgressive and butch lesbians also create their own type of masculinity and also influence masculinity as a whole. These female masculinities are

potentially influential upon all forms of masculinity, including that of masculine identified cis-men.

A critique to the constructivist approach by Levitt and Hiestand describe the ways in which the constructivist approach has been used as a means of oppressing butch gender identity. The first way is to argue that butch lesbians are women imitating men. Levitt and Hiestand (2004:618) state:

This misconstrual of butch-identity as “role-playing” is pervasive and trivializes the meaning of this gender. The implicit assumption is that butches’ sex (female) should determine their gender (the expression of femininity), and therefore any divergence must be a superficial imitation. Butch identities often are pathologized further through associations with anti egalitarianism, oppression, and developing or non-industrialized cultures. (P. 618)

Levitt and Hiestand (2004:618) question both the essentialist and constructivist approaches. They find there has been little research regarding how the social constructivist and essentialist approaches may be “woven together” regarding “butch” or “masculine of center” female masculinities. Levitt and Hiestand (2004:618) describe the ways in which butch identity has been defined as a construction, one of the assumptions made by some constructivist theorists has been that butch lesbians are women imitating men. However, a critique of this particular viewpoint by all respondents to Levitt and Hiestand’s 2004 study regarding butch identity were clear in stating that just because one identifies as butch does not mean that they want to be a man or imitate a man (610).

Butch and Masculine of Center Gender Identities: Differences and Similarities

Border Wars and Butch Voices

While there are these theoretical debates regarding essentialist versus constructivist origins of gender transgressive identities, there are also community debates

happening within the gender transgressive community. From the recent events surrounding the Butch Voices and Butch Nation split, it can be seen where the unrest lies within the butch community. The fact that respondents from previous studies regarding butch identity state that they “do not want to be men,” (Levitt and Hiestand 2004:618) show evidence that there are differences between the FTM (Female to Male) transgender community (biological female at birth who identifies as male) some of which identify as masculine of center, and the woman-identified butch. It is crucial to point out that differences do not denote one group’s struggles as more significant than the other. However, differences between these gender transgressive lesbian communities do indicate that each community has their own specific set of issues. Further, to state that there are differences does not indicate that these communities do not have similarities in their struggles. Both identities challenge gender norms and, therefore, may face similar issues of discrimination within society.

In “Transgender Butch: Butch/FTM Border Wars and the Masculine Continuum,” Judith Halberstam states that while identity has been important for political movements, it is crucial for identity politics to surrender and take a back seat within political movements in order for an alliance to build and thus for the movement to succeed (Halberstam 1998:301). Further, Gayle Rubin (1992:473) stresses the importance of gender and sexual diversity not only as it pushes a political movement ahead but also as the only way in which the broad range of genders can logically be represented (473). However, Judith Halberstam also states that gender diversity is not enough to generate “radical and oppositional politics.” Halberstam elaborates, “radical interventions come from prolonged, intensive political and cultural struggle against real enemies such as the

Christian Right and the Republican Party, transphobes and homophobes” (1998:307).

Halberstam’s analysis ends with the assertion that both FTM (some identifying as MoC) and butches need to contemplate upon what kinds of “men or masculine beings we become,” as “alternative masculinities, ultimately, will fail to change existing gender hierarchies to the extent that they fail to be feminist, anti-racist, anti-elitist, and queer” (307).

Judith Halberstam further states in *Border Wars* (1998:293) that there has been evidence of discord between FTM (some MoC) and butch lesbians regarding issues on feminism and transitioning. For example, Halberstam writes, “some lesbians have voiced their opposition to FTMs, characterizing them as traitors and as women who literally become the enemy.” Halberstam also states “lesbians have tended to erase FTMs by claiming transgender males as lesbians who lack access to a liberating lesbian discourse” (293). Halberstam refers to Rees’ writing on accounts in which some FTM transgenders “do not see themselves as lesbians before treatment,” and also describe their partners as “normal heterosexual women, not lesbians” (293). Halberstam describes that lesbianism from this “FTM perspective suddenly becomes a pathologized category contrasted to the properly heterosexual and gender-normative aims to the male transgender and his feminine partner” (297). Halberstam continues that while differences between FTM and lesbian perspectives are valuable, there also lies the issue in which FTM territory may “fall into homophobic assertions about lesbians and sexist formulations of women in general” (298).

Halberstam elaborates that there is a danger in making strong differentiations between FTM (some which identify as MoC) and butch women in that in doing so it may

“serve the cause of heteronormativity by consigning homosexuality to pathology and by linking transgender to new heteronormative forms” (298). Halberstam states that these concretized distinctions are a form of “gender fiction,” as there are not definite and clear differentiations between “butch” and “transsexual” [transgender] (300). Halberstam provides an example of cases in which there are “butch” women who pass as men in public as well as cases in which FTM transsexuals who “present as gender ambiguous” (301). Halberstam ends this argument by stating “it is time to complicate the models that assign gender queerness only to transgender bodies and gender normativity to all others” (301).

Halberstam concludes that the term “border wars” is problematic, as FTM individuals are viewed as having crossed over the border while butch lesbians are seen as those who remain static. Further, Halberstam views the term “border war” as flawed in that it makes it seem as there are “territories to be defended” (304). While the debates surrounding these issues of community display a need for evaluating the diversity among the LGBTQQI community and gender identity, it is also imperative to study the phenomenon regarding the daily-lived experiences of gender transgressive lesbians. It is my hope that this study will provide deeper understanding into the experiences of this group and can therefore provide insight into their perspectives regarding various areas of their lives.

Study Objectives

Within this particular study, it is my hope that each participant’s perspective, discourse, and identity may be woven together in order to paint a picture of what the daily-lived experiences are for gender transgressive lesbians. Participants’ perspectives

regarding their gender identity can shed light on what daily life is like for a gender transgressive lesbian individual. The participant's also elaborate upon issues such as relationships, feelings about community, and how they view gender identity as discussed within the literature review of this thesis. Further, through self-definition and claiming of their own gender identity, comparisons and contrasts can be utilized to further understand any differences or similarities that lie between each gender identity. It is through this discourse regarding lived experiences of gender transgressive and butch lesbians, that knowledge can be furthered regarding personal experiences and perspectives of the daily life of a gender transgressive lesbian individual. Lastly, I argue that gender transgressive lesbians pose different threats to the dominant gender system than queer or lesbian femmes, gender-blender lesbians, and transgender individuals.

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

Phenomenological Methods

Throughout this study, I employ the phenomenological method, which is appropriate in that it is “important to understand several individuals’ common or shared experiences of a phenomenon” (Creswell 2007:60). Moustakas (1994:13) describes the aim of phenomenological research as “to determine what an experience means for the persons who have had the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description of it” (13). In investigating the lived experiences of gender transgressive lesbians throughout my study, the data collected focuses upon each participant’s own standpoint regarding living with a gender transgressive lesbian identity through in-depth interviews. In their study on transgender lived experience, Nagoshi and Brzuzy (2010:438) state that through “transcendent stories,” “the dynamic relationships in transgenders’ lived experiences of their embodied and self-constructed aspects of identity can act to empower transgenders to resist oppression” (438). My hope is that my study will provide insight into how gender transgressive lesbians resist gender oppression as well.

The phenomenological approach is primarily concerned with an experience from a “first-hand point of view” (Smith 2008). This approach differs from other qualitative methods as it is based upon the lived experiences and the perspectives from the consciousness of the participant. Husserl has used the term “lifeworld” in reference to the world of underlying assumptions within each being, as they are experienced and brought forth through consciousness (Wagner 1973:63). Further, since we are aware of this “intentional consciousness” this then allows the phenomenologist to bracket their own

basic views and experiences within the world and to discover how they are all connected. Therefore, everyday thinking has become an important way of studying the experiences and standpoint of an individual. Phenomenology focuses on the individual's view of the world they live in.

While the phenomenological approach focuses on the participant's own standpoint, it is stated by Alfred Schutz (1967:10) that an individual cannot fully understand another's lived experience through their own "meaning context." This is apparent through the idea that one only understands another person's experiences through their own standpoint. As Schutz states, "everything I know about your conscious life is really based on my knowledge of my own lived experiences." However, Schutz also explains that it is through "interpretive schemes and language," that one can interpret another individual's standpoint. Moustakas' transcendental phenomenology is useful in bracketing the researcher's own standpoint in research, as it focuses on the researcher's role in describing the experiences of the participants. The researcher can best employ this if they begin their study with first describing their own experiences with the phenomenon studied (this was employed in this study with the autobiography at the beginning of this project), and then bracketing their own experiences before describing the experiences of participants (Creswell 2007:60).

Intersubjective understanding is also an important part of this study, as individuals experiences are interpreted differently based upon their own point of view. It is through intersubjectivity that we can come to understand another's lived experiences, despite us having a separate consciousness. The phenomenological method suggests that this intersubjectivity can be accomplished through bracketing our own experiences while

putting ourselves in the position of the other person. Further, this intersubjectivity is possible through “shared signs and interpretive schemes” (Schutz 1967:10). It is through this process, that we also create identity and meaning as a means of also forming community, common identification, as well as distinction. Because this study focuses on meaning making and subjective and intersubjective experiences, in-depth interviews have been conducted and bracketing was utilized beforehand so I would be mindful of my own experience with this phenomenon.

Study Participants

Ten of the participants were recruited for the study. All participants were adults (18 years of age and older) and self-identified as a type of gender transgressive lesbian (such as butch, boi, macha, masculine of center, aggressive and so on). I recruited participants through snowball sampling. I met a majority of the participant’s either at the Butch Voices 2011 conference, or through mutual friends on Facebook. Once the interviewees agreed to participate in the study, they were given a consent form, which explained the purpose of the study, that each interview would be audio recorded, and other important information regarding this study. This can be viewed in Appendix C. Due to the personal nature of this study regarding gender identity, I was aware that some sensitive subjects may be touched upon while they relayed their experiences. Therefore, each participant was aware that they could end the interviews at any time and I also made them aware that they would be given pseudonyms to protect their identity. Also, in case any participant wanted to be referred to LGBTQQI friendly counseling services, due to any possible distress from the interview, I had a list of various support services in the

participants' area of residence readily available; however, none of the participant's expressed that they were in need of those services.

I will now introduce the reader to each participant.

Meet the Participants

Celia

Celia identifies as a butch lesbian. She has her Bachelor's Degree in Accounting. She is a working professional who describes herself as "alternative" in style and appreciates "alternative" music. She also loves riding motorcycles and spending time with her partner.

Linda

Linda identifies as a butch lesbian. She has her Bachelor's degree in Communications. She works in the entertainment industry and has an interest in politics. She enjoys spending time with her longtime partner Kim and their dog.

Carol

Carol identifies as a feminist butch lesbian. She has her Bachelor's degree in Women's Studies. Her and her partner Jennifer have started a lesbian owned business and are very active in the lesbian community.

Tricia

Tricia identifies as a tomboy-femme and also a butch lesbian. She is passionate about bodybuilding and runs her own business as a fitness trainer. She has her Master's Degree in Business Administration. She enjoys spending time with her partner.

Mika

Mika identifies as a butch lesbian. Mika is a working professional and has her Bachelor's degree in Business Management. She enjoys weight lifting in her downtime, along with spending time with her family and spouse.

Lesley

Lesley identifies as a Chicana feminist butch lesbian. She is a working professional and a writer. She has written about her experiences of being a butch in various LGBTQ publications. She enjoys spending time with her daughter and spouse.

Joey

Joey identifies as a feminist butch lesbian. She is an Army veteran and is now a working professional. She enjoys playing guitar and gardening with her longtime partner and child.

Esther

Esther identifies as a butch lesbian. She has her Bachelor's degree in Performance Studies. She is a performance artist and a writer. She has written about her experiences within the LGBTQQI community and has been published as well. She enjoys spending time with her partner and is an active participant within the Queer community.

Rhonda

Rhonda identifies as a butch lesbian. She is a working professional and enjoys various hobbies, such as playing cards. She also shares her life with her longtime partner since high school, Jessica.

Helen

Helen identifies as a boi and also butch lesbian. She has her Bachelor's degree in the Health Sciences. She works in the healthcare industry and enjoys performing in drag king shows. She enjoys traveling with her partner with whom she lives with.

Data Collection

The procedures used to gather the data rely on in depth, semi-structured, open-ended voice recorded interviews with 10 participants. The interviews consisted of 16 questions, and were audio recorded and conducted at a setting of the participant's choice. Each interview lasted for about one hour.

Data Security

All data was kept in a locked file and are password protected. Any information gathered from the interviews which may be directly associated with the participant was kept confidential. All audio recordings will be destroyed once the project is concluded at the participant's request. Pseudonyms are used in the presentation of data for this study in order to protect the confidentiality of each participant. (See Appendix C)

Research Instrument

The interview schedule is divided into four Categories: I. Preliminary Questions, II. Lived Experiences, III. Identity, and IV. Community/Relationships. Category I asks the participant about their perspectives regarding society's views on gender identity and non-conforming gendered presentations. Category II focuses on questions regarding the participant's lived experiences and how their own gender presentations affect their daily lives. Category III, asks for the participant's perspective regarding their own gender identity and how gendered presentation is a manifestation of this gender identity (what it

means to live with this identity). Lastly Category IV asks the participant to reflect upon their gender identity/presentation in regards to their own community and relationships. Here, questions are asked regarding how gender identity affects their relationships, whether they feel there is a community based upon similar gendered presentations and identity, and how family, friends, and romantic relationships are affected by their gender identity. The questions uncover the daily-lived experiences of gender transgressive lesbians.

Organizing, Analyzing, and Synthesizing Data

The interviews were recorded and fully transcribed. I coded the interviews by searching for themes and patterns in the experiences of gender transgressive lesbian identities (Creswell 2007:60). The patterns and themes that emerged were issues pertaining to identity, experience, social encounters, and genderphobia/homophobia. Further, the data has also been interpreted in the description of the gender transgressive lesbian community.

I employed a phenomenological approach in the data analysis. First, I describe my own personal experiences regarding gender transgressive lesbian identity (Creswell 2007:60). Second, I developed a list of important statements from the interviews, regarding how the participants experience life as a gender transgressive lesbian. From these statements I created themes resulting from the interviews regarding the experiences of gender transgressive lesbians. Further, since the experiences of the participants are shaped by the context in which these experiences occur, in my interviews and data analysis I paid particular attention to the contexts of these experiences. The settings in which these experiences occurred are described. Lastly, I have written a synthesized

description that pulls from both the textural (what participant experienced) and structural account (how participant experienced it) so that the “what” and the “how” of this phenomenon are described regarding the experiences of the participants in the study (Creswell 2007:60).

CHAPTER 5: PRESENTATION OF DATA

Throughout this study, I develop the argument that gender transgressive lesbians are “gender outlaws” in that they present certain threats to the dominant gender system. Further, I argue that gender transgressive lesbians pose specific threats to the dominant gender system, which differ from other gender outlaws, such as femme, gender-blending, and transgender individuals. Both of these claims are evidenced in the narratives from the study’s participants. In this section, I will present the findings of my study through the participant’s own words, along with my descriptions regarding the participant’s experiences. It is through the analysis of this data that I develop and provide the basis for my argument.

The overarching themes that emerged in my interviews are presented under common headings for organizational purposes. The presentation of data is organized as follows: in the section on **Identity**, I examine the themes a) society views gender as binary, b) gender outlaws perceive society’s gender norms as being oppressive, c) gender identity is complicated, d) gender identity and sexual identity as merged, e) the meaning of butch is diverse, f) outward appearance reflects internal gender identity, g) gender transgressive and butch lesbian presentations challenge outside gender norms, and h) traditional gendered presentations are perceived as being dull.

Underneath the heading **Experience**, the themes I examine are a) gender transgressive and butch lesbians sometimes experience masculine privilege, b) gender transgressive and butch lesbians experience safety issues, c) gender transgressive and butch lesbians experience being addressed as “sir” frequently, d) gender transgressive and

butch lesbians experience bathroom harassment, e) society's scrutinizing stares, and f) society feels threatened by gender transgressive and butch lesbians.

Under the heading **Community**, the themes I examine are a) gender transgressive and butch lesbians experience common struggles, b) gender transgressive views on differing gender identities: similarities and differences, c) butch and femme dynamic within romantic relationships, d) community is experienced primarily online for most, e) butch lesbian competition within the gender transgressive community, and f) relationships outside of gender transgressive lesbian communities are limited.

Lastly, under the heading **Genderphobia/Homophobia**, the themes I examine are a) genderphobia within the workplace, and b) genderphobia and homophobia within the family. These common headings and the themes underneath them are presented as a way to organize the data presented from the in-depth interviews with the participants.

Identity

In this section, participants reflect upon issues of gender identity as it affects their daily lives. The participants discuss the experiences they encounter within the social world, pertaining to their gender transgressive lesbian identities. The participants also examine how their gender identities pose a threat to the dominant gender norms within society.

Society Views Gender as Binary

The first questions asked of the participants during the interviews are based on their perceptions of how most people view gender. The participants of this study express their belief that society views gender as binary. As Linda explains, "I would say to the majority of people, it's a black/white issue. It's man/woman, boy/girl, pink and blue,

there are only two choices.” In other words, Linda believes that the majority of society views gender as boy/girl or man/woman. Participants also express that individuals within society also have the expectation that the expression of gender identity will fall within society’s views of the appropriate expression coinciding with the sex assigned at birth, such as male sex assignment expressing a masculine gender identity, and the female sex assignment expressing a feminine gender identity.

The participant’s explain their perception of a lack of gender fluidity within society due to heteronormative privilege, in which those who express traditional gender roles are rewarded and encouraged to be uncritical of gender identity. This lack of understanding from the public regarding gender identity has been addressed by Esther, one of my interview participants who states, “Generally, people like my parents or people that I meet at work and the sleepwalking [people who do not think critically about gender identity], they never had to think about it. Privilege is really comfortable. The whole world is not critical around gender.” The idea that most members of society are “sleepwalking” through gender identity conveys that from a gender transgressive lesbian standpoint, they perceive that the majority of people never think about gender. Instead, gender transgressive lesbians view society as adhering to the path prescribed to them at birth, regardless of personal feelings outside of these gender norms.

This perception that society views gender in a binary way, displays how gender transgressive lesbians pose a threat to society’s dominant gender system. Since gender transgressive lesbians do not conform to society’s gender norms, the gender binary view of the dominant culture within society is challenged upon the presence of the gender transgressive lesbian presentation.

Gender Outlaws Perceive Society's Gender Norms as Being Oppressive

For the participant's who express a gender identity outside of society's gender norm, there are perceived social sanctions, which are used against the gender outlaw from various social institutions and within social exchanges. As stated by Esther, "society does not reward people who present the gender that is right for them." Since gender transgressive lesbians express that society does not reward individuals presenting a gender outlaw identity, it can also be concluded by them, that society rewards individuals who adhere to social gender norms. Their perception of a rewards versus punishments system within society regarding gender identity and/or norms can cause those who would like to express their gender identity more fluidly to feel threatened into following strict gender roles, regardless of their own desire to present their gender freely. These gender outlaws suggest that they are constantly coming up against society's punishments in their free expression of their gender identity.

The participant in this study also suggests that not only are "gender fluid expressions" not rewarded, these expressions are rejected by mainstream society. As stated by Tricia, "I don't think our society is accepting to those who don't fit in those standard normative boxes." So for those individuals who express gender outside of dominant gender norms, they may perceive they are not accepted by society in various institutions. The participants surmise that this social isolation is another type of social sanction utilized against those who do not conform to traditional gender roles. Carol, one of the study's participants, describes the ways in which gender transgressive individuals are affected in their daily lives by saying that, "they probably feel lonely; hard to find partners; hard to date. When I was single it was hard to date. Because even being in the

lesbian community, I think some butches would find it hard to really find a group in the lesbian community.” As this response suggests, many gender transgressive and butch lesbians experience a rejection from both the LGBTQQIA community and mainstream society as well.

When asked how society views individuals who do not conform to traditional gender categories, various participants painted a portrait of what life is like on the other side of expressing gender in a non-conforming way. As Lesley states, society reacts to her gender expression “with hostility.” Celia states that those who express gender identity outside of social norms or who express gender fluidity are viewed as “freaks of society.” Further, as stated by participant Linda, “how I dress does affect how people respond to me. I think it affects my safety, you know I feel like I have to be alert. I’m aware of my surroundings at all times.” This social rejection and hostility directed to those who express gender identity outside of social norms leads to feelings of isolation and concerns about safety within various social settings. Safety is a big concern for them, as they are confronted by a hostile and judgmental social world.

Gender Identity is Complicated

The participant’s view of gender identity is complicated, in that there are varieties of ways in which to express gender transgressive identities. When asked what gender means to the participants, there were various responses. Carol says she identifies as Genderqueer, which “are people for whom some link in the feeling/expressing/being-perceived fails” and this failing is in the fact that they do not “follow the rules” of gender norms (Wilchins 2002:28). For participants such as Carol, gender is a presentation, as she expresses her gender identity through appearance and clothing, Carol says:

I totally identify as genderqueer because I'm queering gender. I view it as presentation; it's how you present yourself to the world. I'm not so much about genitalia. I always have to stop myself, because I'm like, 'oh you're butch because you like femmes,' but you can be butch and like butches because that's a sex thing not a gender thing. So it means presentation to me.

In contrast, a portion of the participants view gender as defined by society. As stated by Esther, "gender is a site of inquiry," or a way for members of society to gather information about them based on their gender expression. Celia also reiterates this view, she states, "it's a term or some label that society uses to communicate really. I don't think that there is much behind it to me." Both participants share the idea that gender is created by society as a way of gathering information about members within society or used for social communication purposes.

For some participants, gender has a hybrid of meanings. Joey states, "Gender means to me, more so my characteristics or traits. [It is...] how I present myself, how I carry myself. I think it's a bunch of different things, not just one specific thing. It's definitely a bunch of different things." Joey's view communicates the idea that gender can be presented in a variety of ways and traits. In Joey's perspective, these traits are viewed as being rooted in the various attributes in which a gender transgressive identity can be expressed. The participant can either view these characteristics as innate or developed over time. Based upon the data collected from my sample of participants, being a gender transgressive or butch lesbian is perceived by some to be a conscious presentation.

For other participant's, gender is not only an expression but also a celebration. This point is underscored by Tricia who states, "I am just who I am, I am woman, I'm very out being a woman. I celebrate womanhood but I also respect masculinity and my

masculinity.” As Tricia identifies as a “tomboy-femme,” gender identity, for those who express gender fluidity, can be an expression of a multitude of identities. Many participants within this study simultaneously express the celebration of womanhood and masculinity. They feel a pride within both identities and both of these identities are not seen as mutually exclusive from each other.

In the interviews of this study, various participants describe their experiences regarding popular views on gender within society. Their responses overwhelmingly describe popular opinion as viewing gender uncritically. In the “gender identity is complicated” portion of this study, the participants were asked to reflect upon their own views of gender and what it means to them. The participants suggest the idea that gender identity is a complicated issue. As stated by Esther in response to questions about her gender identity,

I feel like, I’m 36 years old now and I feel like I am a recovering identity politician, and so when you ask me that, I have the impulse to keep it simple and say ‘butch/dyke,’ but there is also another side of me like well... there are also so many different grey areas in however it is that I identify as. Because I don’t feel I live in a butch/femme world or a queer world or a Latino world. I feel I am just trying to strive for a sense of integrity. I feel that is a subject that needs to be complicated, especially from as a sociological concept, but I definitely identify as a masculine female (laughs), not masculine of center, but I definitely don’t shy away from calling myself what I am, especially in non-queer spaces.

In cases like Esther’s, gender identity is both viewed as fixed (masculine female), yet is still complicated by issues pertaining to the various “sides” of an individual. This idea communicates that some gender transgressive and butch lesbians are expected to describe their gender identity in “simple” terms, yet many who identify as a gender outlaw feel that gender identity is a much more complicated issue. Further, this gender identity is

expressed with pride in “non-queer spaces” by many gender outlaws, despite the discrimination that may be ensued by a hostile and genderphobic society.

For other participants of this study, the label “butch,” has been prescribed by various members of society to the participant, such as Linda who states:

I’m not the one who identifies, but that others identify for me. Like when I came out at 27, I was automatically labeled as butch. I didn’t even know what that was. Within a community, everybody had a label and so I was like... oh. So, I guess on some level I do feel more masculine or butch. That’s not like the first thing that I identify with, I guess if that’s the right way to say it. I feel like other people identify for me, like everybody uses labels to identify me, whether I want them to or not. When people meet Kim and I, people automatically say ‘oh, you’re the masculine one,’ and I’m like wait, don’t let the exterior fool you because really I’m the princess; I don’t like to get dirty, she’s the one who kills spiders. People identify me more than I identify myself. You know after going to something like Butch Voices, do I feel like connected to people that identify as butch? I mean yeah, if I could pick a group of people that I feel a sort of connection with then, yeah, I have something in common with them. Yeah, it would probably be butch women.

Linda feels a commonality with butch identified lesbians, however she does not feel she falls within the “typical” idea of what a butch is defined as within society. This point reveals that some gender transgressive and butch lesbians feel a sort of pressure to maintain stereotypical masculinity based on their gender identity. So while a gender transgressive or butch lesbian may feel one way on the inside, they are expected to adhere to the presentation expectation from society.

For gender transgressive lesbian cis-women of color, their gender identity is often expressed as an identity other than butch. Tricia states,

I definitely celebrate my womanhood; I’m a big tomboy. I fail to use the word butch because it is not used that often in African American communities. It would be more the equivalent of stud, but I don’t use stud. I would say, I am all woman with masculine tendencies. I am basically a tomboy. I would say tomboy-femme. I wear lipstick too, you know?

Tricia expresses that women in the African American community do not usually identify as “butch,” but instead identify more often as “stud.” However in her case, she does not identify as “stud” either. She states that she feels more like a “woman with masculine tendencies” or a “tomboy-femme,” in that she expresses her gender in a fluid way. This is a different perspective from the ways in which people make the assumption that she is totally masculine. For gender transgressive and butch lesbians such as Tricia, they embrace different forms of gender identity and proudly display their gender fluidity to the social world.

Based on the various responses from participants, gender identity is indeed a complicated issue, varying from person to person, which can also result in various identities within each person. While the majority of participants identify as butch, the participants are also critical of gender identity and presentation. Further many of them acknowledge that this is not a simple issue but one that needs to be viewed from a complicated and critical lens.

Gender Identity and Sexual Identity as Merged

For most respondents, their gender transgressive identity has developed in conjunction with their lesbian identity. As Lesley states, “They pretty much evolved the same way. I’m a woman, a butch woman, I’m a lesbian, they are all separate but they all go together.” Joey also builds upon this idea, expressing that she feels she cannot be a lesbian without her butch identity. She says, “To me they’re the same. For myself, I can’t be one without the other.” So for Joey, her butch identity is the way she expresses her lesbian identity. Further, this idea shows that some gender transgressive and butch lesbians may feel protective of both identities, as they are dependent upon one another.

For Celia, her sexual and gender identity are “intrinsic to each other.” However she also expresses how these identities did develop at different times, with her gender identity developing first. She says:

I would say my gender identity formed way before. As much as people want to say that it's sexuality, it's sex...it's something different. It was for me. Because I remember being called gay when I didn't even know what gay was, and I was not attracted to women. Like my progression was, I would always want to hang out with the boys, because the boys would always skateboard and ride bikes and girls were always playing with dolls. I didn't want to play with dolls. I very distinctly remember I always wanted to hang out with the boys. I wanted to be with the boys, but I didn't necessarily want to be a boy.

This point reveals that some gender transgressive and butch lesbians feel they do not fit in with the average heterosexual woman. They can relate more to masculine activities and therefore enjoy doing activities that are not typically displayed by feminine gender identities. The social grouping expectations from society onto girls and women, leaves some gender transgressive and butch lesbians feeling as if they do not fit into society's expectations of them.

For other participants, such as Carol, lesbian and butch identity are merged by their feminist affiliations. She states, “Feminist, Woman, Butch, Queer, Lesbian, for me they go hand in hand. My butch-ness is the core of me; my presentation and how I walk in the world. And then my lesbian is woman-loving-woman, so they are merged.” Like Carol, Tricia also states that both her lesbian identity and her gender identity are a reflection of her identity as a woman. She says:

They are both womanhood. I know in terms in of my sexual identity, I have more masculine or dominant tendencies. I tend to be attracted to more feminine women. I guess also a more submissive personality seems to work better for me. Although I am open to switch and do switch.

For most participants, gender identity and sexual identity are dependent upon one another. Further, most participants view both identities as merging with their feminist affiliations, in which womanhood is celebrated. This perspective reveals that some gender transgressive and butch lesbians perceive their lesbian and butch gender identities as merged. For others, they build upon these merged identities in the context of a feminist and woman-centered focus. This woman-centered focus is carried out in various aspects of their lives, from their social world, to their sexual orientation and gender identity, it is all a celebration of womanhood.

The Meaning of Butch is Diverse

To get a clearer idea of the identity construction of gender transgressive lesbians, interview participants were asked to reflect on what “being butch” means to them.

Participants, like Mika, express a variety of explanations; that it is a balance between masculine and feminine, Mika says:

Being butch is like walking a tightrope. We have to be manly, but gentle; strong, but also show emotions; be able to fix stuff, as well as do the dishes. Being butch means taking care of your girlfriend, paying for dinner, opening doors, and being protective and strong.

This idea communicates that being butch is reflected not only in the presentation of the self, but also in how they relate in context to their romantic relationships. This is also echoed by other participants, such as Helen who says, “I think from my own point of view, you have the masculine features, you do the typical butch stuff; like opening the door for your girl, you’re out there painting or fixing something, sports, things like that.”

This perspective reveals that some gender transgressive and butch lesbians feel that being butch is an expression based on socially defined masculine activities, such as fixing things or chivalrous actions towards other women. For others, being butch is a merging of

both socially constructed expressions of masculine and feminine activities, such as both being “gentle,” and “manly” at once.

Tricia furthers this point of expressing chivalry toward her partner, but also points out that “being butch” is also reflected in her attitude and presentation. She says:

I’m butch. When it comes to my lover, the context is very chivalry is not dead! I make sure she has maximum comfort in the world. Independent of my partner, I am a very type A personality, independent thinker, and open minded, but once I make up my mind its very solid. I uh...I have a huge appreciation for all things woman, it’s very important as a masculine butch woman. There’s more...um...I think also with that expression there is a sense of honor toward being butch for me and it’s honoring exactly who I am and what I feel in my everyday expression, it correlates to dress. Every day I think about my outward expression, my external expression; which is very butch. I carry myself in a certain way. I am approachable and nice, but I take no bullshit, and to me that is butch. I like to honor what is real in my life.

For Tricia (who identifies as both tomboy-femme and butch), she expresses that for some gender transgressive and butch lesbians, their attitude towards a judgmental world is expressed in their butch presentations. They feel their presentation is based in honoring their own gender identity along with intentionally confronting others within a genderphobic society.

Other participants, such as Rhonda, do not conform to the notion that being butch means being emotionally tough. She says:

What’s funny is that I like to dress butch but I think inside, emotional wise I am more feminine than Jessica [her femme spouse]. I see a commercial and I cry. I think the typical butch woman is masculine, the protector, so I kind of bend on that, but that is just the way I am.

This perspective reveals the diversity in what butch means to various gender transgressive and butch lesbians. In cases like Rhonda, being butch is not rooted in a masculine set of behaviors but, instead, based solely on presentation. This perspective communicates that identifying as butch, does not necessarily dictate what types of

emotions are to be felt or expressed. However, this definition of “masculinity” is also rooted in a stereotypical view of masculinity, in that showing sensitivity and becoming overcome with emotion are viewed as not being “masculine” behaviors.

For others like Joey, there is an element of emotional strength in her view of being butch. She states:

Good question, what does it mean to be butch? Well, to me, it means a bunch of different things. It means being strong, of course I mean more than just physically, because I’m not a body builder. I think it is more so an emotional strength, because of what I spoke about earlier; what I go through daily and what a butch has to endure. It’s uh strength; it’s for me looking how I look. It’s not trying to transition into being a man, respecting both my masculine and my feminine side, not trying to overhang on one side or the other really. You know, maybe I do lean a little more on the masculine side, but I’m not ashamed of my feminine side. I’m not ashamed of being a woman.

Joey also expresses that being butch is presentation as well. She continues:

I don’t wear dresses, I don’t wear high heels, and I don’t conform to what society says I should look like. You know, and I also do not shave my legs, I don’t shave my armpits. It doesn’t mean that I want to transition into being a man; it just means I am what I think I am, and what I think I should be.

For butch lesbians such as Joey, her presentation is rooted in emotional strength and a respect for both her feminine and masculine sides. Being butch also means that she does not conform to gender norms for women, such as shaving her legs or wearing dresses. Further, for Joey being butch is perceived as being proud of being a woman without accepting the social gender norms put forth from a gender normative society. Through these descriptions of embracing both femininity and masculinity at once, Joey is embracing both sides of the gender binary, therefore undermining the sameness taboo at the core of the gender binary.

Carol also reiterates the point that being butch lies heavily in her presentation. She says:

It's the way I dress; the way I cut my hair, I like fixing things. It's so weird to say such mannish things, to say just because you like that, because a femme woman can fix things too. But it's what I like. I like barbecuing, I like being a gentleman for women, standing up for women, opening doors for women.

Carol's views echo those described above, describing being butch as characterized by being "chivalrous" or being "woman centered." Carol expresses that it feels weird for her to say butch manifests itself through a myriad of such "mannish things," but she accepts that as a part of herself while also acknowledging that femme women do those things as well. She describes her chivalry as being expressed in a woman-centered way.

Celia describes that being butch is more complicated than expressing a traditional butch presentation. She says:

Most butches have short hair because that outwardly appears as traditional men, male gender. Does that mean that a butch with long hair is less butch? No, not at all! Because even though a lot of people think the attributes of 'oh it's your outward appearance that's what makes you butch.' No. I've seen a lot of very effeminate butch girls, they look butch, but they're not butch. Butch is almost like a state of being, that's almost completely separate from my outward appearance or who I fuck. I could be in a room full of women who are all gay and I can separate all the femmes and I can separate all those who are not femmes, and I can still instantly know which ones are butch as well. But it's not, it's really hard to describe. You know I'm not twenty and I have been operating in this mode for all my life. It's like for instance, I ride motorcycles, like I could walk into a room and not because the way a lot of us dress but you can tell the people that ride bikes, it's almost like that whole motorcycle culture, or people that listen to alternative music. Like I said, I know a lot of girls that look butch, but as soon as you start talking to them, you're like no.

For some gender transgressive lesbians such as Celia, being butch is not all about presentation; it's also an attitude or a "state of being." In her description of being in a room full of lesbians, she expresses that she can immediately separate the butches from the femmes based on their "state of being." When she compares gender transgressive groups to motorcycle groups, she says that regardless of their presentation, she can identify who identifies with the group she belongs to herself. Further, just because a

lesbian presents in a masculine way, does not mean she identifies as a butch. For some participants, their own judgments about what butch means to them, is then carried over into their perception of other individual's gender identities. What butch means to them, is what they label as being butch overall.

There was one interview participant who challenged the idea that butch is an expression of masculinity. Lesley states:

To be butch means that I am a woman. Not conventional. My femininity has an identity and that is butch. I don't identify as masculine in any form of the word at all, and I reject that. I reject anyone saying that I'm masculine. No I'm feminine, and my femininity is called butch.

Therefore for Lesley, she rejects the masculine label put onto her by society. She defines butch as her form of expressing her femininity. She questions, who decides what feminine and masculine really is? She creates her own definitions for her own gendered expressions. For some gender outlaws, they question the gender binary of masculinity and femininity, and what those labels mean.

For participants such as Esther, there is a political message in presenting butch. She says:

It's definitely visually challenging, there's definitely a power in that presence. The discomfort and tension and the fun it is to fuck with people. I don't know... I don't disavow butch at all, I think especially in the post-modern world where there is a tendency to explode all these categories.

Some butches are aware that being a gender transgressive or butch lesbian is visually challenging, and also enjoy "fucking" with gender normative individuals. So while some have expressed that they just want to be treated the same as any gender normative person would be, others take some enjoyment in visually rejecting gender norms. There is also a pride in staying within your so-called gender roots, as expressed by Esther who

appreciates her butch identity in the midst of the many modern gender identities available with which to identify.

Esther continues, explaining that gender outlaw and butch history is very important for her. She says:

The history of all our gender outlaws is very near and dear to me. Also, the corroboration that happened previously before the transgender discourse is important to recover. Sylvia Rivera and Marsha Johnson as trans activists, and rebels, instead of them being called drag queens or as men who dress up in dresses. It's important to address people how they want; some people might be more comfortable being called a drag queen than trans woman. I think butch is important as queer historical referencing.

So for Esther, in being butch identified, it is important to honor the “gender outlaws” that came before her. There is an ancestral pride for some within the LGBTQQI community, for those who came before them. As Esther explains butch is “important as queer historical referencing” because though the LGBTQQI community has been largely erased from traditionally dominant gender normative history, the LGBTQQI community has a very rich history with their own heroes, such as Sylvia Rivera and Marsha Johnson. There is a pride in embracing a gender outlaw identity, and the LGBTQQI ancestors have paved the way for many who identify as LGBTQQI. These heroes have contributed to the pride the participant's feel within this community.

Outward Appearance Reflects Internal Gender Identity

When the participants were asked if their outward appearance reflects their gender identity, the responses overwhelmingly affirmed that it does. Further, the participants communicate that this is a natural way of expressing themselves. Celia says:

Yes, but it's not premeditated. It's not like I go to the store and say I can't buy this pink shirt because it's not butch. Like I have always felt comfortable wearing jeans. It's like this, I remember when my mother wanted me to put on a skirt and I didn't want to go outside and play. I felt insecure, I felt like it was wrong. I have a

sister that's only a few years older than me who is very, very, very feminine and heterosexual, and like my mom thought okay I was going to be the same way as my sister. Luckily my mom was like okay, if you want to wear shorts, wear shorts. If you want to wear pants, wear pants, she didn't force me. But that's how it kind of started, I mean before I even knew what sex was.

However, now that she is older, she consciously presents as butch. She continues:

So now that I'm older, it's more calculated. I'm alternative (in style), so it's not like I'm going to present as male, because I never wanted to be a dude. It's just, this is more comfortable. I'm more of a t-shirt and jeans kind of person. But now that I'm older, it's like it's kind of cool to wear a tie. This is very recent actually, where I'm actually consciously presenting, like I'm actually fucking with gender fluidity myself.

So for Celia, the desire to dress in a way that expresses her butch identity formed in her childhood. She feels that her butch presentation has always been psychologically comfortable for her. However, as she gets older, she is consciously presenting as butch and "fucking with gender." She is finding delight in presenting herself in a conscious way, much like Esther expresses the fun she has in "fucking with people" regarding their gender normative expectations of her.

For others like Joey, the fact that she is allowed to express herself freely in her older age is very different than how she was raised as a child. Joey says:

I couldn't always dress the way I wanted to. So I grew up and I dress exactly the way that I want to. So when I wear a tie, you know even if there are social repercussions for that, its freedom. There's nobody stopping me from doing that, it's not illegal to wear a tie and I'm not going to get burned at the stake. I may get a comment here and there, and some snickers or looks, but ultimately I can do that if I want to.

This freedom to choose is important for the butch identity, as there are many butch identified individuals who express that they were not allowed to express themselves freely as children. It feels liberating as an adult for the butch identified individual to be

able to put on a suit and tie and walk into the world freely in this presentation. There are a number of participant's who consciously present and enjoy their butch presentations.

Carol, who says she realizes presentation is important within society, also expresses this viewpoint. She chooses to express her gender identity in the manner in which she would like to be viewed by society. She says her presentation makes her feel "powerful." She elaborates:

I love clothing. I love to dress up. I always want to help butches dress up. It's not like an artificial thing, but in looking nice you're presenting to the straight world. Like to men, I tied my tie better than you, and just because they are men's clothes, that doesn't mean they don't fit me. When I look good, I feel good and I become more powerful.

So while the dominant gender normative society may be judging her, she has pride in her appearance. This experience provides her with self-respect, which is important especially in a society that often expresses hostility and rejection towards gender outlaws.

Other participants express that they also consciously present, but for other reasons such as protection. Mika says:

My presentation tells the world I'm butch, accept it or get the fuck out of my way. It's a persona butches have to portray to let people know not to mess with us, and that we are strong and can protect ourselves if need be.

So while there is an element of presenting for fun or for pride, other butches feel an element of protection through displaying a "tough" masculine image. This is a way of telling the world that they can protect themselves if they need to. With the many hate crimes that have occurred against gender outlaws, a feeling of being able to protect oneself is important for butch lesbians such as Mika.

Helen describes her presentation more simply. She dresses the way she does for comfort, she says, "Yes. Button downs, long sleeves, dress pants, dress shoes, boxers, all

of it.” She continued, “It’s just what I’m comfortable in. I’m not trying to make a statement with it; it’s just what I’m comfortable in.” So for Helen, presentation is not about trying to make a statement, it is just for her own comfort level. This notion of dressing for psychological comfort is also reiterated by Mika, who states:

God yes. I mean, look at me. Anyone can tell I’m butch. I’m most comfortable in men’s clothing. I can’t recall the last time I wore women’s clothing. Not even one item of women’s clothing.

So for Mika, there are various reasons why she presents the way she does with her clothing, for comfort and for protection. Her presentation is premeditated and is not to be mistaken as anything but butch.

Lesley points out that many women including straight women have a butch presentation. She says, “I’m free to express it in any way I choose to. A lot of women don’t share that with me. It’s not just lesbians, there are number of straight women who present as butch. They are not lesbians, but they are butch.” So, in the case of some participants, butch identity and lesbian identity are distinct and can be expressed separately. Lesley’s observation of heterosexual women having a “butch” presentation further complicates the idea of what the definition of “butch” really is. While many butch lesbians state that their sexual orientation (lesbian) is blended with their gender identity (butch), Lesley communicates that having a butch presentation does not always coincide with having a lesbian sexual orientation.

Gender Transgressive and Butch Lesbian Presentations Challenge Outside Gender Norms

Gender norms are enforced within society in a myriad of ways, including but not limited to discriminatory laws and social sanctions. These social sanctions seek to

disconnect those who are gender outlaws from the rest of society. As stated by Audre Lorde (1984:239):

Institutionalized rejection of difference is an absolute necessity in a profit economy, which needs outsiders as surplus people. As members of such an economy, we have all been programmed to respond to the human differences between us with fear and loathing and to handle that difference in one of three ways: ignore it, and if that is not possible, copy it if we think it is dominant, or destroy it if we think it is subordinate. But we have no patterns for relating across our human differences as equals. As a result, those differences have been misnamed and misused in the service of separation and confusion. (P. 239)

Furthering this view, the participants of this study have experienced the ways in which society has sought to destroy those who identify outside of gender norms. When the participants were asked if they feel that their gender identity challenges outside traditional gender categories. The participants express that indeed it does. Mika states:

Yes definitely. Butches are a rare breed nowadays though. When I look around gay clubs, there are hardly any 'real' butches left. People who follow what the majority of what society sees as 'normal,' tend to stare at me and wonder if I'm a man or if I'm a lesbian. I don't know if the hetero community knows the difference between lesbian and butch.

Butch lesbians such as Mika perceive that there is a lack of knowledge from the majority of heterosexuals regarding LGBTQQI communities and gender identities. So, what Mika is expressing, is that she views heterosexuals commonly mistaking sexual orientation and gender identity as being intrinsic to each other (though for some participants they have expressed this view as well). To her, she feels that "butch" is a "dying breed," as she feels that there are "hardly any real butches left," as her definition of being a "real butch" is rooted in "being very masculine." For her, she feels alone in her masculine butch identity. Further, as gender identities are becoming more diversified in terms (such as macha, boi, stud, etc.), she perceives that the butch gender identity is dying out. Mika also perceives that butch identity is disappearing due to lesbians "following what the majority of what

society sees as normal,” therefore choosing to express their lesbian gender identity in a way that conforms to society’s norms of what a lesbian “should” look like, such as a femme or gender-blender lesbian presentation. Mika is also often mislabeled as a transgender man or as a cisgender man due to her masculine presentation. This is an example of how gender transgressive lesbians pose a greater threat to the dominant gender system than femme, gender-blender lesbians and some transpeople do; as gender transgressive lesbians embrace both sides of the gender binary simultaneously. Mika’s perception is that there is a lack of butch visibility within mainstream society, so this creates a social ignorance regarding butch lesbian presentations.

For other participants such as Helen, the reasoning as to the intention of her presentation is questioned. She says, “They just don’t get it. Why do you want to be different? What are you trying to say? I’m not trying to say anything! Don’t think too hard. It’s just me.” Further, she believes her sexual orientation is also based on essential traits. She says, “Why would I pick one of the hardest lives to live that there is? It’s not a choice. It’s just who I am and I can’t help it. I like girls.” Helen views her gender and sexual identities as being based upon more essentialist innate qualities and traits. In Helen’s perspective, she doesn’t think other people understand her butch lesbian presentation. They question her motivations as to why she is presenting in the way she does. For Helen, she is just being herself without a motive for making statements with her presentation.

For Tricia, her relationship with her femme partner is seen mostly through the male lens or male gaze. She says:

We (with her femme partner) were at a bar; we were the only African Americans in the bar. It’s been around since the 1920s and we were not allowed to be at that

bar back then, and the culture is still the same. We like the beer there; it's a local microbrew. I was dressed in women's clothing but I carry myself butch. I lead and I pulled out her chair. It's a lot for people to look at. Anytime we go anywhere, especially in our city, it depends on if they are men or women. The men are attracted to us. She's beautiful, I would stare too, and sometimes I'm in the mood, sometimes I'm not. We did have a guy approach us, um but people get very... usually the men are trying to spit their game, but women sometimes are very interesting in their reactions. I think there is an intimidation factor; we get a lot of stares. The men think it's exotic; we are more acceptable for hetero men than hetero women.

As Tricia expresses, when she presents "in women's clothing" and is seen on a date with her femme-presenting girlfriend, men become attracted to their "exotic" relationship. She perceives that their presentation as a couple is "exotic" to heterosexual men, she also feels that heterosexual men are more accepting of their lesbian relationships than heterosexual women are. She also expresses that men "spit their game," and hit on them, while women are more intimidated by their relationship. This male view of lesbianism as fantasy or for the enjoyment of men can be said to be rooted in the patriarchal notion that women's sexuality is owned by and for men, however this is not the reality for lesbians who have no interest in men as sexual partners.

For participants such as Joey, the image of two feminine lesbians in a relationship has become a man's fantasy due to media portrayals of lesbians. She says:

In the lesbian community, like when you have two femmes together, and they can even borrow each other's clothes, it all seems like they are a reflection of the media; like a man's fantasy. That's what being a lesbian is, either you are a dyke trying to be a man, or you're two feminine women getting together for a man to watch.

So for Joey, she perceives this as a double bind in which her gender identity and sexual orientation are constantly being either mislabeled or being sexualized by heterosexual men. For her, she also questions the romantic relationships between two feminine identified lesbians as being a "reflection of the media; like a man's fantasy." For Joey,

the only way for lesbians to avoid this male ownership of female sexuality is to express a butch presentation, which is not part of the heterosexual man's typical lesbian fantasy. Her butch presentation fights and rejects this heterosexual male sexualization of her lesbian sexual orientation.

For gender transgressive lesbians, many perceive that their gender identity is constantly being judged or misconstrued from patriarchal ideas regarding lesbian women. They are either viewed as wanting to be men or as being there for a man's fantasy. This topic was also elaborated upon in Denissen and Saguy's (2013:394) study of tradeswomen and their experiences within their field. In their study, tradesmen employed objectification of lesbian tradeswomen's romantic relationships, as this is "another way that tradesmen neutralize the threat of lesbian/female autonomy...by recasting them as objects of men's sexual desire" (394). For participants such as Joey, a butch presentation is a deterrent for the notion that women are there for men's pleasure. Through the butch expression of the lesbian identity being apart from the male lens, butch identity rejects the idea of male ownership over female sexuality. They create their own definition of sexuality apart from the male perspective. This is another example of how gender transgressive lesbian identities pose threats to the dominant gender system.

Traditional Gendered Presentations are Perceived as Being Dull

The participants were asked to reflect upon how they in turn feel about traditional gendered presentations. In some cases, the participants view traditional gender presentations as boring and restricting. Linda says, "Well, I think some people are very boring in how they express themselves, I'm not trying to be mean or anything by saying

that. I just think people are afraid to express themselves, you know?” Joey also expresses this idea, she says:

Well, I like being a butch and I like my femme to be feminine, so maybe I’m conforming to that myself. But I think it’s fine, that is how it is supposed to be for my life. For the outside world, when I see heterosexuals conforming so much or even for lesbians who conform to how they are ‘supposed’ to look within in a straight society; it’s enough to laugh about. Looking at a heterosexual couple and family, father and mother, son and daughter; son and dad wearing sports shirt, mom and daughter wearing pink. It’s a very obvious joke; they cannot escape the crazy suburban image. So I laugh about it, it’s ridiculous to me, like I am probably ridiculous to them. They are trying to fit in a little box and that would drive me crazy.

The theme of traditional gendered presentations being considered “boring” was repeated throughout this study. Helen expressed that her heterosexual friends even express boredom in their heterosexual traditional gendered presentations and view gay/lesbian life as exciting. When asked how she feels about traditional gendered presentations, Helen replies that she feels they are “boring, so boring. I have straight friends who are like ‘you guys have the funnest pride festivals,’ the guys throw really great parties. It’s like, we are not boring!”

For other participants, they find traditional gendered presentations to be constricting. As stated by Mika:

I don’t like them [traditional gendered presentations]. I find them constricting and wasteful. I think everyone should feel comfortable in their own skin, comfortable to be a man and wear a tutu if you want. We shouldn’t judge each other by how we dress or look, rather by how we act, you know?

As Mika expresses, traditional gendered presentations can be constricting for anyone who would like to express gender fluidity.

For other participants, some feel that they are themselves performing traditional gender identities, such as the participant Carol who says, “I mean I feel like I’m a

traditional guy, like I'm a woman who is a traditional guy. [In regards to] presentation, as long as people are enacting what they really feel [it's fine], but some people are presenting in a way that they are not [feeling].”

So while some gender transgressive lesbians view traditional gendered presentations as boring, some also view it as constricting. From their perspective, they view gender differently than gender normative individuals do. It may be said that gender outlaws are forced into feeling negatively about traditional gendered presentations, since they are often cast aside and made to feel as outsiders for challenging the traditional gender norms of society. Their perspective is that a traditional gendered presentation would be “constricting” for themselves as well as “boring,” as they would not feel free in such a presentation. This being due to traditional gendered presentations not reflecting how they authentically feel within themselves.

Experience

This study focuses on the daily-lived experiences of gender transgressive and butch lesbians. The experiences that are described by the participants are expected to provide insight into how they experience the social world, and what everyday life is like for gender transgressive and butch lesbians. It is through their own descriptions (along with my analysis) of their experiences that we may have a deeper understanding of what life is like for gender transgressive and butch identified lesbians.

Gender Transgressive and Butch Lesbians Sometimes Experience Masculine Privilege

Although the participants were not asked if they experience masculine privilege due to their masculine gender presentations, a number of participants express that they do in fact benefit from certain forms of masculine privilege. This masculine privilege can be

found within various aspects of their lives, such as work. As Mika states, “In my work life I tend to be listened to more often than other feminine female coworkers. Sad, but it happens.” This masculine privilege has also been experienced in social settings or in various stores. As Joey states:

Like if my partner (femme identified) and I go out to dinner and we get the check, the check always gets put towards me. Like if we go to a store, I’m addressed more by salesmen for more technical buys such as a DVD player, a TV, computer, all the technical toys. They think that I will understand more than my partner who dresses feminine, so they look me in the eye. I know that irritates her and it does for me too, because it shouldn’t be assumed that I understand more, you know? Especially when I feel that she is smarter than me.

Joey perceives this masculine privilege as demeaning towards her femme-identified partner. Since Joey is woman-identified herself, she has a deeper understanding of what is behind the masculine privilege she receives. She notices that her femme-identified partner is being taken less seriously due to her feminine presentation. The experience of being both a woman and also masculine identified provides an insight into what is happening during these encounters. Joey, for one, notices and acknowledges her masculine privilege, but she also is critical of it from a woman’s perspective.

For Linda, she critiques the way some gender transgressive lesbians can be found filling the patriarchal role they portray themselves as fighting against. She states:

That makes butches very ironic to me sometimes, because how women fight that patriarchal society and everything that a man stands for, but then they’re [gender transgressive lesbians] kind of taking that on, they’re filling that role, and its very fascinating when I see certain women doing that.

Linda is critiquing the acceptance of masculine privilege from some butch-identified women. She sees other butches filling the role of the patriarchy they claim they are fighting against. Linda perceives that some butch-identified lesbians accept their privilege and perpetuate that privilege. For her, this is fascinating and ironic, as she views

woman-identified butch lesbian identity as being a feminist identity. However, as she says, not all butch-identified lesbians can be assumed to be feminists.

This complicated issue was touched upon in the introduction of this project, as this was one of the many arguments presented at the Butch Voices 2011 conference. There have been differing opinions on what the butch/femme dynamic means and how this is expressed within a relationship between the two. Questions about masculine privilege within society and their effect upon feminine identified/presenting individuals have been discussed in various journal articles, textbooks and within personal conversations. It is apparent through the experience of certain participants within this study, that there is such a thing as gender transgressive lesbians benefitting from some masculine privilege in certain contexts and that it is not unnoticed among gender transgressive lesbians. However in Moore's study (2006:134), gender transgressive lesbians were still subjected to misogynist disadvantages, especially economically.

Gender Transgressive and Butch Lesbians Experience Safety Issues

Many participants express that they experience the feeling of being unsafe in various settings within society. The HRC (Human Rights Campaign) reported a study conducted by Harris Interactive regarding hate crimes against LGBT individuals. It states that 54% of LGBT people "are concerned about being the victim of a hate crime," with 27% of those who were polled being lesbians who stated they were "extremely concerned" about being a victim of a hate crime (Durso 2012). This feeling has also been expressed by the participants of this study, such as Linda who states, "How I dress does affect how people respond to me. I think it affects my safety, you know, I feel like I have

to be alert.” Gender transgressive lesbians, as Carol states, experience homophobia and genderphobia:

I was with a bunch of butches and we were at a strip club. We cut the line by paying the bouncer and these guys screamed out ‘fags!’ to us, and I was just like, Wow! So part of my body is like, I’ve just been like discriminated against and seen as this different thing and they could physically harm me.

Carol expresses her shock at being called “fags” by men in this instance, in this case she wonders if she is safe. In this group setting, she is facing direct male homophobic aggression towards her and her other butch-identified friends. The safety issue is questioned from the standpoint as a woman and as a lesbian.

The concern for safety for gender transgressive lesbians is shared among the family members and friends of the participants. Linda says,

Whether it is at work, which is why we need laws to protect people, um when they’re out in public, I know that my safety is a concern for a lot of people. You know, I try to observe when I’m on the bus or the train, just because I feel like I’m the only lesbian on there, like where are all the gay folks?!

Linda’s experience of feeling isolated in certain social situations is experienced especially when on public transit. She wonders if she is alone in these situations as an LGBTQQI person. Her safety is in question in this lonely experience. She wonders if the people on her bus are homophobic or genderphobic. She questions, will someone harass me? If they do, who will help me? She perceives that there is nobody on her bus that will have her back, since she thinks she is the only LGBTQ person in sight. These questions are something that both women and LGBTQQI individuals can identify with, in this case both sex and gender identity are intersected, and feelings of safety are an issue in both of these cases.

Gender Transgressive and Butch Lesbians Experience Being Addressed as “Sir”

Frequently

All participants of this study mentioned being called “sir” in various situations within society. The feelings they have about being addressed in this manner are varied. In the study “Gendered Homophobia and the Contradictions of Workplace Discrimination for Women in the Building Trades,” Denissen and Saguy (2013:385) describe that “butch and gender-blending women may be lesbian or straight and may sometimes be taken for men, but-unlike transmen-they do not identify as men” (385). The participants of this study all identify as cis-women, therefore most reject being referred to as sir, such as Joey who says:

I don’t want to be addressed as, ‘how can I help you ma’am,’ or ‘how can I help you sir.’ I’m not really comfortable either way, but I’m more comfortable with being called ‘ma’am’ than ‘sir.’ But I don’t like either really. But if you have to call me one, I will be irritated with it, but I would rather be called ‘ma’am.’ I’m not trying to be a man, and I don’t even wear ties in public because I already get mistaken enough for being a man by wearing a baseball hat, shirt and jeans.

Joey prefers to be addressed in a gender neutral way. She is irritated when people address her as “sir,” because she does not identify as a man. Being mislabeled as such is just another daily experience reminding her that society has a very binary view regarding gender identity. Since she experiences this quite often, she goes out of her way to dress less masculine than she would like. She decides not to wear the tie she would like to wear because they already think she is a man in her average everyday clothing.

Linda states that this happens to her in the workplace quite often, she says, “I think people sometimes don’t look at the individual. Especially where I work now, I get called ‘guy’ a lot or ‘sir’.” This experience is also echoed throughout this study as Carol states, “I’m being called sir constantly, and am always getting hassled going into the

bathroom.” Helen also states “sometimes they call me sir.” In these cases the participant is being identified by society as a gender she does not identify with, and this happens on a daily basis and in various places.

On the other hand, there are a few participants who are not offended at being called “sir.” As Rhonda states, “Well, I guess I really don’t care. When I get people saying sir or ma’am, I don’t correct them. However they see me, it doesn’t bother me. So if they think I’m a man that’s fine.” In her perspective, she is not concerned regarding if society views her gender identity as being associated with being a man. She accepts being addressed as both “sir” and “ma’am.” It could be that she has simply gotten used to being misidentified or that she is not sensitive to either label.

One participant expressed the notion of social confusion regarding the LGBTQQI community, Linda says:

I think now because of the transgender community, there is a much more visual part that there’s now this automatic assumption that if you’re dressing as a different gender or expressing yourself that way, that all of a sudden you’re put into that (transgender) category. So it’s like ‘oh you’re trying to be a guy,’ and I’m like no.

So for Linda, this social confusion between a transgender identity and a gender transgressive lesbian gender identity are often blurred by society. Within the LGBTQQI community, there are various gender identities and sexual orientations. In Linda identifying with the cis-woman L (lesbian) portion of the LGBTQQI community, she prefers to be identified as a woman. She perceives that the T (transgender) portion of the community has stood out within society in their quest to be addressed as they appear (excluding genderqueer trans expression). For example, a feminine presenting transgender woman most often (though not always) prefers to be addressed with the

pronouns “she, her, hers,” whereas a masculine presenting transgender man commonly (though not always) prefers to be addressed with the pronouns “he, him, his.” For Linda, this has led some within society to be uncritical and undiscerning of various gender identities, as they simply accept masculine presentation as preferring to be addressed in male pronouns, and feminine presentation as preferring to be addressed in female pronouns. However, for Linda and other cisgender woman-identified butches, gender identity is more complicated than that. Masculine presentation does not always equate as identifying with male pronouns (as in the case of the participants of this study), and feminine presentation does not always equate as identifying with female pronouns. This is yet another example of the ways in which gender transgressive lesbians pose a higher threat to the dominant gender system (as they embrace both sides of the gender binary simultaneously) than some (excluding genderqueer) transpeople.

For other participants, this goes beyond being misidentified. Often, they are assumed to want to be a different gender than they identify with. As stated by Carol a butch-identified lesbian, “I’m viewed as wanting to be a man.” Butch lesbians experience this inaccurate accusation of wanting to be a man often. They perceive this as society’s unwillingness to accept that butch expression is not manifested in a desire to be a man; this is simply their way of expressing butch lesbian gender identity. This is also perceived as one way that mainstream society seeks to erase the butch lesbian experience; since society does not accept butch on its own as a valid identity, it seeks to erase its existence. The visibility of the woman-identified butch experience is often dismissed and their identity is often pathologized through not adhering to the sameness taboo at the core of the gender binary view within the dominant gender system.

The ways gender transgressive lesbians threaten the rigid roles placed upon gender identity and women in general, (cis or transgender) is apparent in these cases. If one does not conform to the specific dress code and presentation that society has dictated for the general population (masculine/male and feminine/female), the individual is then mislabeled and often encounters these heterosexist assumptions about their own identity. This happens every day for gender transgressive lesbians and for most; this is a blatant disrespect for who they are and how they identify.

Gender Transgressive and Butch Lesbians Experience Bathroom Harassment

The participants overwhelmingly express their issues with bathroom harassment from others, especially from traditional gendered cis-women. Some participants have begun to use the men's restroom due to this harassment. As Helen states,

The main way it affects me is the public restrooms. I used to use women's restrooms, but I've had so much drama and confrontation that I don't remember the last time I used the women's restroom in public. I just use the men's, there are no questions asked there so, it's easy to pass. I mean it's to the point where when I go out, I will dehydrate myself, I don't drink so I won't have to use any restrooms.

As Helen expresses, she often goes without drinking fluids in order to not have to use a public restroom. Since she said she would dehydrate herself by not drinking fluids before going out in public in order to avoid using a public women's restroom, this reveals how disturbing it is for her when she is confronted by others who judge her by her gender transgressive appearance. Celia reiterates the fear of using the bathroom and looking to avoid it all together in public settings, she says, "in a public setting; I won't go to the bathroom."

Celia also expresses feelings of vulnerability when she is in the women's restroom, she states:

Some like older women would like, I've had it a lot of times where I'm like washing my hands, because I can't hold it in you know? I have to go to the bathroom, and I have to wash my hands because I'm a clean person. Probably that is the most vulnerable and will be the most vulnerable I will ever be in my entire life. When you're in there by yourself, if you can get from the door to the stall, you're cool. It's when you're washing your hands, it's like I'm standing in the mall naked. The only thing that I have going for me in that sense, is that I have big boobs. So when I go into the women's restroom, I stick them out. If I'm wearing a man's dress shirt with a tank top under I will unbutton my shirt, or I'm standing very much like this (chest out) even when I'm wearing a sports bra, I'm not trying to minimize them you know? You can't minimize D's too much. Like I don't bind... I don't want to be a guy. I'm happy with what I have, I'm happy being a girl.

This vulnerability is so intense for Celia, that she feels the need to legitimize needing to wash her hands in the sink. Celia continues,

I've had women open the door, see me, I turn around and show them and I even look down at my own chest to show them... please just let me finish washing my own hands. And sometimes when I'm ornery I'm like, yes this is a woman's bathroom and yes I am a woman if you want to check! But most of the time it's shameful, I just want to wash my hands and get the fuck out of there! And sometimes I have to be careful because when I'm walking into a woman's bathroom and there's a man behind me, I have to make sure that he doesn't come in with me. As a matter of fact, it happened to me yesterday. I had to tell the dude 'no, sorry you're in the wrong one,' because then it's like now I'm having awkward moments with guys.

This restroom harassment leads participants like Celia to develop a phobia like fear of using the women's restroom to the point where she feels she needs to hurry up and "get the fuck out of there!"

As Celia mentions, there are times she gets tired of being harassed and she may become "ornery" in her response to the harassers. Like Linda who states, "I get stopped to go to the bathroom, you know, they are like 'hey you're in the wrong bathroom,' and I'm like really? Because I'm more than willing to show you that I'm not."

The solution for this problem for many participants has been to begin using the men's restroom, such as Rhonda who says,

I have a lot of friends who are butch lesbians who go to the women's restroom and they get a lot of hassle. Women will say, 'hey this is the women's bathroom!' And I say I am a woman. So I think it is a little embarrassing in that regard. The way I deal with it, I just go to the men's restroom. Men don't care, so I just go to men's restrooms.

There is a glimmer of hope for gender transgressive lesbians who have been harassed in the restroom. The development of gender-neutral restrooms is becoming more readily available, as Celia says,

I love those gender-neutral bathrooms, or the ones that are individual. I love those; I hunt those out all the time. Isn't it sickening that in our society we have to fear something basic, like a bodily function? Like I just need to pee!

This experience of being fearful of going to a public restroom is experienced in several ways. First, in approaching the bathroom door, with the sign that says "Women" displaying a figure of a woman with a dress as an illustration of who is welcome inside. Once they open this door, depending on who is already inside the restroom, the gender transgressive lesbian encounters stares, questions, and sometimes hostility. The next step in this bathroom experience is in going to the sink to wash their hands. This portion of the restroom experience has been described by some participants as being the most "vulnerable" part of the whole situation. It is here at the sink, that there is more time for other women using the restroom, to confront them, scrutinize them and question their gender identity. It is only when they are out of the situation when they exit the women's restroom, that they feel safe and less vulnerable. This is another example of how society views gender transgressive lesbians as being a threat to the dominant gender system, as they do not conform to society's gender norms.

Social Encounters

In everyday life, we encounter strangers within our daily tasks and errands. It is in these social encounters that we as individuals interact with other members of society, in many cases, with individuals who we do not know personally. As discussed throughout this study, gender transgressive lesbians pose certain threats to the dominant gender system. In this section, I explore how society's perceived threats regarding butch lesbians and gender norms are reflected in how gender transgressive lesbians are treated and socially punished throughout their daily social encounters.

Society's Scrutinizing Stares

Many participants have indicated that when they go outside and are in the public eye, stranger's stare at them for long periods of time. Rhonda states, "I get second to third looks, it bothers me but that's their problem. It's not towards me. They are just curious."

Participants such as Joey say that the public stares not only at them, but at their families and friends as well. She says:

My immediate family is subjected to the stares; when I go out to restaurants with them or just go out in public. They get kind of the judgment that I get, you know just like guilty by association. My immediate family, my partner and son get it as well. They get the stares; first of all because we are a gay family, second of all, I look how I look so um. On a personal note if I'm alone, I'm affected because I get stares um or the lack of stares, like the 'I am not going to act like I even notice you' kind of thing.

Joey expresses that there is also a feeling of invisibility, as some individuals act as if she is not even there. This visibility issue affects all areas of the participant's lives, including their families and friends. When Joey says her family and friends are "guilty by association," what are they guilty of? Within society, is it a crime to break gender norms?

This is one example of the many ways society punishes those who are a threat to the dominant gender system, such as gender transgressive lesbians.

Society Feels Threatened by Gender Transgressive and Butch Lesbians

Judith Roof (1991:248) explains, the correlation between “lesbianism, masculinity, and heterosexual hatred,” as caused by the “threat to masculine supremacy and to a heterosexual system lesbians potentially pose.” Further, in the journal article “G.I. Joes in Barbie Land,” Inness and Lloyd (1995:9) state:

The butch’s appearance announces that she does not belong or wish to belong in a society that expects or demands femininity in women. Further, by adopting a conspicuously masculine image, the butch also rejects the role of woman-as-commodity, to be exchanged and bartered by men. The butch rejects this vision of womanhood, and in doing so becomes an outcast. (P. 9)

The participants of this study reiterate this notion of society’s insecurities with gender transgressive lesbian expressions. Tricia says “I feel like there is, in certain settings, there is an intimidation factor in a normative environment. I am pushing comfort zones a lot just being who I am and my fluidity.” So as Tricia expresses, she is pushing the social norms of society by expressing her gender fluidity. This ties into Innes and Lloyd’s (1995) theory that her gender transgressive expression challenges a heteronormative and misogynist society.

For other participants, they would like for society to judge them based on their humanity and kind nature. Celia states, “Like I don’t think anyone should judge just because of the way I look. I want to be viewed by society like I’m a nice caring person.”

Linda also expresses this preference, she says:

At the end of the day, I want to be seen for who I am and who I think I am, which I’m aware are not always the same; who I think I am and how everybody else perceives me. But you know, I want to be seen as who I think I am, which is a kind person, a good person, trying to do the right thing, I’m a fun person.

Linda acknowledges that who she perceives herself to be, is not always the way society views her or treats her. As she experiences her daily life, she encounters hostility based on her butch lesbian presentation, yet she perceives herself as a kind person, deserving of respect. There is a disconnect between how she views herself and how society reacts to her within social encounters. This disconnect can be viewed as being rooted in social sanctions being utilized against gender outlaws for threatening the dominant gender system.

For participants such as Carol, while she is proud of her butch feminist identity, she would prefer for others to view her in a gender neutral way. She says:

Yeah, I think butch is always a part of me. I can't really hide from it, yeah I want to be seen and for the world to know what butch is. It doesn't need to be at the forefront, I don't think it is. I'm not one of those, 'I am just a human' [type of person]. I like people to um, I wouldn't force it but if it came up in conversation I would let them know. But with guys, usually they will treat me like a dude, you know? They might say weird things and I'm like (looks puzzled). Like my barber asked me the last time I went, 'do you ever wear dresses?' and I'm like dude! How long have I been coming here? So he was stepping out, he was looking at me like a woman, when I just want him to talk to me like anybody else, well not so much like a dude or a lady, but who I am.

Carol expresses that the way others perceive her is also not the way she views herself.

When her longtime barber, who she thought knew her well asks her if she wears dresses, she realizes that he really doesn't know that much about her. The way he and other men perceive her is different than her own viewpoint of herself. This is experienced also when men treat her like a "dude," they proceed to say "weird things" assuming that she will be okay with it because she has a masculine presentation. She prefers for others to treat her as an individual, without all of the stereotypical presumptions that come along with being a woman or presenting as masculine.

For participants such as Joey, society's labels are confining as she faces them in every community of which she is a part. Joey states:

I don't see why I have to be perceived as anything really. You know, I don't have to fit into a box. You know, it's kind of a double-edged sword because from the gay community standpoint, I don't want to be seen as transitioning, I don't want to be a man. And from the straight community I don't want to be seen as if I should be dressing more feminine. So it's like in either society or either little club, I have to fit in some sort of box, and I don't want to fit into a box. If my life intertwines with you and it's necessary, why do you have to even categorize me at all? Why can't you just say 'hi?' or conduct business with me? You know, I don't need to get your approval or fit into some box. You know what I mean? I don't want to be shoved into any sort of box or put into any sort of title. I just want to do my business and move on.

So for Joey, these judgments from various communities regarding her gender identity are confining. In the heterosexual world, she is seen as a gender outlaw who is threatening all social norms and breaking rules regarding gender roles. On the other hand, the LGBTQQI community is also judging her. In this case, she is misjudged as wanting to transition into becoming a man due to her masculine presentation. This is another example of how gender transgressive lesbians pose a greater threat to the dominant gender system than some (excluding genderqueer) transpeople, as they are undermining the sameness taboo at the core of the gender binary.

For Mika, her butch presentation is very important in how she wants to be viewed by the world. She says:

I want to be seen as strong, masculine, and as a person most importantly. I think I want to be viewed that way because it reaffirms my butch-ness. I get insulted if others make comments or jokes about me not being butch or masculine.

Mika does not like for her masculinity or butch identity to be challenged. She becomes insulted when her masculinity is questioned and further feels her butch gender identity is re-affirmed by society's respect of her masculine presentation. She perceives masculinity

as a very important part of her identity, when others question her masculinity she feels they are disrespecting her as a person.

Tricia expresses that she wants to be viewed as someone who respects herself and also someone who provokes others to think about their own views and words. She says:

I want to be seen as someone who respects myself; I am big on that. Someone respectful, I am very aware of the words that I speak and I choose them with caution, sometimes to provoke. When I am presenting to the world, it is to provoke and elevate. We need that in order to grow.

So for Tricia, she consciously presents not only to express her gender identity, but also to “provoke and elevate” the consciousness of society and to push society’s views of gender norms. Her perception is that she is not only presenting to express her own gender identity, but also to communicate to others in ways that will help them expand their minds regarding gender identity. Tricia does not mind respectful conversation regarding her gender identity; she views this as helping society advance towards a more accepting place regarding gender identity.

Other participants express that they just want equality within society and prefer not to stand out in regards to their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. Helen expresses this view, she says:

I just want to be seen as equal. I’m not trying to be seen as something I’m not. I just want to be seen as an individual and this is how I am. I want to be seen as how a regular straight couple is seen. Like oh she’s like anybody else, she has two legs. Not like ‘that’s a girl? Oh my god!’

For Helen, she wants to be seen as any other heterosexual person. She prefers for society to treat her lesbian partnership the same they would any other heterosexual couple, instead of the constant way that society views her lesbian relationship as having a shock value to it. Her perspective is that she is tired of others being shocked by her gender

presentation. For gender transgressive lesbians, this reaction from others can feel as if others are making fun of their presentations or demeaning them. Her presentation, unlike Tricia, is not intended to provoke. She prefers to be viewed as any other gender normative individual.

Community

The community experiences of gender transgressive lesbians are important to explore, especially since they are outside of the dominant gender system. It is through community that many marginalized groups find commonality, discourse, and a call to action to change society's discriminatory actions against them. In this section, we explore how gender transgressive lesbians experience and define community.

Gender Transgressive and Butch Lesbians Experience Common Struggles

The theme of gender transgressive lesbians having common struggles is pervasive in this study. All participants, such as Mika, express the awareness of a common butch struggle, she states:

I would think other butches are affected similarly to me. They get the same stares, odd-looking stares; perhaps some looks of disgust as I've noticed. It's difficult to be a butch because we have to be manlier than men and enough of a woman at the same time. It's confusing and exhausting.

Mika feels that society reveals their "disgust" for her gender expression through their staring and dirty looks towards her. She is exhausted by having to present herself within the confines of society's gender normative expectations. She describes the butch experience as being looked upon with "disgust." As butches go through their daily lives, they are often stared at within their social encounters; this is bothersome and provoking for many butch lesbians.

Helen expresses that she thinks other butch identified lesbians also experience the presumption by society that she wants to be a man. She states:

I hear a lot of the same stuff, with the bathroom issues, the whole thing like ‘why do you want to look like a guy?’ or like ‘you don’t have what I have,’ or like ‘do you want a dick?’ I’m like no. I have one; it’s just not on me. (laughs) So like friends of mine go through the same stuff. Like people will just say stupid shit to you like ‘dyke’ or people yell ‘fag’ at me and I’m like, get it right if you’re going to insult me.

Helen encounters hostility from men who try to re-assert their maleness over her butch gender identity through saying things like “you don’t have what I have,” or “do you want a dick?” She perceives this confrontation and accusation by men as being rooted in insecurity in their own male experience. She bluntly let’s these men know that she is content with being a woman and that she has everything that they have, it’s just in a different form. She elaborates that this experience of being perceived as wanting to be a man is a common struggle among butch lesbians, along with bathroom harassment as well. This is another example of how gender transgressive lesbians pose a threat to the dominant gender system, as they express masculinity and femaleness simultaneously, undermining the sameness taboo at the core of the gender binary.

As stated by Linda, many gender transgressive lesbians face various forms of discrimination in their daily lives. When she attended a Butch Voices conference, she realized there were many other butch identified individuals who have experienced discrimination. She says:

I think that any woman who is presenting differently than the norm of what women should be, is probably struggling on some level, or has had issues. I know that we actually talked about this at Butch Voices, claiming your space and I was really shocked about a lot of things that I heard coming out of people’s mouths, you know how they were treated; how people were in a store and they wouldn’t wait on them, how they were asked to leave places.

The experience of the butch lesbian struggle is common for the majority of gender outlaws. As Linda expresses, she didn't realize how intense the discrimination against butch identified individuals was until she was in a group of others who also identify as butch. She describes herself as being shocked when hearing about the amount and extremity of the discrimination received by other butch and gender transgressive lesbians. Further, as Linda continues, she also states:

I can see how (LGBTQQI) people are looking, they are looking alert, or that they are watching their backs. If one person said that they didn't struggle with it, I would be shocked. You know I would be like ok, what is your secret? I think that everyone that expresses themselves in a different way has had something; maybe personal, family, work related probably has some sort of struggle.

Linda can see other LGBTQQI individuals in their daily lives also protecting themselves by "watching their backs." She expresses that she perceives that every LGBTQQI individual experiences struggle within their own social world. Linda believes that the discrimination butch identified women face daily are products of society teaching discrimination to individuals. She continues:

I think honestly at the core of human beings, the majority of people really don't care about stuff like that. I just think that it's something that gets pushed in society as a whole. Like people tell them oh, they're different, they're weird.

So Linda views human beings as naturally being open to various expressions of gender identity, but that it is society, which teaches people to view gender transgressive lesbians as the "other." It is in these teachings throughout social institutions that allow for prejudice to manifest and grow within humans and groups. These discriminatory teachings are utilized to maintain the dominant gender system; this is accomplished through the reproduction of gender normative expectations within the social world.

Joey believes that some butch identified lesbians may get used to this type of daily discrimination and in turn stop noticing it. She says, “I think it’s definitely similar; some people may have better experiences in getting over it or just not noticing it anymore.” Similarly, Carol describes a myriad of ways in which butch identified lesbians experience daily discrimination. She says:

Probably the same with the bathrooms, the sir, probably at their workplace; hopefully they are finding work where they can be accepted for who they are. Probably a lot of them hide a good amount of their butch-ness, that is why I am one of those people who does not work in that, that’s why I started (lesbian owned business). They probably feel lonely; hard to find partners, hard to date, when I was single it was hard to date. I guess I’m very specific; I am looking for politically minded femmes. It affects that. Because even being in the lesbian community, I think some butches would find it hard to really find a group in the lesbian community.

As Carol expresses, isolation is a part of the butch identified lesbian experience for many. She elaborates that she hopes that other butch lesbians are not having trouble with finding employment. Further, she sees loneliness as being a common struggle among butch lesbians, this stemming from a rejection not only from the heteronormative society, but also within the LGBTQQI community. This feeling of rejection from the LGBTQQI community and from society as a whole can lead to feelings of invisibility.

Gender Transgressive Views on Differing Gender Identities: Similarities and Differences

When the participants were asked to reflect upon gender identities different from their own, there were various responses regarding their experiences with other gender identities. For some respondents such as Celia, sexual identity (such as lesbian identity) alone does not create conflict from outside observers within society. For example, in her view, femme identified lesbians and/or queer cis-women are viewed as not having to struggle as much within society. She says:

Feminine women that look normal, like I don't mean to be mean, but I don't think that you guys deal with the kind of things; like let's say someone who is masculine or transitioning or a drag queen, very effeminate men [do], because on the outside to society you look just like them.

This idea was also echoed by participant Joey who says, "to me they [femmes and heterosexual women] are the same, because they both can hide beneath this protected little shelter. They don't have to face what I face everyday." Joey takes this issue a bit further; viewing femme identified queer or lesbian women as socially straight. This is echoed in the literature as well, as stated by Jeanne Cordova, (Innes and Lloyd 1995:1) "High school years are much harder on butches [than on femmes]. Femmes passed as straight, even to themselves. Butches can't. We stick out like G.I. Joes in Barbie Land." Rhonda perceives this as true, she elaborates:

I think they have it easier because they conform to society. A lesbian femme goes through life, looking like a woman. If she doesn't have short hair then she doesn't have looks [stares], but with short hair they would wonder if she is a lesbian. Feminine women do not have problems with society. Butch lesbians get more hassle. They [society] are curious as to if we are a man or a woman? Why do they dress that way? Why don't they wear skirts? I think they [femmes] have it easier.

This view that queer femmes or lesbian femmes often pass as heterosexual within society, communicates how gender transgressive lesbians often pose a greater threat to the dominant gender system than queer or lesbian femmes.

However Celia does acknowledge that there are other types of struggles femme identified lesbian or queer femme women face, such as invisibility. She continues,

I'm not saying like you have a free ticket because it's difficult for you guys, because just like I walk into a room and everyone knows I'm gay, you have the opposite issue. You walk into a room and you want everyone to know you're gay, but nobody knows.

Many participants found similarities between gender transgressive lesbian and transgender identity. These similarities are rooted in experiencing discrimination from various avenues within society, due to not conforming to traditional gender roles and expectations. Joey says:

I think that the biggest similarities would be with those who do not conform, like the transgender community, a transgender woman or a transgender man. I think there are a lot of similarities because once again, we don't fit into a neat little box. I think their complaints would be the same as to how they're referred to, or gender specified. Yeah I think the battle is pretty much the same, the only difference is they don't really identify with the biological sex that they were born into.

Joey can identify with the struggles that transgender individuals face within society regarding fighting gender norms and expectations. She perceives that the daily discrimination she faces, as a butch lesbian are similar to the daily struggles of those who identify as transgender. For her, she acknowledges that there are some differences, but that the common thread is in they both "don't fit into a neat little box," the box being the gender normative expectations from society. Joey also finds similarities with her identity as a woman and the identity of trans women who express feminist viewpoints. She says,

They're [Male to Female transgender individuals] choosing to give up this VIP card. They're going from being a man to being a woman. So, [the experience is] similar for a MtF transgender person, [as] she is trying to get far away from what a man is. For me, I can relate to you more if you're more into women's rights and you're not into degrading women. If you are more into those issues, then I think it's closer tied to me.

Joey expresses that as a woman-identified butch feminist lesbian, she can relate to transgender women in their struggle for equality as women. She views transgender men as being further away from the feminist viewpoint than transgender women. So while she finds commonality between butch lesbian gender identity and transgender identity, she relates more to transgender women due to their lived experiences as women.

Carol who says, “there are similarities between me and trans women because we are facing sexism, queer sexism” echoed this commonality with transgender women. The recognition of MtF (male to female) transgender struggle is recognized by the butch identified participants of this study. Celia expresses:

I think that for men who are transitioning to women...like on a scale, if there's 1 to 10, in general everyone's own story is particular to their own circumstances, I would think they have it the hardest.

The participants also perceive that while they sympathize with transgender struggle, many in our society do not, even within the LGBTQQI community. Helen states, “I noticed that for the trans community, that is the hardest life to live. They really have to focus on themselves; even in the queer community, it's hard for them.” Esther furthers this idea of transgender discrimination within the LGBTQQI community. She states,

There is this attitude that I came across, I went to this women's high school that was very like trans-phobic and trans-misogynistic. I was like this feels like red state lesbianism; this feels like a woman born woman thing, so in that sense I'm definitely not that. The people who are the most marginalized in the room are the people we have the most to learn from.

As Esther expresses, there is discrimination within the LGBTQQI community against certain gender identities. She elaborates that she has seen lesbians discriminate against transgender women, in that they are not “woman born woman,” she describes this discrimination as “red state lesbianism” comparing discriminating lesbians to red state conservatives. Esther also holds the belief that “the most marginalized [people] in the room are the people we have the most to learn from.” For her, those who struggle the most within society, have the most to offer in regards to learning about the human

experience and in framing an agenda towards creating community and furthering equality. In her view, those who are silenced should be heard the most clearly.

Carol expresses many of the ways in which gender identity can create commonalities and differences within society. She says she relates to,

Women in general because of sexism, so yeah there are similarities to straight women. There is a similarity somewhat between straight men and me, because I sometimes get masculine privilege. It's not the same but in different social situations sort of a privilege. They listen to me more. This happened yesterday with me and Jennifer (her femme partner) with a parking attendant. He was not listening to her, but when I went up he totally was quiet and listened. So there is a similarity. There is a similarity between my identity and trans men too, just because I don't want to generalize that all trans men have been butch, but probably most have. So then they are facing queer discrimination too, but we are different because sometimes they can totally pass and get more privilege.

For Carol, butch identified cis-women can relate to all women based on sexism, however she feels she also has similarities with straight men because she sometimes experiences masculine privilege. Also, she finds a similarity with transgender men because she thinks somewhere on their journey, many of them at one time identified as "butch," further, they too face queer discrimination in their daily lives. However, she also expressed that trans men may also experience higher levels of masculine privilege because they often pass as men in everyday interactions.

Other participants such as Tricia express their observations that heterosexual couples often have many societal privileges that LGBTQQI couples do not have. She says:

I think at the end of the day, we are having a human experience, love is love, pain is pain, and it is all the same no matter what your expression is. But I do know that I don't always hold my partner's hand in public, I don't need to add something to make us stand out [in order to] to be safe. Where [as] in a hetero relationship, I don't know if that is ever even thought about. It's a hetero privilege. It's the same as a person of color, always mindful of my environment.

So for Tricia, she expresses that she is always “mindful” of her environment, not only because her gender identity is gender transgressive, but also because she is a person of color and also in a lesbian relationship. She describes that she thinks twice before holding her partner’s hand, due to the discrimination they experience as lesbians of color. She contemplates upon what life is like for a heterosexual couple, who do not have to think of safety issues for something as simple as holding their partner’s hand in public. Further, as stated earlier, the intersection of various marginalized identities occurs within many participants within this study; including the identities of being woman identified, people of color, LGBT, and gender transgressive. Therefore in their experience, this discrimination and history of violence towards these marginalized identities creates the necessity for the participants to be hyper aware of their surroundings for safety reasons.

Butch and Femme Dynamic Within Romantic Relationships

When the participants were asked to reflect upon their romantic relationships, the responses were overwhelmingly that they prefer to partner with femme-identified cis-women. As stated by Mignon Moore in her study on gender transgressive lesbians (2006:133), they “are primarily attracted to feminine women, and also hold feminist beliefs about eradicating gender inequality.” The reasons for this attraction are varied. Some participants have dated other butch identified cis-women in the past, such as Tricia who says, “I dated women who were butch, it never worked. We were too much the same.” So for participants like Tricia, other butch identified cis-women were too similar to her for it to work out.

For Rhonda, she is simply attracted to feminine cis-women regardless of the sexual identity of the other person. As she says, “Um well I tend to be attracted to

feminine women, even if they're not lesbians (laughs). I like the straight girls, hetero girls are very cute, but I am attracted to feminine women, not into butch lesbians or men.”

Other participants such as Joey express that being in a relationship with a femme-identified cis-woman provides functionality, she says:

I like femmes. I like the perfume, the makeup. I don't want to be with a butch, I never would be. For me it doesn't stop at sex, it's the way you live. If you have two in the same role, who does what in the relationship? There are roles we fit into whether we like them or not, we have to function that way. How does that work when you have the same roles? That goes from the bedroom to everyday life.

Many participants expressed this butch-femme pairing as functional, such as Helen who says, “I like femmes and that dynamic really works.” Celia furthers this view saying:

I date feminine women. Would I ever date someone who looked like me? Probably not. I'm not attracted to other butch girls. I mean I know that there are [butches who date other butches], but to me it's kind of weird. I'm like wait 'who's in charge? Who wears the pants?' Where again it's like that's me being ignorant and trying to fit our own people into those heterosexual boxes. But at the same time, its like the way we are raised in our society, we still try to fit into those roles.

This butch/femme dynamic can be said to be functional, in that for some, there are gender role divisions. As Celia mentions, these ideas of division of labor among gender identities may be rooted in patriarchal views regarding what a feminine woman is expected to do within a relationship versus what a masculine woman is expected to do, much like the division of labor between men and women.

For others, the butch/femme dynamic is a preference in sexuality and sexual expression. As Carol says, “in my relationships, it would be hard to have a romantic relationship with someone who didn't like all that gender bending role-play, like butch-

femme.” For participants such as Carol, the sexual role-play that can occur in butch/femme sexuality is the dynamic that is most intriguing to them.

For some participants, the attraction to femme-identified cis-women is simply because there is a certain dynamic, such as Lesley who says, “I like femme women even though I’m butch. They are complementary.”

As stated prior, the sexual identity of a femme-identified cis-woman is not necessarily always expected to be lesbian identified. Various participants within this study have expressed their attraction to bisexual and heterosexual cis-women. As Esther says:

Yeah, I think my gender identity is contingent on who I partner with, in the sense that um the butch/femme is a solid rubric to begin the relating. Yeah, I think I’ve always liked femme-identified, femme-presenting women, who have always dated butch dykes, butches, trans guys, or soft men. So I think that the bisexual femme is the standard person.

So while all of the participants identify as lesbians themselves, most are attracted to or partnered with femme-identified cis-women with varying sexual identities (such as bisexual, heterosexual, or lesbian).

Community is Experienced Primarily Online For Most

When asked if the participants feel there is a butch community, most respondents said the connection is primarily online, such as Facebook. For some, this is a positive thing as butch identified women can share their common interests with one another. Tricia says, “All I have to do is go to Facebook. It’s great; we talk about our interests. Motorcycles, cigars, tattoos and pin-up girls (laughs).”

For others, they feel as if the online communities are not complete without physical interaction. Linda says, “We’re not coming together physically in the

community. Everything's online. Which you can do some community building online, don't get me wrong, but I really think that the only way you're ever going to make solid change is through face to face interaction." So for Linda, she perceives that the community she would like to participate in, is one that can create change within communities regarding butch issues.

Some participants feel as if there is a community, however not in the geographic location where they are residing. Such as Helen, who answered, that there is a butch community "in San Francisco." This statement communicates that she feels butch community building is limited to a specific geographic location.

This idea is echoed by other participants, such as Joey, who feels that in her hometown, lesbians are reflections of the lesbian representations from the media in which lesbians are mainly portrayed as all femme or femme-ish. She says, "I think in my area, I think butch is a dying breed. I think it's mainly femmes or like lesbians from The L Word." For the butch identified friends Joey does know she says, "we don't get together often. So you're not able to be as reinforced in your character as you would like, because you do not find much support. Definitely some isolation." This experience of social isolation can be difficult for some, as they are in need of a community, especially when relationships, such as family, are sometimes not accepting of their gender identity.

For participants like Lesley, she has a core group of butch identified friends, and this brings her comfort and provides the community she is looking for. She says:

I think wherever there is a scarcity like in the butch/femme community. We are careful with what we have. The style goes in and out. My butch friends have never been affected by it, we are just friends and a level of comfort is there. That is hard to get elsewhere.

Lesley experiences a solid connection with a core group of butch lesbian identified friends. With her perception of the “style” going “in and out,” she says this core group of butch lesbians are not affected by the social changes. She holds a special place in her life for these friendships, as these types of connection are rare outside of her group of butch lesbian friends.

Esther communicates that it is not so much the butch identity that she looks for in friendships or community. She feels friendships and community are based more on political affiliations than on gender identity alone. She says:

I think I relate to folks pretty superficially. I think that I have gotten a little more intentional about making friends, like who is going to be a part of my social world. Being queer is great, but our friendships are really contingent on our politics, or justice work. If we don't have politics in common, we are probably not going to be friends (laughs). So it's like 'oh you're dating a cop?' No. Uh, so that is always how it is going to be. It's never like 'oh we are friends because we are butches.' If I think you're um, if we are just different, like on party lines and um politics, it's probably not going to work out.

Esther expresses that since being butch does not always align with similar political views among the community, that gender identity alone does not automatically create a community. Her openness for a friendship with another butch lies in their common political affiliations and views on social justice.

While, Esther perceives her friendships as based upon more than gender identity alone, most of the participants express the desire to have a solid butch community in their own lives. Some just feel as if this community is not happening due to a lack of butch pride and hiding by some. Linda says:

I think it's almost like we're in hiding to me, because of the expression. Like I feel like some people are really trying to pass as guys, for survival purposes but aren't like trans. They are not trying to be a man or in transition, but really presenting themselves as that way.

Linda expresses her feelings that many woman-identified butches are trying to pass as men, not because they are transgender, but because they are striving for a sense of safety within society. She perceives this striving to “pass as guys” as being a reason for a lack of butch solidarity and community. This aim from some gender transgressive lesbians towards trying to “pass as guys” for safety reasons is yet another example of how gender transgressive lesbians pose a greater threat to the dominant gender system than queer femmes, gender blending lesbians, and some (excluding genderqueer) transgender individuals; as gender transgressive lesbians are undermining the sameness taboo at the core of the gender binary.

As stated earlier, there are places that are more active in terms of having a butch community or conferences centered on butch issues. The biennial conference “Butch Voices” meets in Oakland, California every two years, and is the main conference held regarding butch identified issues (trans and cis). While there has been some community struggle in regards to feminist issues, what it means to be “butch,” and who should be represented at the table; it can be said that there is still a need for this community despite the differences that are present. This is expressed by some participants, such as Lesley who when asked if she believes if there is a butch community says,

Not as much as I think there should be. It always comes down to people are people. What works works, and what doesn't doesn't. With Butch Voices, there is a conflict between butches. There is a level of comfort that can be built on, but that hasn't happened. I wonder if it's a power struggle?

For Lesley, she craves a butch community, but is critical about the conflict that has occurred within Butch Voices regarding the split in views of what the meaning of butch really is. She expresses that she believes this conflict has blocked the possibility of community building among gender transgressive and butch lesbians. She wonders if this

is based on a power struggle, and if this struggle for power is harmful for other butches who would like to participate in a community without this struggle for power.

Butch Lesbian Competition Within the Gender Transgressive Community

When the participants were asked if they feel as if there is solidarity in the butch community, there were a variety of answers. For some, they admit that they do not participate much in the butch community, such as Tricia, who says “I don’t know if I feel it so much. I am a loner and I don’t get out. It’s hard for me to say because I don’t actively participate.” While others, like Mika express that they do seek out a butch community and there is also solidarity among this community. She says, “There’s an understanding among us all, sort of like soldiers who serve together you know? We understand our challenges, our likes, how society discriminates against us, things like that.”

On the other hand, some participants express that they feel there is a sort of butch competition that occurs when you have a group of butches together in a physical space. Such as Celia, who when asked if she feels if there is a butch solidarity says, “no. You walk into a room full of butches; it’s who has the biggest peacock feathers. It’s like the way heterosexual men are with each other.” Celia perceives that butch lesbians try to re-assert their masculinity within the butch community; she compares this competition as being much like how heterosexual cis-men strive to be the most masculine person in the room. For Celia, this competition and presentation of needing to be the most butch person in the room, creates a hostile and judgmental environment. This type of competition does not allow for authentic experiences to be communicated within the butch community.

While Helen feels there is solidarity, she also feels that there is a high amount of competition within this community. She says:

I think there is. I see it two ways. I think there is solidarity, and I also see the lines that divide. Like, I don't know if femmes do this, but sometimes in the butch community, if you see another butch lesbian; your chest puffs out a little, you're trying to out-butch the other. Yeah we do that. Sometimes, [we engage in] not so friendly competition. This came up at Butch Voices, there was a little femme thing going on, a femme conference, and we were all in the same hotel; all these bois and we were talking about this exact issue right here. Yeah, we were all saying our chests puff out a bit.

As Helen mentions, the presence of femmes within the same hotel at the same time as the butch conference, created a reaction of masculine competition at the Butch Voices conference. So while in her experience, she expresses that butches are striving for a sense of butch community, the presence of femmes during this conference created a competitive environment.

For Rhonda, she says that society's discrimination against the butch community has created an internalized anger within the community. For her, she acknowledges that there is an element of butch competition when they are in the same space, but that she doesn't care to participate in this type of exchange. She says:

I think when you put a group of butch lesbians together, things can be a little tense (laughs), because I think they are very angry sometimes, lots of anger inside of them. I don't know where that comes from; maybe society puts them in that corner. I'm laid back I don't really care. I will live wherever I want to live. If someone doesn't like my life, I don't care. If butch lesbians get together, there is competition, like who is more masculine?

Rhonda also expresses that she doesn't mind if a butch lesbian is political or not, she says, "if they want to change the world, or not change the world, that's fine." So for Rhonda, she perceives there is a large amount of anger within butch lesbians, due to their experiences with discrimination from society. She believes this anger, in response to

society's hostility towards gender transgressive lesbians, creates an internalized anger, which has a lack of direction. For her, this anger becomes directed to all areas of their lives, even amongst community. Rhonda tries to separate herself from this perceived internalized anger, and finds she is willing to live anywhere she wishes, without care of other opinions amongst the larger gender normative world. She is not interested in political ideas or in changing the world within a butch community. She prefers not to get involved with the anger she perceives to be blocking the possibility of butch community. This feeling that some gender transgressive lesbians express ambivalence towards butch politics, is also confirmed by Carol who says:

I don't think every butch I meet is someone who is down for the butch cause. I definitely don't think that. Most people just want to be. That is why I love L.A., because there is more [butch solidarity]. In Long Beach, there is more of a feeling like, I just want to be or no identity at all. In L.A., there is a more constant thinking of political issues.

This view expressed by Carol, that not "every butch I meet is someone who is down for the butch cause," shows evidence that some who identify as gender transgressive or butch, may not be as dedicated to community issues as others who identify as gender transgressive or butch. However, Carol does crave a politically minded butch community, as she says she loves Los Angeles, because they are more politically minded.

Esther, who explains that while someone may identify as a butch lesbian, they may also have differing politics regarding other minorities, she elaborates on this issue even further. She says:

People are at different places at all times. In every group there is going to be a mix of consciences, so somebody might have their racial economic justice down, but when it comes to misogyny or trans-phobia or whatever, there is some shit to work out. People are constantly in flux and working stuff out.

So while one may identify as one type of minority, they may also have various justice views regarding transphobia, racism, homophobia and sexism. For Esther, this is important, as she expressed earlier, she does not choose to create friendships on gender identity alone. She looks for friendships with others who are politically affiliated with her own ideas of social justice.

For Linda, she feels as if other LGBTQI groups are more active in their solidarity, she says:

I feel like the femme community is way more active, like Kim [her femme partner] belongs to like a couple groups on Facebook, they're always doing stuff, they're having clothing exchanges with each other. Like I feel like there's much more dialogue in the femme community, and I feel like sometimes they're doing more for the butches than the butches are, you know what I mean?

Linda perceives that the queer femme community is more open to community building than gender transgressive and butch lesbian communities are. She also feels that queer femmes are not only building community for themselves, but also looking to further butch solidarity as well. However, she also says that though there may be some conflict within the butch community, their struggle within a genderphobic society creates the need for community and solidarity. Linda says:

I think butch people, because of how they express themselves tend to be, I feel like there's two spectrums on them. Like you have people who are really ok with who they are and present themselves and are out there, and then you have the people that express themselves, but you know for safety maybe they're afraid to be out, for whatever reason. I mean we all got issues and stuff, but like they're a little more secretive, like they're not in the forefront.

Linda perceives that this lack of butch solidarity may be due to the need for some gender transgressive individuals to hide their gender identity, for safety reasons. She feels they tend to isolate themselves from community, because they do not feel safe expressing their gender identity as part of a butch group. So while Linda perceives that queer femmes do

more community building than gender transgressive lesbians do, it may be said that this could be due to the butch visual presentation being considered deviant within a gender normative society. As expressed by various participants earlier in this study, some butch lesbians perceive queer femmes as passing as heterosexual within society, in contrast butch lesbians are constantly being scrutinized for their gender presentation. This is yet another example of how gender transgressive lesbians pose a greater threat to the dominant gender system than queer or lesbian femmes.

Further, since this community faces discrimination in daily life, as stated by Linda, community is a very necessary way to build bridges and for building up gender transgressive and butch pride. Geographically, some places may be safer than others for gender transgressive and butch identified lesbians. Depending on where an individual lives, geography may affect whether or not they have access to such butch communities. In these cases, online communities may be very helpful in lessening the feeling of isolation in their hometowns.

Relationships Outside of Gender Transgressive Lesbian Communities are Limited

The participants were asked to reflect on what their relationships are like with others who are outside of the gender transgressive and butch community. For some participants, they elaborate that they have different sides that they show to different people. Such as Tricia, who communicates more freely about herself on social media than in the work world. She says:

I feel there is another me inside of work. I am aware of my settings and I choose what to share and what not to share and how deep I want to go. With my friends on Facebook, I show more with the friends I feel comfortable with. I am very transparent.

In cases like Tricia's, technology provides a free space to express her gender identity, whereas in certain settings like work, she is less transparent about her life. She perceives that in her daily life at work, she will be judged more harshly due to the gender normative appearances of her co-workers. For Tricia, she expresses that she feels a freedom in her gender transgressive expression in online communities, because she has a queer community who will embrace her gender identity. She feels she can show her authentic self more easily in an online community than she is allowed in her daily life within a gender normative society.

For Lesley, the intersection as a woman of color and a self-identified butch leaves her feeling fragmented, since members of either group may not understand the other side of her. When asked about her relationships with others outside of the butch community, she says they are,

pretty good. You know there are more of them um, when I first came out, being a Chicana, it was a definite struggle. As a person of color, am I more comfortable with lesbians who are not of color, or people of color who are straight? Either way we are coming up against stereotypes, either way, there are those limits and it's a struggle. It ends up very fragmented.

For Lesley, she feels fragmented within her identities, as a Chicana and as a butch lesbian. She perceives that she comes up against stereotypes within either community in regards to her ethnicity and her gender identity. She feels there are parts of herself that are fragmented as she feels like she is considered an outsider in either community. As stated earlier in the study, the intersection of various identities within the participant (race/gender identity) can create a feeling of isolation even when they feel a sense of community within one group or the other.

For other participants such as Joey, while she feels her sexual orientation is something she has in common with the LGBTQQI community, she also feels the LGBTQQI community's priorities are male dominated. She says:

With the LGBT community, there is a small connection, but we do not get together much. For me, it feels like we [butches] are a dying breed. This is not what a modern lesbian looks like. We are seen as less evolved, older, and not hip. We're not on the [LGBTQQI] agenda. We are not the focus. It is mainly based on gay men, and the plight of gay men. There are so many things for gay men. They [the LGBTQQI community] are very gay male oriented.

Joey feels that the LGBTQQI community has misogynist priorities, as in the larger outside world. Historically, the LGBTQQI community has had an issue with this as well. For Joey, she feels this issue has not changed and that lesbians are still dealing with issues of gay cis-men expressing their male privilege over lesbian cis-women.

Further, Carol touches upon misogyny within the heterosexual world, when asked about her relationships outside of the butch community, she says:

To be honest, like I don't much. Like I get along with men, I just, besides my little brother who is an awesome guy, I prefer not to interact with men; there are only a few good guys I could have a conversation with. They have a motive with feminine women. I don't want to generalize though, but through experience with me, they are too dude with me. I don't want to be a dude. I can be a dude with another woman. It's just weird, it's not smart and it's not my thing. So yeah, straight women but usually straight women who are more like queer minded, very open to that.

So for Carol, she expresses that she does not like the company of heterosexual men for the most part, due to her feelings about their sexualization of women and expressing misogynistic attitudes with her. She says that heterosexual men try to be "dude" with her, but she prefers to be "dude" with other women. For her, expressing masculinity is more genuine when she is expressing it with another butch woman. She does express that she does relate to heterosexual women though, especially with heterosexual women who are

“queer minded,” which may be expressed in their acceptance of women expressing gender fluidly.

The experience of butch identified lesbians being included or subjected to sexist speech from men is also experienced by tradeswomen in the construction field. In Denissen and Saguy’s (2013) study, some lesbian participants also describe their experience in working with fellow tradesmen and being treated like “one of the guys” through being subject to sexist viewpoints, and some participants expressing that they feel angered at some of the sexist rhetoric that the tradesmen spoke with them (Denissen and Saguy 2013:390).

This feeling of preferring to separate herself from the company of heterosexual sexist men, is reiterated by Celia, who says:

There is only so much testosterone I can take. I don’t have any straight male friends. Not to discriminate against guys, but they either want you to cook or clean for them. Men in general are more in tune with their wants. They are just easier. I think that is why girls like butches; we are simpler but still complicated. It’s the best of both worlds, we present masculine but then there is the complex emotion. It doesn’t matter, I can cut my hair short and wear a tie, but I’m still a girl.

Celia reveals her feelings regarding how heterosexual men view women in general; this turns her off from wanting to have any sort of friendship with heterosexual men. While she feels men only want women for “cooking” and “cleaning,” she expresses that their simplicity is something a butch has in common with a heterosexual cis-man. However, what makes butches different from heterosexual cis-men is that they balance their masculine simplicity with a “complex emotion.”

Other participants, such as Linda reflect upon her relationships with femme lesbians or queer cis-women. She says, “They’re [femme identified queers or lesbians]

very protective of the butch women in their lives.” This is part of the butch/femme dynamic that has been expressed by various participants. Femme lesbians and queer femmes have historically been described as protective over their butch partners. It may be that this stems from the fact that the femme partner of the butch views how much discrimination gender transgressive lesbians receive from society, therefore femmes feel a need to protect their butch partners or butch friends from such discrimination.

Genderphobia and Homophobia

In this section, the participants reflect upon encounters with genderphobia and homophobia within their daily lives. The participants also describe the context in which these experiences have occurred. As gender outlaws and lesbians, their experiences with genderphobia and homophobia occur in many areas of their lives. It is through their own descriptions of these experiences that further insight is provided into how gender transgressive and butch lesbians experience genderphobia and homophobia in the social world.

Genderphobia Within the Workplace

When participants are asked to reflect upon how gender identity affects their relationships, their responses vary depending on which type of relationship we touch upon. When it comes to co-workers, some participants express that their co-workers are curious about their gender identity. Tricia says:

In my work relationships, I don't need to claim my identity, it just is. If it is a topic of conversation, I'm happy to talk about it, but if not I am happy to do work. Like when I mention my girlfriends' name they're like 'oh,' so I think there is a curiosity because we are exotic.

For Tricia, her co-workers express a curiosity regarding her relationship with her femme-identified partner. She describes their curiosity as being rooted in the idea that their

relationship is considered “exotic” or unusual. She describes herself at work as being willing to answer the questions her co-workers may have regarding her relationship, but does not discuss this topic if she is not questioned about it. Earlier in this study, Tricia also expresses that there is only so much that she will divulge regarding her gender identity to her co-workers. So while she is open to answering questions, she does not feel entirely free to express her gender identity within the workplace.

Within this study, others express that their co-workers show some discomfort with their gender identity. Lesley says, “I think at first, the women are uncomfortable. They are not sure if I’m like being around a guy. Once they find there is nothing threatening about me, they are okay with it.” So in this case other women feel threatened by Lesley’s gender identity, because they are unsure if she is like a man. Lesley also expresses that once they realize she is not threatening (like a man), they become “okay” with her gender identity. This constant necessity of needing to prove oneself as being “safe” or “okay” within the workplace is also echoed by other participants within this study.

When the participants are asked to reflect upon their experiences in their professional lives as a whole, nearly all participants express that they have experienced some sort of discrimination in their professional lives. This experience begins with the interview process, as Linda says, “going to job interviews or meeting some people; they are kind of taken aback, like what they hear and what they see on paper is not what they see in person.” She continues,

Like I said earlier, you know having gone to job interviews and presenting myself how I do. I feel like that’s probably cost me jobs. You know what they’re like, and I would get it, like, (pauses, deep breath) if I was going in there and my lip was pierced and I was wearing ratty jeans, you know? Look like I rolled out of bed, I would get it, but I do present well. You know? Maybe you don’t like my shirt and tie, but it looks good, it’s clean.

Linda perceives that her gender transgressive presentation has cost her jobs, since she has a name that is viewed as typically feminine, the company is expecting a feminine gender normative person to show up to the interview. So, these expectations by employers are different than how she presents herself at the first interview, in a suit and tie. While she understands employers professionally discriminating based upon presentation, such as being unprofessional, she is critical of their discrimination being based upon gender identity.

Joey says she also experiences this type of job discrimination regarding not being able to get past the first interview. She says:

From a higher level, I am not viewed as very professional. There have been jobs I have been overqualified for, but I'm overlooked. It's because I'm a butch. I am not offered certain positions or jobs due to my identity. It's a struggle getting a good job.

In cases such as Linda and Joey, a woman with a butch gender identity many times will not make it past the first interview phase. This job discrimination can make it very difficult for a butch presenting woman to obtain employment.

For other participants such as Celia, she presented differently in order to obtain employment. She says:

I had to present as a [feminine] woman. I hated it, I felt like I was dressing in drag and I had sold my soul to the devil, but I was tired of being poor! One of my professors told me 'if you want to get into a big firm, you're going to have to change a little bit.' He goes, 'you don't have to give up your whole identity, but especially during recruiting you're going to have to present differently, and once you're in there and you're in the culture, you're in the environment, maybe slowly but surely you can [express freely].'

So for Celia, she presented differently (feminine) than how she identifies (butch) for survival purposes, such as being able to pay rent and afford groceries. Her professor told

her that she would have a difficult time finding employment due to her presentation. She expresses that she took his advice, and was indeed hired for the position she desired. This example is crucial in understanding butch lesbians who live in poverty, with gender discrimination being the root of this issue. These experiences with struggling to find employment are examples of how gender transgressive lesbians pose a greater threat to the dominant gender system than femmes and gender blenders, as their masculine presentations are viewed as undermining the sameness taboo of the gender binary. This sometimes results in employers discriminating against gender transgressive lesbians.

In cases in which a butch presenting woman is hired for the job, the participants express that they are also discriminated against while on the job. Joey says:

Like for some jobs, they try to keep me in the back so nobody will see me. They pay me less, because they pay women less, and I do just as much hard work as their highest performing man. So they like to keep me where I am. They like to hide me from the customers. Look at what I go through in society! Businesses know that. They don't want their customers feeling uncomfortable or end up offending them.

Joey's experience with job discrimination is intersectional. She expresses that she not only deals with on the job homophobia, but also sexism and genderphobia as well. The fact that she is paid less for the same job as the men in her field due to her being a woman is rooted in misogyny. Further, she perceives her employer is "hiding" her in the back away from customers because they do not want the customers to feel "uncomfortable" with her butch appearance. This displays a blatant form of homophobia and genderphobia from her employer. Joey also experiences this discrimination in her educational life. She says:

Employment I would say is hard, just because I don't fit into the box. I don't look like what a company may want me to look like, or dress like, or you know, carry myself. Just a lot of things in general, especially um even at school, everywhere I

go I encounter some sort of complication or some sort of resistance because its very obvious what I am and who I am. So it affects all areas.

As Joey expresses, she confronts “resistance” in all areas. This resistance from society within professional and educational settings often results in butch identified individuals living in poverty and struggling economically. Further, resistance from employers and the educational system are also examples of how gender transgressive lesbians pose a threat to the dominant gender system, and are therefore lacking in the privileges that are afforded to gender conforming individuals within these systems.

This genderphobia also cuts across various forms of gender outlaw presentation, which are outside of the gender norms of society. As stated by Linda:

Most of the transgender people that I had the experience in meeting are super educated, but can’t get a job. I mean, you know, we’re talking Masters or Ph.D., have had experience in their field, but now that they have chose this [to come out as transgender], you know to go through this transition. What do a lot of people do? They’re out on the streets, then they’re forced into doing things they’re not supposed to, and they’re in trouble, which only continues.

As Linda says, the economic struggle of being unable to obtain good employment is a very real issue, and for some it can lead to homelessness and imprisonment. Expressing gender identity outside of gender norms is not only difficult, but can also be dangerous in a world in which there are many institutions that practice gender discrimination.

The alternative for some, who identify as butch, is that they have had the opportunity to start a lesbian owned businesses. Carol says:

Yeah, we obviously didn’t call ourselves a neutral name, [business name anonymous, but has lesbian orientation within the name]. We wanted it to be in the forefront that we are lesbians, so it’s nice because we don’t have the shock factor and we didn’t want to appeal to everybody, we have straight clients because they are down with it, gay is hip. It’s positive, but some people still ask questions. They want to know about the gays.

Carol perceives that her straight clients view gay as being hip. She also expresses that her straight clients ask her questions regarding her sexual orientation. For Carol, she perceives this questioning as being rooted in a curiosity about her lesbian identity. While her opening her own business is a positive way to deal with job discrimination, most participants remain working for businesses, which are not lesbian owned.

Genderphobia and Homophobia Within the Family

Gender transgressive and butch identified lesbians also experience a large amount of homophobia and genderphobia from family members. In many cases, religion is the culprit behind the families' rejection and discrimination against the participants. As Tricia says:

Family is absolutely affected. My family is not supportive of my life [as a gender transgressive lesbian]. They are Pentecostal Christian. I am incredibly spiritual, but I am not religious. I respect all religions. In terms of my family, we have love for each other, but I am definitely the black sheep of the family. There is hate; there is homophobia in my family. I feel loved and hated at the same time.

Tricia expresses that her family is not supportive of her gender transgressive lesbian identity. She perceives this as being rooted in her family's Pentecostal Christian religious affiliations. She considers herself to be an outsider within her family, and she views her family as being homophobic. Her experience is that her family loves her, however she also expresses feeling "hated" by her family at the same time, based on their disapproval of her gender transgressive lesbian identity.

For others, being unaccepted by family members lies in the unfulfilled expectations the family had planned for the participant's lives. As Rhonda says:

Well it's mostly just my mother who had a really hard time with me being gay, and I think it's because she's your mom and she loves you, and why would she want me to be gay? This life is a lot harder. It's harder than a heteros' life, so I think she thought society would treat me bad and I would just not have the life she

wanted for me. Of course she wanted me to play with dolls, and wanted me to walk down the aisle in a wedding dress, she probably had all these dreams that didn't happen, traditional mother and daughter relationship that she didn't really have. I feel bad that she didn't have that. For a while we didn't talk, for years she blamed everything on my spouse, so there was a lot of tension in the relationship. We finally started talking five years ago. She came around, she is getting along with my spouse; it is totally different than it was before. They know this is not going to go away. I think she sees my spouse takes really good care of me, cause I moved out when I was like fifteen years old. I was living with my girlfriend [now spouse] and her mom, so I think she sees we take care of each other and we do positive things. She just came around, for her it is a relief as well, now that she has her daughter back. Everyone else in the family is accepting, I actually have a gay aunt and my mom actually blamed her. So, you know everybody is very accepting now.

In Rhonda's case, she left her parents' house at the age of fifteen due to the struggle her mother was having with her sexual identity and her gender identity. She expresses that in her experience, her mother had expectations of the life she wanted for Rhonda. These expectations were impossible for Rhonda, as she identified differently from what her mother expected of her. She perceives that her mother wanted different for her, due to the fear she had that her daughter would encounter a discriminating world. Instead, she moved in with her then girlfriend (now spouse) and has lived with her ever since she was a teenager.

While there was a great amount of family conflict in Rhonda's teenage years regarding her gender transgressive lesbian identity, she expresses that as she emerged into adulthood her relationship with her family has improved. An important point to make here is that while Rhonda had a place to live outside of her parent's house, many LGBTQQI identified individuals are kicked out of their families' homes and forced to live on the streets. As reported by the Williams Institute (2012), 40% of the homeless population is LGBTQ youth. Further the Williams Institute conducted a study in which,

Nearly seven in ten (68%) respondents indicated that family rejection was a major contributing factor contributing to LGBT youth homelessness, making it the most cited factor. More than half (54%) of respondents indicated that abuse in their family was another important factor contributing to LGBT homelessness.

For Helen, being the only child of a single parent makes it even more difficult to internalize her father's rejection of her butch lesbian identity. When asked about how her family relationships are affected by her gender identity, she replies:

Ok (takes a deep breath), the family, like my cousins that are my age and younger, they really don't care. But my dad is not cool with it; my older cousin is not cool with it. It's really tough, because I'm in a relationship now and my dad's not cool with it. It's just my dad and me, I don't have siblings, and I don't have a mom. It's just my dad and me, so it has been a struggle.

In essence, Helen feels isolated from her only parent, as she is in a lesbian relationship, which her father refuses to accept. Helen perceives that this rejection of her gender identity has something to do with the age of her father. She expresses that the younger generation of her family is more accepting of her gender identity.

While Helen experiences family rejection through lack of acceptance, others experience similar rejection in the form of families feeling "ashamed." For example, Joey says:

Well with my parents, they have come to a point of acceptance; it's more like tolerance. They don't give me grief about it. They stopped once I moved out of the house. I rarely see my parents. As far as my siblings, it's based on the event. For my brother's wedding, I felt the tension; I don't fit at all so it was difficult. My demeanor is very obvious, so I never have to come out. Looking at these functions, it's hard to explain. It's kind of like they are ashamed, like they wish I would fit into how I'm supposed to be in their opinion.

Joey experiences her family's rejection of her as being ashamed of her gender identity. While her family was more vocal of their disapproval of her in the past, now as an adult, she experiences this as more of an unspoken tension while engaging in family functions. She views this silent disapproval of her, as being rooted in their expectations regarding

their desire for her to express a gender normative identity. This tension makes Joey uncomfortable, and therefore, she doesn't see her family very much anymore.

Much like Rhonda and Joey, Lesley expresses that her mother had different expectations of what she would grow up to be, other than butch. She says:

Well my brother is also gay and my parents are dead. My father was fine with it; my mother had a hard time with it. She was a traditional woman, homophobic. But my daughter ended up being her revenge. I was a butch little girl, any things my mother loved like dolls, I didn't want. I didn't play with them; I guess she [participant's daughter] would [like dolls]. There was never any acceptance [from participant's mother]. It was bad enough that I was gay, but that I was butch was very hard on her.

For Lesley, she experienced various forms of rejection from her mother. She was rejected not only based on her sexual identity but also on her gender identity as a butch identified individual. She views her daughter's gender normative expression as being her mother's "revenge," as Lesley expresses her daughter would have been the daughter that her mother would have wanted, a feminine identified daughter. Lesley however, feels she could not express her gender identity in the way her mother expected of her, as she is a butch lesbian and has presented as such for most of her life, including in childhood. This desire from parents for their daughters to have a feminine presentation is another example of how gender transgressive lesbians pose a greater threat to the dominant gender system than femme and gender-blender lesbians, as their female masculine presentations challenge the "sameness" taboo of the gender binary.

Linda expresses that she has not had contact with a portion of her family in many years, she says:

I don't speak to my brother. We haven't spoken in (long pause) years. We've never had a relationship. And that's not just based on that, but I mean part of it now really is that he can't deal with who I am.

Linda's lack of relationship with her brother has been present for her whole life growing up. She perceives that this lack of relationship as they are older, as being rooted in the fact that he cannot accept her identity as a butch and as a lesbian. When Linda discusses her relationship with her mom, she describes her mother as butch presenting, but heterosexual. She is described as accepting Linda's gender identity because she is also gender fluid herself, she says:

Um (long pause), uh, I don't think my mom, my mom's probably the only one, (laughs) because my mom looks butch herself, I mean my mom has always had short hair, she wears polo shirts and flip-flops now, and I don't ever remember seeing my mother in a dress as a child. The rest of the family, like my extended family, like my cousins and aunts and uncles aren't quite sure what to do with me, which is okay. It has been a long time, like when I was a kid, we were all closer and we all visited, but now everybody's kind of doing their own thing.

When the holidays come around, Linda does not hide who she is from her family. She says:

I send Christmas cards with pictures of Kim [her partner] and I, because, like, yeah you know? You send me a Christmas card of your grandkid; I'm sending you a picture of my family. Um, I did it one year to push an issue, you know just to say if you don't want to have anything to do with me, that's fine but this is who I am. I'm not gonna hide anymore. I'm not gonna pin my mom, we went round and round for like two years where she was like 'I don't want you to tell anybody,' and I was like, I hate to break it to you---they know.

While her mother is accepting of Linda's gender identity, she would prefer for her to be secretive about her relationship with her partner. Linda comes up against her family's traditional view of what their definition of family means to them. She reveals she has sent out Christmas pictures of her and her partner to her family to make a point, her point being that family can be experienced in different ways. Family does not always come in the form of a husband and wife with children. Her family, as defined by her, is her and her partner. While her mother did not want for Linda to "tell anybody," Linda expresses

that her family already knows, and she is glad that they know about her being a butch and a lesbian.

CHAPTER 6: SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS AND OUTCOMES

In summary, the statements from the participants have been drawn from interviews with gender transgressive and butch identified lesbians regarding their everyday lived experiences. In the first section of this study, the participants elaborate their own views on how most people within society view gender, how they think society views individuals who do not conform to traditional gender categories, what gender means to them, how they identify and describe their own identity, along with if they distinguish between their gender and sexual identity.

The participants of this study express that society views gender simply, viewing masculine as equating to man, and feminine as equating to woman. This rigid “gender schema” (Devor 1987:34), has had adverse effects on the participants, in that their own gender identity is often discounted as a legitimate gender experience. The participants relate that they have all experienced discrimination in various forms due to their gender transgressive or butch lesbian presentation. Participants have various views on what gender means to them, some expressing that gender is based on sex. Other participants have a more complicated way of viewing gender, expressing that gender is subjective and can be expressed differently for each individual. Nearly all participants identify themselves as “butch,” one participant, Rhonda, identifies herself as “tomboy-femme” but also later said that she does also relate to the term “butch” as well. Further, nearly all participants consider their sexual identity (lesbian) and gender identity (butch) as being dependent on the other and undistinguished. One participant, Esther, did say that she distinguishes between the two identities, both (lesbian identity and butch identity) being independent identities from each other.

Further, the participants elaborate on what their lived experiences are like in their day-to-day lives. They detail their own thoughts and feelings on issues such as; how their gender affects their daily lives, how they want to be seen by others in their daily lives, how they feel other individuals with a similar gender identity to theirs are affected in their daily lives, and how they think their experiences are different or similar to those with other gender experiences.

The participants all express that they do feel their gender identity affects their daily lives. Their experiences have been affected in various ways including; experiencing bathroom harassment, being misidentified as men, dealing with work discrimination, being stared at in a hostile way, and dealing with issues of safety.

When asked how they want to be seen by others in their daily life, and if this relates to their gender identity, most express that they are not concerned with how others view them. Some participants state that they want to be addressed in a gender-neutral way, while others would like to be addressed as a woman by others. None of the participants communicate that they would like to be viewed as a man, or as wanting to be a man. Some participants say that they would like to be viewed only as being a good person; while others express that they just want to be respected and seen as deserving of equal rights within society.

All participants communicate that they believe that other individuals with a similar gender identity to their own are also similarly affected in their daily lives. These common struggles are experienced in dealing with social discrimination within various social institutions and daily interactions. The participants describe how others who identify as gender transgressive and butch also experience their own struggles with

bathroom harassment, with safety issues and in being commonly mis-identified as men or as wanting to be men.

When the participants were asked how they think their own experiences are different or similar to those with different gender experiences than their own, the responses were varied. Most participants state that they feel they have similar struggles in society as other non-conforming gender identities, such as transgender or other gender expressions that are outside of the social norm. Some participants express they experience various forms of masculine privilege; in those cases they found similarities with men. However, many respondents also said their experiences are similar to all women, as they experience sexism in various ways as well.

The participants also elaborate on issues of gender identity, according to them. They relate on issues such as what it means to be gender transgressive or butch, if their outward appearance reflects their gender identity, what their presentation means to them, if they feel that their gender identity challenges outside traditional gender categories, how people with traditional gender categories respond to their presentation, and what they think of gendered presentations.

When asked what it means to be a gender transgressive or butch lesbian, various responses were presented. For some respondents, their own identity is seen as being a presentation. While others express that their gender identity is more of an “essence” as it is at the core of their selves, affecting all aspects of their lives. Still others express that being a gender transgressive or butch is based on activities they perform in their daily lives such as “fixing things,” while others feel it is rooted in acts of “chivalry” towards

other women, especially their femme-identified partners. Lastly, some participants view butch as being grounded in female strength.

All participants state that they do feel their outward appearance (clothing and/or style) reflects their gender identity. When asked what this presentation means to them, there are a variety of responses. For some, this presentation is simply what is the most psychologically comfortable for themselves. While for others, it is more of a statement of freedom, especially since some respondents were forbidden to dress as they wanted to in childhood. Some participants, express that their presentation is rooted in non-conformity from social gender norms, and further that this non-conformity can be expressed in various fashion representations.

When asked if they feel that their gender identity challenges outside traditional gender categories, all respondents communicate that it does. They were then asked how those who do conform to traditional gender categories respond to their gender transgressive or butch presentation. The responses vary from being misidentified as a man, to experiencing hateful responses from a traditionally gendered society. Some respondents say that those with traditional gendered presentations express fear towards their gender transgressive or butch presentations. While other respondents express an overall feeling that others are uncomfortable with their gender identity.

Respondents then elaborate on how they themselves feel about traditional gendered presentations. Some respondents say they feel that traditional gendered presentations are “boring,” while nearly an equal amount of respondent’s state that they are not bothered by traditional gendered presentations. Still, some respondent’s express that they feel traditional gendered presentations are constricting for most people, in that

those who have traditional gender presentations seem socially forced into playing some traditional role and that most are trapped within this role.

Lastly, the participants discuss their thoughts on community and relationships. They interpret how their relationships are affected by their gender identity, in particular with co-workers, romantic relationships, in their professional lives, family relationships, and friendships. In regards to community, the participants articulate their feelings on the concept of gender transgressive or butch communities, such as how they relate to others within this community; if they feel there is solidarity within this community and how they perceive this solidarity. Finally, they were asked to reflect on what their relationships are like with others who are outside of the gender transgressive or butch lesbian community.

The responses to this last portion of the interview schedule were based on feelings of community and relationships. When asked how co-workers perceive their gender identity, the responses were varied. For some, their co-workers are “fine” with their gender identity. For others, they have experienced high levels of homophobia and genderphobia; some of this was directed at them from not just men, but also heterosexual cis-women. For others, they experience sexism from male co-workers regarding their gender identity, such as derogatory remarks and jokes made regarding their gender transgressive or butch presentation.

The respondents were then asked to reflect upon how their romantic relationships are affected by their gender identity. All of the respondents state that they are strictly attracted to femme-identified women. Most state that they don’t think a butch-on-butched relationship would work for them personally. One participant, Esther, elaborates further

that she is attracted to femme queer or bisexual women, while the respondent Rhonda states she is attracted to feminine heterosexual women. However most respondents do not elaborate on the sexual identity they prefer in their partnerships with femme women, only with the gender identity of femme being desired. While some participant's describe their romantic relationships with femme women as being functional, it is unclear if the participants view these gender roles as being rooted in patriarchal gender divisions of labor seeping their way into lesbian relationships. This is something that should be researched in a future study.

When asked if their professional lives are affected by others perceptions regarding their gender identity, nearly all of the participants express that they have experienced some form of work discrimination. While some respondents perceive that they were not offered jobs based on their gender transgressive presentation, one participant, Celia, even described having to present as feminine in order to become employed at all. Some participants reflect upon experiences with workplace sexism in not being paid a fair wage for work, while others express they did not even make it past the first interview once employers saw their presentation, despite being highly qualified for the position. Respondents also state that they are repeatedly misidentified as being men in the workplace. One participant, Carol, started a lesbian owned business, this being partly due to her desire to avoid homophobic and genderphobic experiences within the professional world.

Participants were also asked to reflect upon their family relationships as pertaining to their gender identity. Many participants relay that they experience homophobia and genderphobia within their families. Some participants reveal that they

are no longer in contact with their family members, because of their families' genderphobic and homophobic reactions towards them. One respondent, Rhonda, states she left home as a teenager due to her mother's homophobia towards her lesbian identity, she has lived with her girlfriend (now spouse) ever since her teenage years. For some respondents, their parents homophobia and genderphobia is fueled by religious ideologies, more specifically Christian oriented religions, such as Pentecostal Christian and Catholic.

When respondents were asked if they feel their friendships are affected by their gender identity, the answers are varied. For many respondents, they only have queer or butch identified friends, as there is a level of understanding there that they can relate to. For others, they have a desire to make gender transgressive or butch friends, but they find it difficult to find other gender transgressive or butch individuals to develop friendships with. One respondent, Rhonda, indicates that she has friendships with a wide variety of people, not necessarily driven by a common sexuality or gender identity.

Respondents were then asked if they feel if there is a gender transgressive or butch community. Some respondents say there is a butch community, however this community is more rooted in online groups, rather than face-to-face interactions. Other respondents state that they believe there is a butch community, but not in the area in which they live. A few respondents state that they do not think there is a butch community.

For the respondents who state they do feel there is a gender transgressive or butch community, they were then asked to reflect on how they relate to others within this community. For many, they state the relating is mostly online or on Facebook. While

others state it is more rooted in face-to-face interactions, such as performing in drag king shows. One participant, Esther, states that in regards to friendships, being gender transgressive or butch lesbian is not so important, instead the importance lies in how you identify politically.

The respondents were then asked if they feel there is solidarity among the members of the gender transgressive or butch lesbian community. Most participant's express that there is not a high level of solidarity within this community, as there is a high level of competition among gender transgressive and butch identified individuals within a group setting. However, some participants express that a commonality is felt among the community, and that this is comforting for them.

Lastly, the respondents were asked to elaborate on what their relationships are like with others outside of the gender transgressive or butch community. Most respondents state that they have mainly queer friendships. While one participant, Joey, states that she feels that the LGBTQQIA community is not focused enough on gender transgressive or butch lesbian issues, instead the LGBTQQIA community's main focus is on gay men. Others state that they do not have any heterosexual male friends, and that this is a deliberate choice on their part due to their perceptions that most heterosexual men are sexist. Still, one participant, Rhonda, says that her relationships with others outside of the gender transgressive or butch lesbian community are "fine," and that she has friendships with a variety of people with varying identities. Another participant, Tricia, says she is only "out" with her Facebook friends and is selective in whom she chooses to confide in regarding her sexual identity at work and in life.

The Lifeworld Space of Gender Transgressive Lesbians

The phenomenological approach to this study, analyzes the interconnectedness of the subject (gender transgressive lesbians), and others within the socially constructed world. This study also describes the ways in which participants express many commonalities in their daily experiences in regards to their gender identity. This commonality of experiences describes the “essence” of the lifeworld space of gender transgressive and butch lesbians. This essence manifests itself in a number of ways, particularly in their common experiences regarding gender identity, and with their perspectives regarding the communities and relationships within their own social world.

An example of how the lifeworld spaces of gender transgressive lesbians are examined within this study is through discussing the participant’s views regarding gender identity. When the participants are asked to describe their gender identity and its expression within society, most describe this expression as coming from a multitude of everyday experiences. Joey describes her butch identity expression by stating:

I think it’s basically how I dress, how I present myself. Maybe the mannerisms, how I act, it’s kind of hard to say. I think it’s basically what I do every day normally you know? How I get dressed, how I talk to people, how I interact or don’t interact with strangers. I think it’s all that.

So it can be said that for participants like Joey, their gender expression is linked to everything they do in any given day. She continues, “it’s not just reflected in how I dress, it’s also how I act, how I carry myself, how I speak, it’s in everything.” Since gender identity for most of the participants is described as being a part of everything they do, it can be said that this is one example of how daily-lived experiences can be considered the lifeworld essence of gender transgressive lesbians.

Gender Transgressive Lesbians and Intersubjectivity

Intersubjectivity is based on a shared perception of reality and the assumptions individuals make regarding shared experiences and their meanings. These assumptions create the belief that we do live in shared lifeworld spaces. For gender transgressive lesbians, the intersubjective experience is based upon their idea that society has perceived gender binary divisions. In the cases of those who transgress the notions of the gender binary, some transgress gender norms due to their adoption of this shared reality, while for others they transgress gender norms as a rejection of this shared reality regarding the gender binary. Intersubjective understanding is also an important part of this study, as individuals experiences are interpreted differently based upon their own viewpoints. It is through intersubjectivity that we can come to understand another's lived experiences, despite us having a separate consciousness. In this study, I examine the shared experiences among gender transgressive lesbians in order to provide the context for building understanding and empathy for this group's experiences and struggles in daily life. Further, this study discusses intersubjectivity as it is utilized by the participants in forming community, through common identification among gender transgressive identities.

The essence of the lifeworld of gender transgressive lesbians can also be viewed from their struggles within the dominant gender system. This is a common experience among the participants, as they encounter prejudice in their day-to-day lives, even while performing menial tasks such as going to a restaurant or walking down the street. Discrimination is an important piece of the puzzle when describing the daily-lived experiences of gender transgressive or butch lesbians, as they face this continuously

within daily social interactions. This discrimination comes in many forms, from constant public gawking or staring, being ridiculed for their gender identity, being mis-identified as men, or being accused of wanting to be men. Further, the participants are often confronted and asked to leave women's restrooms; this harassment has even induced a fear of entering a public restroom in some who identify as gender transgressive or butch. Safety is a hefty area of concern in the experience of a gender transgressive or butch lesbian, as there have been instances of violence against both identities and towards all gender outlaws.

The goal of this study is to provide an avenue of understanding and empathy into what life is like for gender transgressive lesbians. Although gender transgressive lesbians may often experience harassment and fear, they remain resolute in their own gender identities. For the participants, they are simply expressing who they are and there is no other way for them to present themselves out in the social world. When the participants describe what gender transgressive or butch means to them, many respond that it is rooted in strength and freedom. While gender transgressive and butch lesbians do endure a high amount of societal discrimination, they express their gender identity with pride and without apology.

CONCLUSION

This study has explored the daily-lived experiences of gender transgressive lesbians through in-depth interviews regarding the participant's own perspectives on their gender identity and gendered presentation. Further, this study asks participants to reflect upon their own experiences within the workplace, personal relationships and community and how their gender identity is perceived from outside individuals. The participant's responses shed light upon genderphobia, homophobia and sexism within the gender transgressive and butch lesbian experience. This study contributes to previous sociological studies regarding gender transgressive lesbians as it focuses on participants personal accounts of various forms of social interactions (workplace, personal relationships, and community) and asks the participant to reflect upon how their own gendered presentation is perceived by others within society and also how they themselves view gender identity.

This study is different from prior research regarding gender transgressive and butch lesbian identities, as it focuses on their own perspectives regarding their lived everyday experiences. Further, in this study, participants reflect upon a variety of topics such as: their own opinions on gender identity, their feelings about society's views on gender identity, their lived experiences in their own daily lives, opinions on gendered presentations, and reflections upon how their gender identity has affected their relationships and community. The outcomes of this study are different from the outcomes of previous studies, in that the participants create a deeper understanding as to what daily life is like for a gender transgressive or butch identified lesbian.

Further, the responses to this study are different from some previous studies and actually provide a contrast from other study outcomes. For example, in Holly Devor's study "Gender Blending Females," Devor describes, "gender blending females" as cis-women who "have clear female identities and know themselves to be women concurrently with gender presentations that often do not successfully communicate these facts to others." (Devor 1987:12) While this is also the case with the gender transgressive lesbians of this study, Devor's study suggests that gender blending females "have largely escaped the threat of physical and sexual violence" (Devor 1987:37), by consciously using their gender identity to "avoid the institutionalized physical control and confinement of women by men." However, in my study regarding this particular issue, many gender transgressive and butch lesbians express that they experience safety issues and safety concerns quite often, specifically due to discriminatory practices and the historical violence that has occurred to gender transgressive and butch lesbian cis-women, and to the larger LGBTQQI community. These safety issues are also experienced by Denissen and Saguy's participants (2013:386), in their study, some participant's express that they experience various forms of physical and sexual violence. Denissen and Saguy explain that while lesbians in the construction trades may be:

less threatening to notions of men's work, their visibility threatens the dictates of compulsory heterosexuality and, more broadly, the subordination of women's sexuality to men's desire. (P. 386)

Denissen and Saguy (2013:386) also state "men's efforts to sexually objectify women coworkers can be understood as an attempt to restore this gender-sexual order." While women in the construction trade "skillfully mix performances of femininity and masculinity" in order to resist sexism in the workplace, "resistance to sexual

objectification may elicit more overt hostility from male co workers” (Denissen and Saguy 2013:386). Therefore, for those who resist gender oppression within a patriarchal system, men sometimes retaliate with physical violence against women who present outside of gender norms. Some participants of this study also express this experience of feeling threatened by violence from others, due to being outside of society’s strict gender norms.

Another area in which this study is different from Devor’s (1987:34) study is through the way in which Devor describes how the participants of his study do not correct being mistaken for a man, and that they do this in order to obtain masculine privileges. Devor states:

they learned that they could use their gender role to their advantage to gain some access to both male privilege and masculine freedom of movement while at the same time avoiding some of the more odious aspects of being female in a society predicated on male dominance. (P. 34)

However, in my study this is definitely not the case. While some participants did state they have experienced masculine privileges some of the time, they feel uncomfortable and upset by this misguided privilege. Instead, many participants reject being mistaken as men in public and resent those who give them privileges based on the false assumptions that they are male. Further, many of the participants in this study identify simultaneously as “butch” and “feminist,” and they do not distinguish between the two, with the two identities in these cases being interwoven into each other.

This study reflects upon the daily-lived experiences of gender transgressive lesbians and also the experiences that demonstrate how transgressive gender identities are vital in resisting gender oppression, homophobia, and heteronormativity. Future research will be needed regarding the divide between some gender transgressive lesbians and FTM

(Female to Male) transgender individuals. Further, it is imperative that future research is conducted regarding feminist attitudes among gender transgressive lesbians, femme lesbian identities and FTM (Female to Male) transgender individuals; as previous studies and recent events hint that these are important topics which would need entire studies devoted to them.

There are areas of this study in which further possible research is necessary, in particular focusing on the intersections of transgender identity and gender transgressive identity. While the identities are different and their own separate entities, some of the participants state that there are some commonalities in that both identities experience discrimination for presenting gender roles which are outside of social gender norms. Further, there has been much discourse regarding transgender male identity versus gender transgressive and butch lesbian identity. Issues regarding their own specific issues, their commonalities, their place within the communities they have created and also political commonalities and differences should also have their own studies devoted to these issues.

Another area of study, which is necessary, is the issue of femme visibility within the LGBTQQI community. As stated in the presentation of data portion of this study, some gender transgressive and butch lesbian identified participants state that femme identified queer cis-women do not experience as much discrimination as they do, due to the fact that they can pass as heterosexual women in their daily lives. However, other participants indicate that femme identified individuals experience their own issues with discrimination, in particular visibility issues and sexism. It is imperative that this issue of femme invisibility is studied, as “our lives are complicated by class, race, and gender oppression. Our lives are shaped by homophobia and the pleasures of radical sex” (Rose

and Camilleri 2002:13). Further, it is important to understand the perspective and lived experiences of femmes in their own words, as femme is “not tied to butch,” but is its own identity and experience (13).

There are a few limitations in the research of this study. The sample size of this study was limited to 10 participants; therefore it is possible that if the sample size were larger there may have been more variation in responses regarding the lived experiences of gender transgressive or butch lesbians.

Further, while there are a variety of ethnicities and races represented in this study, the gender identities were all very similar. As stated in the literature review section of this study, gender identities many times vary based on racial identities. However, all of the participants of this study felt a commonality with the term “butch” regardless of racial identity. One participant identified more as a tomboy-femme, but also states she has commonalities with the term “butch” as well. If there were varying gender identities such as “stud,” “macha,” or “aggressive,” there may have been more perspectives present in this study regarding the lived experiences of gender transgressive lesbians.

The outcomes of this study provide the essence of what life is like for gender transgressive and butch lesbians, this is relevant for a myriad of reasons. The relevance of this study pertains to the personal lives of the gender transgressive community and LGBTQQIA community as a whole, as it displays what life is like for those who present gender identity outside of social and traditional norms. It is my hope that this will provide some insight into what is needed for this community in order for a more equal future to be implemented.

This study is also important to the professional lives and rights of those whose gender identity is presented outside of the dominant social norm. Many participants of this study express that they experience a high level of discrimination in their professional lives; from being overlooked for positions they are qualified for, experiencing harassment from co-workers, to feeling like they have to conceal their gender identity in order to maintain employment. Therefore, this study is relevant for employers who seek to further gender identity equality within the workplace. Further, this is important for worker's rights in general, as discrimination laws should be implemented in order to protect gender identity as one of the protected groups.

This study is also pertinent for society as a whole as the participant's lives are affected by all arenas within society, from the family to their professional lives and beyond. These issues are not only personal; they are political, as the rights of the participants are affected by the discriminatory practices of the majority. It is my hope that this study will provide an avenue of understanding for the lived experiences of gender transgressive and butch lesbians, as this insight can build bridges between various communities and lessen the discriminatory practices against this group in their daily lives.

In conclusion, I argue that the data presented in this study has described the ways in which gender transgressive lesbians pose different threats to the dominant gender system than femmes, gender-blender, and transgender individuals. In the case of queer or lesbian femmes, gender transgressive lesbians are more visibly threatening to the dominant gender system as their gender presentation is outside of the norm and they are more likely to be seen as lesbian. In regards to gender-blending lesbians, gender

transgressive lesbians also pose a different threat to the dominant gender system. Similar to femmes, gender-blending lesbians may pass as heterosexual, or may be assumed to be heterosexual in a way that gender transgressive lesbians are not. Lastly, gender transgressive lesbians offer a different threat to the dominant gender system than transgender identities. Specifically, gender transgressives threaten the gender binary by identifying as women who have a masculine presentation. In contrast to some transpeople, gender transgressives (and gender-blenders) claim both "sides" of the binary, thereby undermining the sameness taboo at the core of the gender binary. In these ways, gender transgressive lesbians are a greater threat to the dominant gender system.

AFTERWARD: CLOSING COMMENTS AND RESEARCH GOALS

In closing, this study seeks to explore the lived experiences of gender transgressive and butch lesbian gender identities. The thoughts, feelings and experiences expressed by the participants offer a deeper insight into what life is like for those who identify as gender transgressive or butch lesbian. For the participants, society's binary view regarding gender identity does not coincide with their gendered presentations of female masculinities, therefore their gender transgressive identities undermine the sameness taboo at the core of the gender binary. In their gender transgressive lesbian identities, they experience public shaming, discrimination and visibility issues.

The discrimination experienced by the participants from society intersects throughout various parts of their public and private lives. Gender transgressive and butch lesbians are often mistaken and mis-identified as being men, or wanting to be men. The participants of this study do not identify as transgender, but they are often perceived as identifying as such. Since society views gender in a binary way, the majority of society views masculine gendered presentation as identifying as male. However, this binary view of gender is untrue for the participants, who identify as butch women and express their own type of masculinity separate from those who identify as men. This is yet another way that gender transgressive lesbians pose a threat to the dominant gender system, and also undermine the sameness taboo at the core of the gender binary.

Common experiences among the participants are revealed in their daily lives as they are often subject to bathroom harassment from traditionally gendered cis-women. The participants describe the ways in which others confront them in women's bathrooms; asking them to leave and being told they are not in the right bathroom. For some

participants, these experiences with bathroom harassment has led them to use men's restrooms instead of women's restrooms. For others, they continue using the women's restroom and face the everyday harassment in the restroom. Some participants express feeling very vulnerable in women's restrooms, particularly when they are washing their hands, since this is the moment when they come face-to-face with the other women in the restroom. Further, some respondent's report dehydrating themselves by abstaining from drinking liquids, in order to avoid having to use public restrooms. This type of restroom fear is traumatic for many participant's, so traumatic in fact that their own health is in jeopardy from trying to halt their own bodily functions. With the recent addition of gender-neutral bathrooms, participants feel there is more comfort in using the restroom, but these types of restrooms are few and far between. Further, it can be said that the solution lies not only in creating gender-neutral restrooms, but also in society bending their own binary views regarding gender.

Many participants express that they do fear for their own safety in their daily lives, due to society's hostile reactions toward their gender transgressive lesbian presentations. The LGBTQQIA community has been devastated by many hate crimes throughout history, and gender outlaws in particular have been targeted for expressing their gender identity outside of society's norms. Further, women in general have been subject to physical and sexual violence within society. When these two identities are intersected, the gender outlaw woman experiences struggle with street harassment and violence in ways that other identities, such as cis-men, do not experience. This history of violence towards gender outlaws and women is internalized and they often have a feeling of needing to "watch their backs." In this study, the intersection of being woman-

identified and butch-identified creates a multitude of reasons for feeling unsafe in public spaces. It is imperative that the law is supportive of gender outlaws when they are subject to gender based violence, as history shows the law is not always supportive of victims of hate crimes and instead blame the victim for not performing gender in a traditional way. It is only through dismantling the current dominant gender system and society transforming its views regarding gender identity that these changes can occur.

The participants also express that while they face daily discrimination from society, this does not affect how they view themselves. Despite society's attempts to push gender outlaws into hiding, the participants remain strong in their gender identities. The participants express the pride they have in their gender transgressive and butch lesbian identities. The participants only expect to be respected and treated as equals in their everyday lives, beyond that for most, it is unimportant to them if society is accepting of their gender identity.

The participants elaborate on their views regarding what it means to be butch or gender transgressive. They express that being butch is an essence, as it is a part of everything they do in their everyday lives. This presentation is described as being rooted in strength and in a respect for all womankind. This presentation is also rooted in a freedom of expression and in non-conformity with regards to traditional gendered expectations within society. There is also a fashion element to this presentation, as many participants express that they do find clothing and style as important in the presentations of their butch or gender transgressive identities.

Most participants indicate that they do experience homophobia and genderphobia from their families. A number of participants also reveal that they are no longer in contact

with members of their family for this particular reason. Furthermore, most participants began to experience family homophobia and genderphobia starting in their childhood or adolescence. A few participants express that they have been expelled from their homes, leaving them to live with friends or extended family members. Religion is pointed out to be a major part of this family rejection, in particular in affiliation with Christian religions. There is a large problem with LGBTQQI youth who are homeless due to being expelled from their homes based on their sexual and gender identities. For some, they find shelter within LGBTQQI organizations, while others are left to fend for themselves on the streets. This is a problem for many reasons; one of the main issues is the violence that is experienced by LGBTQQI youth within society. It is reported by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, that in 2014 alone, hate crimes were committed against 1,402 LGBTQ identified individuals (Federal Bureau of Investigation 2014). Further in regards to other gender outlaws, such as transgender individuals, in just the first six weeks of 2015, six transgender women have been murdered in hate crimes or in domestic violence cases (Sherouse 2015).

Along with the violence and murder that is experienced by LGBTQQI individuals, there is also a high suicide rate among LGBTQQI individuals, especially LGBTQQI youth. The Trevor Project has released a list of facts about suicide, stating “LGBT youth are 4 times more likely, and questioning youth are 3 times more likely, to attempt suicide as their straight peers,” further “nearly half of young transgender people have seriously thought about taking their own lives, and one quarter report having made a suicide attempt” (The Trevor Project 2014). The reasoning behind these suicide attempts is said to be partly due to the rejection they receive from family. The Trevor Project

states “LGB youth who come from highly rejecting families are 8.4 times more likely to have attempted suicide as [other] LGB peers who reported no or low levels of family rejection” (The Trevor Project 2014). These statistics are crucial in understanding how family and societal rejection affects LGBTQQI individuals, these rejections do make the difference between life and death for many. It is my hope that schools and parents educate themselves on how to improve the lives of LGBTQQI youth who face daily discrimination and how to prevent bullying and violence against LGBTQQI youth.

When the participants elaborate on their thoughts regarding the butch or gender transgressive community, it is found that most participants feel that there is a lack of community, especially in their own residential areas. It is also expressed that there is less of a face-to-face community happening and instead more of an online community occurring, especially on Facebook. One respondent, Linda, questions how much can be done politically from the gender transgressive or the butch lesbian community since they do not meet face-to-face, as in person interactions seem to be more reliable for community movements in making a difference. However, there are political groups that form online, so it is my hope that this will also occur for this community as well.

Lastly, when the participants reflect upon their relationships with others outside of the gender transgressive or butch lesbian community, many express that they are selective in their friendships. Some participants state that they do not have friendships with heterosexual cis-men, due to their misogynistic viewpoints. The respondents who identify as people of color are more likely to have friendships with other LGBTQQI people of color. One participant states that while she would like to develop deeper relationships with the LGBTQQI community at large, there are too many differences

within this large community. She discusses that the LGBTQQI community is heavily geared toward the agenda of gay men, with lesbian issues being of minimal importance. So while commonalities are important for butch and gender transgressive lesbians, political affiliation also matters greatly within their relationships. The participant's express the need for community, however conflicts can deter some away from the community. It is my hope that this issue is studied in the future, as there is evidence from the participants that there is some desire for more gender transgressive and butch community in the participant's lives.

My future goals as a researcher are to investigate the lives of queer femme identities and transgender identities as well. I find that there is a need for further study into these two communities, not just in regards to their relationships with the gender transgressive and butch lesbian community, but as independent studies regarding their own lived experiences. I am hopeful that the studies of these LGBTQQI identities can create a dialogue regarding the struggles, laws, commonalities, differences and feelings within these identities. As a queer femme myself, I will have an insider view regarding what the daily-lived experiences are for those who identify as queer femme. However, I will need to apply a good amount of bracketing in studying queer femme identities, due to my experience with this phenomenon, as there are different experiences within the femme community. In my goals for studying the transgender community, I would like to create another phenomenological study regarding the lived experiences of transgender women in particular. I would like to discuss issues of trans-misogyny, their relationships outside of their community, trans-feminism, and their views on the LGBTQQI community as a whole.

This study explores the lived experiences of gender transgressive and butch identified lesbians. I find that this community faces many forms of discrimination within society due to traditionally gender normative views, but gender transgressive and butch lesbians remain strong and resilient in their own lives. It is up to parents, educators and community leaders to lead the next generation towards a more liberated view of gender identity. It is only then, that not just the LGBTQQI community, but also the whole of society, can loosen their gender normative chains and experience a greater freedom of gender expression for all.

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APPENDIX A

Interview Schedule

Icebreaker questions:

1. In your experience, how do most people view gender?
2. How do think society views individuals who do not conform to traditional gender categories?
3. What does gender mean to you?
4. How do you identify? How do you describe your identity? Do you distinguish between your gender and sexual identity or are they the same to you?

Lived Experiences:

5. Do you feel that your gender identity affects your daily life? If so, in what ways?
6. How do you want to be seen by others in your daily life, and how is this related to your gender identity, or not?
7. How do you feel other individuals with a similar gender identity to yours are affected in their daily lives?
8. How do you think your experiences are different/similar to those with other gender experiences?

Identity:

9. From your own point of view, what does it mean to be (insert gender identity)?
10. Does your outward appearance (clothing, style) reflect your gender identity? If so, what does this presentation mean to you?
11. Do you feel that your gender identity challenges outside traditional gender categories?

- a. If so, how do those who conform to these traditional gender categories respond to your presentation?
- b. What do you think of traditional gendered presentations?

Community/Relationships:

13. How are your relationships affected by your gender identity?

14. Follow up questions for work, romantic, professional, and family:

- a. How do you feel your co-workers perceive your gender identity?
- b. How does your gender identity affect your romantic relationship/s?
- c. Is your professional life affected by others perceptions regarding your gender identity?
- d. Are your family relationships affected by your gender identity?
- e. Do you feel your friendships are affected by your gender identity? If yes, how so and in what ways?

15. Do you feel there is a (insert participant's gender identity) community?

- a. If so, how do you relate to others within this community?
- b. Do you feel there is solidarity among members within this community?
- c. How do you perceive and/or experience this solidarity?

16. What are your relationships like with others who are outside of the (insert participant's gender identity) community?

APPENDIX B

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

The Lived Experiences of Self-Identified Masculine of Center lesbian/queer Individuals: A Phenomenological Study.

Volunteers Wanted for a Research Study

Purpose and Procedures

This study is intended to examine the voices and perspectives of self-identified Masculine of Center lesbian/queer individuals, regarding their daily-lived experiences and perspectives on community. This study will add to the limited literature regarding the perspectives of Masculine of Center lesbian/queer individuals. It is hoped that this study will aid pro-LGBTQ activists, lobbyists, community leaders, and genderqueer individuals in aiding the Masculine of Center community regarding their needs that are expressed within the study.

This study will be conducted through interviews that will ask questions regarding your views and experiences related to gender identity. Each interview will be one hour in length with a possible short follow-up interview if more detail is needed. During this interview, you will be asked questions related to your gender identity as a “masculine of center” individual. Interviews will be scheduled in a location that is agreed upon between researcher and participant.

Eligibility to participate

Participants must be 18 years of age or older, and must self-identify as a Masculine of Center lesbian/queer individual (for example Butch, AG, Stud, Boi, Macha or any other Masculine of Center identity). Participants must be willing to be interviewed for one hour or so regarding your gender identity in person or on the telephone. All interviews will be audio recorded. Also, all participants must sign a “Form of Consent,” which must be returned to researcher before any interviewing can take place.

Benefits of participation

The benefits of participating in this study include: taking a part in contributing to the much-needed research regarding masculine of center lesbian/queer individuals, as well as the opportunity to participate in a qualitative research study. Further, this may foster personal insights regarding the experiences of the masculine of center lesbian/queer community.

Location and Contact Information

The location of this study is to be arranged between participant and researcher.

This research is conducted under the direction of Julia Lynch Davison, CSUN Sociology Department.

APPENDIX C

California State University, Northridge

The Lived Experiences of Gender Transgressive Lesbians: A Phenomenological Study.

Informed Consent Form

Description of the Research

This study is intended to examine the perspectives of gender transgressive lesbians (a lesbian with a masculine gendered presentation) regarding their daily-lived experiences. This study seeks to describe the participant's lived experiences in their daily lives regarding their gender identity.

Participant Information

This study will be conducted through in-depth interviews with gender transgressive lesbian individuals. The interview questions will consist of open-ended questions regarding the participant's views regarding their daily-lived experiences and gender identity. Each interview will be one hour in length with a possible short follow-up interview if more detail is needed. The risk for participation in this study is minimal, however personal issues of gender identity will be discussed. You will receive information on how to contact low-cost counseling and support groups in the event that any emotional discomfort is experienced during the interview. The use of such counseling and support groups is made at the participant's own cost. Further, if you become uncomfortable in any way with the interview you may discontinue participation at any time or ask to skip any questions or topics. There will be no monetary compensation for participation in this study.

Confidentiality and Final Disposition of Data

Any information gathered from the interviews which may be directly associated with yourself will be kept confidential, and will not be used without your written permission or if required by law. The results of this data may be published, however the names of the participants will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms. All data gathered from this study will be kept in a locked file and will also be kept on a password-protected computer. All audio recordings will be destroyed once the project is concluded at the participant's request.

Benefit of Participation

The benefits of participating in this study include: taking a part in contributing to the much-needed research regarding gender transgressive lesbians, as well as the opportunity to participate in a qualitative research study. Further, this may foster personal insights regarding the experiences of the gender transgressive lesbian community.

Concerns

If you would like to voice any concerns regarding this study please direct your questions to Research and Sponsored Projects, 18111 Nordhoff Street, California State University Northridge, CA 91330-8232, and by phone at 818-677-2901. If you have specific questions about the study you may contact Dr. David Boyns at 18111 Nordhoff Street, California State University, Northridge, 321 Santa Susana Hall, Department of Sociology, Northridge, CA 91330-8318, by email at david.boyns@csun.edu, and by phone at (818) 677-6803.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time. Likewise, the researcher may cancel this study at any time.

Audio Taping

The in-depth interviews will be audio taped so that an accurate representation of the interview can be transcribed. Your initials here _____ signify your consent to be audio taped. All audio recordings and transcripts will be kept in a locked file and will also be kept on a password-protected computer. Audio recordings will be destroyed if the participant wishes once the study is concluded.

I have read the above and understand the conditions outlined for participation in the study. I have been provided with a copy of this consent form to keep and I give informed consent of my participation in the study.

Participant Printed Name:

First

MI

Last

Signature: _____

Date: _____

If you have signed this form please return one copy to the interviewer.

Keep one copy of this consent form for your records.