

**Transgender and Genderqueer Youth and Adolescent Populations: An Ethnographic
Content Analysis of Postings to Social Media**

by

Courtney Rebecca East

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
Auburn University
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Auburn, Alabama
August 5, 2017

Keywords: transgender; genderqueer; youth and adolescents; counseling; ethnographic content
analysis

Copyright 2017 by Courtney Rebecca East

Approved by

Amanda Evans, Ph.D., Chair; Associate Professor of Counselor Education
Melanie Iarussi, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Counselor Education
Nicholas Derzis, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Rehabilitation Counseling
Rebecca Curtis, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Rehabilitation Counseling

Abstract

The purpose of this dissertation is to explore the trends, issues, and concerns surrounding the transgender and genderqueer youth and adolescent populations with the aim of better understanding the culture of this demographic. This population face disproportionately high rates of social and psychological distress in comparison to their cisgender counterparts. While it is clear that the transgender and genderqueer youth and adolescent population endures adversity, the counseling profession has emphasized the use of a strengths-based and wellness approach to serving the needs of all clients. This study utilized an Ethnographic Content Analysis (ECA) to look at 224 postings to an online social media group provided by self-identified transgender or genderqueer youth and adolescents over the course of three consecutive months. Findings from this study revealed 3 thematic categories: *Seeking*, *Sharing*, and *Providing* along with 11 subcategories. This study highlighted unique concerns associated with this population such as dysphoria, passing, and name changes, all of which are imperative for counseling professionals to be aware of when serving this population. Also, this study showed that support systems are indicative of mental wellness and self-confidence. Postings within this study indicated a desire for in-group acceptance and belonging versus general community-level or societal acceptance. It was found that group members more often posted forms of uplifting and positive messages showing empowerment, resilience, and pride in one's identity rather than posting messages indicating self-pity, shame, or anger as was expected based on the high levels of reported harassment from current research findings.

Acknowledgements

To Mom – of course you are first on the list. Without fail you have always had my back. You diligently listened to endless conference presentations, manuscripts, and let me read you word for word my entire dissertation proposal. That takes patience and a whole lot of love. You have always been my proudest supporter and have the patience of a saint in handling me. I've never questioned your belief in me and I'm so grateful to have a mom who cares as much as you do. Thank you for your kindness and all of the encouragement you've given me over the years. I hope you know how much I love you.

Mio, my best friend, my ride or die, you have been there from the beginning of this entire journey. Every single day, without question and without judgement you sat by me and encouraged me to keep going. Thank you for your kindness and your unfailing love.

To Dr. Evans, you are the sole reason I made it through this program. You picked me up when I felt like the world was against me and I needed a good cheerleader. You helped me to remember why I was in this and gave me the confidence to go big or go home. You've watched me cry more times than I'm brave enough to admit but you never allowed me feel sorry for myself for very long. Instead you pushed me and challenged me and for that I will always be grateful. You are one of the kindest, most supportive, and most fearless women and educators that I know. I look up to you and hope that one day I can make the kind of impact on my students that you have had on me, although that's a tall order. Thank you for believing in me.

Oh, Kristine, you're a gem; you're my partner in crime. I'm so glad you hustled your way into my life and forced your friendship on me. Not only have you been a mentor to me, but you've been my confidant, my cheerleader, and most importantly, my best friend. I love how different we are from each other and I love that that is what makes our friendship rock. You're also one of the smartest ladies I know. There is no other person in this world that I can call up and have a deep and meaningful discussions about race, gender, politics, or academia with. I admire your fierceness and love your kindness. I really can say that you've played a pivotal role in the advocate that I've become. But just as importantly, your friendship keeps me grounded. I'm so excited to continue our friendship and to work as colleagues together up in the Midwest. Thank you for being you and thank you for showing me what unwavering friendship looks like.

I want to thank my committee members, Dr. Iarussi, Dr. Curtis, and Dr. Derzis, along with my OR, Dr. Webster. I'm so glad I had the opportunity to work with you all. Thank you for your kindness and support throughout this process. You all gave me incredible feedback and discussion that will help me become not only a better researcher, but a better educator.

I have to thank all of the transgender and genderqueer kids out there for your bravery, strength, and pure awesomeness. You all are the real MVPs. I thought this dissertation would help me become a more informed counselor, but it did so much more than that. I learned about resiliency, appreciating life, and figuring out how to just love yourself for who you are and not what others want you to be. I only wish that I had half of the self-love as a teenager that some of you already have. Thank you for being you and for teaching me to just be me.

Last but never least, I want to dedicate this dissertation to my Nana and Pops. My Nana was one of my best friends and a lady that I hope to one day emulate; she was fierce and fearless and didn't care what anyone thought of her. Pops taught me how to be an adult, how to appreciate life, and how to see the good in people. They gave me the love and support I needed to survive college and I wouldn't be where or who I am today without them. So, with a head bump and a hand squeeze, I dedicate this to them.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgments.....	iii
List of Tables.....	viii
CHAPTER I: Introduction And Background Of The Problem.....	1
Introduction.....	1
Individuals Who Identify as Transgender.....	2
Transgender Youth and Adolescents.....	4
Counseling Transgender Youth and Adolescents.....	6
Counselors As Barriers.....	7
Competency-Based Guidelines.....	8
Counselor Awareness.....	10
Counselor Skills.....	11
Purpose of The Study.....	13
Significance of The Study.....	14
Research Question.....	14
CHAPTER II: Research Methodology.....	16
Introduction.....	16
Ethnographic Content Analysis.....	16
Sample.....	17

Data Collection.....	22
Data Analysis.....	27
Trustworthiness.....	30
CHAPTER III: Findings.....	36
Thematic Categories and Subcategories.....	37
Seeking.....	38
Sharing.....	53
Providing.....	66
CHAPTER IV: Discussion.....	72
Unique Issues and Concerns.....	73
Importance of Supportive Family, Peers, Community.....	74
Desire for In-group Acceptance.....	76
Empowerment.....	76
Limitations.....	78
Implications for Counseling Professionals.....	78
Implications for Future Research.....	79
References.....	82
Appendices.....	90

List of Tables

Table 3.0: <i>Posts Expressing Feminine Identity</i>	18
Table 3.1: <i>Posts Expressing Masculine Identity</i>	19
Table 3.2: <i>Posts Expressing Neutral Identity</i>	20
Table 3.3: <i>Posts With No Gender Identity Specifier</i>	21
Table 3.4: <i>Demographic Totals</i>	21
Table 4.0: <i>Thematic Categories and Subcategories</i>	37
Table 4.1: <i>Coding Description of Subcategories</i>	37
Table 4.2: <i>Frequencies of Subcategories and Supporting Codes: ‘Seeking’</i>	38
Table 4.3: <i>Frequencies of Subcategories and Supporting Codes: ‘Sharing’</i>	54
Table 4.4: <i>Frequencies of Subcategories and Supporting Codes: ‘Providing’</i>	66

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE PROBLEM

It is estimated that transgender individuals make up approximately .3% to .5% of the adult population living in the United States (Gates, 2011; Russo, 2016). Notably, there are no current reports that provide an approximated number of transgender youth or adolescents in the U.S. (Russo, 2016). While broad, national-population data indicating the number of transgender youth do not yet exist, it has been best estimated through local-population studies that .05-1.5% of transgender youth and adolescents in the U.S. identify as transgender or genderqueer (Almeida, Johnson, Corliss, Molnar, & Azrael, 2009; Dane County Youth Commission, 2015). Moreover, a current shift in U.S. social and political conversations have led to the increase in visibility of the transgender populations and likewise, is predicted to continue to increase (Avera, Zholu, Speedin, Ingram & Prado, 2015; Meerwijk & Seelius, 2017; Singh, Boyd, & Whitman, 2010).

Research indicates that transgender populations face extreme social disadvantages based on gender identity, to include family relational issues, homelessness, job displacement, school drop-out, and medical mistreatment (Avera et al., 2015, Lombardi, 2009). This pervasive discrimination further adds to the increasingly high rate of verbal and sexual harassment and assault, anxiety, depression, drug addiction, suicide, and interpersonal difficulties than cisgender populations (Avera et al., 2015; Grant, Mottet, Tanis, Heerman, Harrison, & Keisling, 2011; Harris Interactive & Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Educators Network (GLSEN), 2005; Kosciw, Greytak, Paler, & Boesen, 2014; Singh & Burnes, 2009). Despite the persistence of psychological distress in transgender individuals, counseling professionals are ill-equipped to serve the unique needs of these populations (Singh & Burns, 2009; Singh et al., 2010). This is evidenced in the lack of representation of transgender individuals, along with related issues and

trends, found in counseling research, literature, and training programs (Avera et al., 2015; O'Hara, Dispenza, Brack & Blood, 2013).

Individuals Who Identify as Transgender

In U.S. culture, an individual's sex (e.g. male or female) is assigned at birth based on primary sex characteristics (World Medical Association [WMA], 2015). This individual is then expected to identify with that assigned sex, making up their corresponding gender identity. They are further expected to behave and dress according to a set of societal norms that are assigned to each of the binary sexes, making up the individual's full gender expression (Tebbe, Moradi & Ege, 2014; WMA, 2015). Both gender identity and gender expression make up the social concept of 'gender' that is most often spoken as the binary options of 'boy/man' and 'girl/woman'. Those who identify as transgender experience gender incongruence between their biological sex that was assigned at birth and their internally perceived gender (WMA, 2015).

Gender incongruence or a transgender identity does not imply a mental impairment, nor does it assume mental health issues. However, transgender individuals may seek services to help them better understand their gender through a self-actualization process and/or to address the potentially complex social, educational, and relational issues that are often related to transgender identity (Vanderburgh, 2009; WMA, 2015). Although treatment with sex hormones, surgical interventions, and supportive counseling services is empirically supported to be beneficial to transgender individuals seeking gender transition, these individuals are often denied access to these types of services (WMA, 2015). This is due to a number of reasons including health insurance policies, state laws which allow the legal discrimination and refusal to provide services to any client, and a lack of training and competent service providers (Singh et al., 2010; WMA, 2015).

Approximately 0.3% to 0.5% of the adult U.S. population identifies as transgender or have experienced dissatisfaction with their assigned gender (Gates, 2011; James, Herman, Rankin, Keisling, Mottet, & Anafi, 2016; Ramsay et al., 2015; Russo, 2016). Currently, the Census Bureau, Department of Justice, Department of Labor, Department of Health and Human Services, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation are all facing political pressure to include questions or measures regarding gender identity on several national surveys in order to gain a fuller understanding of the gender identity demographics, along with intersecting demographics, in the U.S. (Tobin, Freedman-Gurspan, & Mottet, 2015). Currently, the Center for Disease Control has added optional questions on gender identity to the Youth Risk Behavior Survey and the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (Tobin et al., 2015). It has been best estimated by multiple local-population studies that approximately .05-1.5% of the total United States population identify as transgender youth and adolescents (Almeida et al., 2009; Dane County Youth Commission, 2015). Adding to this issue is the lack of ability to accurately and inclusively define the multiple identities that fall among the complex transgender spectrum because of rapidly evolving language (Gender Identity in U.S. Surveillance, 2014; Ramsay et al., 2015).

Transgender Youth and Adolescents

An area of specifically increased visibility within the transgender communities is that of the youth and adolescent sub-populations (Singh & Burnes, 2009). Although the number of transgender youth and adolescents living in the U.S. is not readily available, the data reporting the experiences of discrimination and stigmatization is very clear. Multiple studies suggest that the transgender youth and adolescent populations are particularly vulnerable due to being disproportionately affected by harassment and bullying, leading to increased levels of mental

health issues and rates of attempted suicide than their cisgender, or non-transgender, counterparts (Avera et al., 2015; Greytak, Kosciw, & Diaz, 2009; Greytak, Kosciw, Villenas, & Giga, 2016; James et al., 2016; Harris Interactive & GLSEN, 2005; Kosciw, Greytak, Giga, Villenas, & Danischewski, 2016; Singh & Burnes, 2009).

Additionally, there has been an increase of transgender individuals coming out and beginning the transition process at an earlier age (Russo, 2016; Vanderburgh, 2009).

Vanderburgh (2009) speaks of this process as a relatively new phenomenon for which pre-pubescent children are transitioning socially from one gender role (typically assigned to match the biological sex) to another role (one that is incongruent with social gender norms). As such, there is an increased need for prepared counselors and supportive services for the transgender youth (Vanderburgh, 2009).

Despite limited survey data and a lack of consistency of information regarding these populations, all recent data sets unfailingly represent very similar results; transgender youth and adolescents face unduly high levels of discrimination. Current research studies report that 82% of transgender youth and adolescents feel unsafe at school and consider their learning environment to be a hostile environment (Kosciw et al., 2014). This necessitates verbal and physical assault, lack of school-based supports, and an overall lack of safety for these students (Greytak et al., 2016; Kosciw et al., 2014). Forty-four percent of transgender youth and adolescents report being physically abused (e.g. shoved, pushed, punched) (Kosciw et al., 2014). Transgender youth also face unique challenges at school that are specific to gender-based segregation (i.e. locker/changing rooms, restrooms, sports teams, social sororities/fraternities, gender-based clubs) (Greytak et al., 2016; Kosciw et al., 2016). However, transgender youth and adolescents also face harassment outside of the school environment, with 67% having been bullied online

(Kosciw et al., 2014). This information indicates that more than half of transgender youth and adolescents face some form of victimization on a regular basis.

Further compounding these issues faced by transgender youth and adolescents, only 33% of students feel that school staff would have appropriately handled the situation if they had seen and/or been told of the harassment or assault. Only 11% of transgender students report having LGBT-inclusive curriculum in their classes, and only 24% of students' report having an anti-harassment policy at their school that includes sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression (Greytak et al., 2016). These results suggest that more supportive services, along with higher levels of advocacy and education, are required in the school settings and that more counselor training is needed for the preparation in serving transgender youth, in both school and mental health settings.

Counseling Transgender Youth and Adolescents

As the transgender communities continue to gain visibility, the trends and issues related to these populations within the counseling profession are becoming more apparent (Singh & Burns, 2009; Singh et al., 2010). Likewise, there is a rise in transgender youth and adolescents across school, mental health, and college settings (Singh et al., 2010). This particular rise has begun to highlight the lack of prepared and well-trained counseling professionals leading to a serious concern in effectiveness in the services and in the training of counselors (Singh et al., 2010).

It is the ethical and legal responsibility of Counselor Educators and practicing counselors alike to be abreast of current trends and issues related to the transgender population so that best practice and best care is provided to all clients regardless of gender identity or gender expression (American Counseling Association [ACA], 2014). Highlighting these responsibilities are five

core professional values of the counseling profession in the Code of Ethics Preamble issued by the American Counseling Association (2014). These core values require “honoring diversity and embracing a multicultural approach in support of the worth, dignity, potential, and uniqueness of people within their social and cultural contexts”, “promoting social justice” and “practicing in a competent and ethical manner” (ACA, 2014, pg. 3). Additionally, the most recent update of the ACA Code of Ethics includes a subsection on the ethical duties of counselors in regards to ‘Nondiscrimination’. Subsection C.5 provides that “[c]ounselors do not condone or engage in discrimination against prospective or current clients, students, employees, supervisees, or research participants based on...gender, gender identity...” (ACA, pg. 9, 2014).

For counseling professionals to stay congruent with the duties set forth by the ACA Code of Ethics, counselors have an obligation to both serve and advocate for the appropriate mental health services for transgender youth and adolescents. Currently, there is little support in the professional literature available specifically for counselors on the provision of appropriate and supportive services for transgender youth and adolescents (Singh & Burnes, 2009; Singh et al., 2010).

Counselors as a Barrier

Transgender clients face multiple barriers to seeking appropriate and effective counseling services. In addition to facing the increased levels of discrimination and stereotyping brought on by the general public, transgender individuals often face similar concerns when reaching out to a counseling professional. Singh, Boyd, and Whitman (2010) state that transgender clients often must first educate the counselor about gender identities before feeling understood and safe within the counseling environment (Pickering, 2005). Finding a counselor who is educated and up-to-date on common issues, including sociopolitical concerns for the transgender community, can

serve as a significant barrier to seeking and obtaining effective treatment services (Singh et al., 2010).

Further, training and education regarding the nuances of gender identity, including knowledge on definitions of biological sex and gender, can seem overwhelming for some practitioners. Sexual orientation (i.e. gay, lesbian, straight, bisexual, etc.) is often confused with gender identity as well. For some counseling professionals, these topics may seem intimidating to first learn about, especially if it is not explicitly and directly taught in counselor training programs (Avera et al., 2015; Chen-Hayes, 2001; Singh et al., 2010).

This intimidation and lack of training lends itself to counseling professionals who are lacking the competencies to serve the transgender communities to refer out to another provider (Singh et al., 2010). Aiding even further to this barrier is the current national shift in state laws that make it easier to for helping professionals to refer LGBTQ clients based on “sincerely held principles” (Meyers, 2016, p. 26). This barrier provides an additional level of fear and mistrust towards the counseling profession. To prevent the unnecessary referral of transgender clients, which could be construed as discrimination, rejection, or social exclusion, it is imperative that counseling professionals become more educated on issues, competencies, and skills for best serving the transgender communities (Meyers, 2016; Singh et al., 2010).

Competency-Based Guidelines

The primary set of guidelines that counseling providers have at this time for providing the services for transgender clients is the *ALGBTIC Competencies for Counseling Transgender Clients* (ALGBTIC, 2010). This set of competencies was developed with specific reference to the previously existing *Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual, (LGB) Competencies* (Association for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Issues in Counseling [ALGBTIC], 2003), the ACA

Advocacy Competencies (Lewis, Arnold, House, & Toporek, 2003), and the ACA Multicultural Competencies (Sue, Arredondo & McDavis, 1992) to ensure that these suggested transgender competencies are grounded in the counselor role of advocacy that incorporates a multicultural approach to strength and wellness (ALGBTIC, 2010). These proposed transgender competencies utilize a framework that incorporates counselor knowledge, skills, and awareness (ALGBTIC, 2010). However, as with the majority of literature currently available for counselor practice with transgender clients, an important limitation of these competencies to note is the primary focus on the population of transgender adults. Although many of the competencies can be generalized to other age populations, they are not meant to be a strict guiding source for working with the youth or student sub-population of the transgender community (ALGBTIC, 2010).

The *ALGBTIC Competencies for Counseling Transgender Clients* were created as a foundational set of competencies geared specifically towards counseling professionals serving transgender clients, their families (including ‘family of choice’), groups, and/or communities (ALGBTIC, 2010). These competencies do not address sub-populations, such as youth or older adults, nor do they break down definitions of gender or the multiple gender identities. Rather, these competencies focus on general, foundational concepts for best practice that will allow counseling professionals to build their knowledge base. In doing so, transgender-affirmative language is highly emphasized throughout the competencies which was drawn from both theoretical and empirical sources (ALGBTIC, 2010). Furthermore, the *ALGBTIC Competencies for Counseling Transgender Clients* are organized into the eight training domains set forth by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP). These eight domains include: Human Growth and Development; Social and Cultural Foundations; Helping Relations; Group Work; Professional Orientation; Career and Lifestyle Development

Competencies; Appraisal, and; Research. Each of the eight competency domains incorporate the Knowledge, Skills, and Awareness (KSA) multicultural framework created by Sue, Arredondo, and McDavis (1992) (ALGBTIC, 2010).

The World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH) provides the *Standards of Care (SOC) for the Health of Transsexual, Transgender, and Gender Nonconforming People* (2011). The SOC are evidence-based and provide clinical guidance for health professionals serving the transgender communities (WPATH, 2010). Because these guidelines are intended to be used by all health professionals, they go beyond the foundational counseling competencies proposed by the *ALGBTIC Competencies for Counseling Transgender Clients* (ALGBTIC, 2010), and therefore are encouraged for both sets of guidelines to be used in conjuncture with each other (ALGBTIC, 2010). Unlike the *ALGBTIC Competencies for Counseling Transgender Clients* (ALGBTIC, 2010), the SOC provide a chapter entitled *Assessment and Treatment of Children and Adolescents with Gender Dysphoria* (WPATH, 2010, p. 10-21). This chapter discusses in-depth clinical suggestions for assessment of gender dysphoria, interventions (e.g. psychological, social, and physical), and social transitions for youth. Additionally, a chapter is dedicated strictly towards the mental health profession, where suggested outlines for hormonal therapy referrals, surgical referrals, and general referral letters are provided (WPATH, 2010, p. 21-33). It is recommended that the SOC along with the *Competencies for Counseling Transgender Clients* are to be utilized in both counselor training and practice as formal guidelines for appropriately serving the transgender populations (Singh & Burnes, 2010; Walinsky & Whitcomb, 2010)

Counselor Awareness

Many scholars suggest that counselors and counselor trainees alike explore their own biases, stereotypes, understanding or privilege and marginalization, and societal expectations regarding gender, sex, and gender identity to better serve the transgender communities (ALGBTIC, 2010; Carroll & Gilroy, 2002; Lev, 2004; O’Hara et al., 2013; Singh et al., 2010; WPATH, 2010;). Counselors must work to identify, confront, and understand any internalized negative attitudes towards the transgender communities (Carroll & Gilroy, 2002). This requires counseling professionals to examine how they may be adding to the propagation of the binary categorization of gender through a “thoughtful and honest exploration of one’s beliefs about gender identity and one’s sexism” (Singh et al., 2010, p. 431). Counselor awareness can be facilitated through numerous activities. These activities may include engaging in reflective classroom discussions (Singh et al., 2010); participating in advocacy events (O’Hara et al., 2013; Lewis et al., 2003); exposure to media and bibliotherapy (O’Hara et al., 2013; Carroll & Gilroy, 2002); and, exercises and questionnaires regarding behaviors, aptitudes, and attitudes (Bornstein, 1998). In developing competency with transgender clients, counselors should reflect on knowledge of issues, their personal values and awareness, along with the application of skills (O’Hara et al., 2013; Singh et al., 2010) as discussed below.

Counselor Skills

Gender identity is not one dimensional. That is to say that although every person identifies with a gender – be it man, woman, genderqueer, etc. – gender is not the sole identity that makes up a person, nor is it always the most salient identity. Counselors must be aware of the intersectionality of gender identity in relation to racial and/or ethnic identity, religious affiliation, social class, sexual orientation, abilities, and age/generation (Singh et al., 2010). Taking multiple identities into account while conceptualizing presenting concerns, not only maintains the ACA

principles to serve and honor clients' multicultural diversity, but also enhances effectiveness of the treatment (ACA, 2014; Singh et al., 2010). Scholars suggest the use of an affirmative approach to serving transgender clients in a way that supports the individual's identity rather than treating their dysphoria. In taking this approach, counselors can assist the client to understand and define their own identity, rather than encouraging the client to adapt to the expected societal norms (Bockting, 1997; Carroll, Gilroy & Ryan, 2002; Singh et al., 2010).

Traditional mental health treatment for adolescents showing signs of social gender norm incongruence entailed an assessment for Gender Identity Disorder, or GID (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2000), followed by the provision of treatment to steer behaviors in a traditionally gender-appropriate direction (Vanderburgh, 2009). A more modern approach is to allow the client to self-actualize through a process of exploration and self-acceptance thus reducing gender dissonance (Lev, 2004; Vanderburgh, 2009). By supporting the client's therapeutic process with an open and nonjudgmental stance, the client can freely explore their identity rather than be steered in a particular direction by the counselor (Lev, 2004; Vanderburgh, 2009).

During initial counseling sessions, transgender clients who are seeking counseling treatment for gender-related concerns may not immediately disclose the full nature of their presenting issues (deVries, Cohen-Kettenis, & Delmarre-van de Waal, 2006; Singh et al., 2010). Many transgender clients seek counseling for the same wide range of concerns as the general population, but often present with increased levels of societal marginalization, body dysmorphia, isolation, identity confusion, and shame (deVries et al., 2006; Singh et al., 2010). White and Goldberg (2006) suggests that counseling professionals build the therapeutic relationship by routinely assessing for related concerns. The recommended assessment includes the following

inquiries: nature of the concern; how the concern impacts other aspects of life, such as home life, peer relationships, school work, or employment; coping skills to highlight forms of resiliency; internalization of societal gender norms and variance; and, cultural or psychosocial factors (White & Goldberg, 2006; Singh et al., 2010).

Beyond this assessment process, suggested treatment is currently focused on the psychological deficits and stressors often faced by the transgender communities (Avera et al., 2015; Singh & Burnes, 2009). This deficit-based approach further informs the conceptualization, potential diagnosis, and treatment interventions (Avera et al., 2015), which has been challenged by many scholars as an ineffective approach to counseling the transgender communities (Avera et al., 2015; Bockting, Knudson, & Goldberg, 2006; Singh & Burnes, 2009).

Transgender clients, including the youth and adolescent sub-population, seek counseling for a wide range of issues which may or may not directly relate to experiences of marginalization (Avera et al., 2015). As such, counselors are encouraged to be aware of these common experiences while utilizing a strengths-based approach that is grounded in wellness and resilience (Avera et al., 2015; Carroll et al., 2002; Singh & Burnes, 2009). Emerging research on strengths-based treatments includes the Indivisible Self (IS-Wel) model (Myers & Sweeney, 2008) with transgender individuals. The IS-Wel model is used to explore and help improve the client's overall wellbeing in a holistic view of the self (Avera et al., 2015; Meyers & Sweeney, 2008). Additionally, Chavez-Korell & Johnson (2010) propose the use of narrative therapy in conjunction with the multicultural counseling competencies and the *Competencies for Counseling with Transgender Clients*. This use of narrative therapy is described as an integrative approach to affirmative counseling with transgender individuals (Chavez-Korell & Johnson, 2010). There is increased support for strengths-based treatment approaches rather than a focus on

deficits and marginalization (Avera et al., 2015; Carroll et al., 2002; Singh & Burnes, 2009). Furthermore, these types of approaches honor the principles of wellness and strengths-focused treatment that defines the counseling identity (ACA, 2014; Avera et al., 2015; Myers & Sweeney, 2008).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the general experiences of transgender and genderqueer youth and adolescents. Specifically, this study seeks to capture a snapshot of the culture of this population by examining the nature and essence of candid online postings provided by individuals who self-identify with similar age and gender demographics. By understanding the issues, concerns, questions, and general experiences of these individuals, the opportunity for rich, naturalistic data can be drawn. It is the intention that this type of broad, inductive inquiry will provide a fuller understanding of the culture of transgender and genderqueer youth and adolescents and thus a more holistic understanding of how counselors can better serve this increasingly visible community from a wellness-focused lens.

Significance of the Study

Conducting an Ethnographic Content Analysis (ECA) on the candid postings shared among transgender youth and adolescents has the potential to divulge a myriad of topics, opening up room to better understand the most salient experiences, concerns and presenting issues that are faced by transgender youth and adolescents. Further, this type of inquiry provides the opportunity to better understand the diversity, resiliency, and strengths that could inform effective wellness-based treatment approaches. Research produced from this study will add significant contribution to the currently minimal counseling research and counselor training literature on transgender youth and adolescents.

Research Question

In taking a mixed “fieldwork first” approach (Yin, 2016, p.76), a small sample of existing data was initially reviewed which was then utilized to inform the direction of the study, review of the literature, and research questions. The purpose of employing a fieldwork first approach, versus beginning with a rigid set of research questions, for this specific study was to allow the researcher to be exposed to relevant worldviews and lenses (Yin, 2016, p. 77) that may not be fully captured in the existing research or literature. The guiding research question for this proposed study based on initial fieldwork is as follows:

RQ 1: What is the nature and essence of the content posted by self-identified transgender and genderqueer youth and adolescents to a private social media group, within a three-month period of time?

Conclusion

The visibility of transgender individuals, specifically transgender youth and adolescents, is increasing as is the awareness of this population’s specific issues and needs. Transgender youth and adolescents face higher rates of suicide, verbal and physical harassment, and drug addiction than cisgender youth. Yet, there remains a lack of supportive literature for practicing counselors and counselor educators. While counseling research and literature exists on counselor training and the provision of effective services for transgender youth and adolescents, it is minimal and lacking definitive empirical support. This brief introduction highlights the common issues and trends surrounding transgender youth and adolescents along with a brief discussion of the current literature on counselor preparedness and the provision of counseling services.

CHAPTER II: METHODOLOGY

The nature of daily life and experiences of transgender and genderqueer youth and adolescents has been greatly understudied (Meerwijk & Seelius, 2017). This chapter describes the use of the qualitative method of an inductive Ethnographic Content Analysis of postings to an online social media group forum to explore the culture and general way of life of transgender and genderqueer youth and adolescents. More specifically, the researcher aims to explore the nature and essence of online postings among transgender and genderqueer youth and teenagers within *Transgender and Genderqueer Teens*, a publically searchable online social media group. This chapter describes the Ethnographic Content Analysis method, participants, data collection and analysis procedures, and methods of ensuring trustworthiness.

Ethnographic Content Analysis

A qualitative approach was carefully selected and utilized for the methodology of this study. The nature of qualitative data allows for rich descriptions and fruitful explanations that provide the researcher to go beyond initial preconceptions and existing frameworks (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Because this study aimed to investigate culture and way of life via social media group postings, the potential for serendipitous and meaningful analyses was desired, and thus lending itself to the appropriateness of a qualitative approach.

An Ethnographic Content Analysis (ECA) research design was employed to explore and analyze the postings of transgender and genderqueer youth and adolescents to an online social media group. Although ECA is a systematic and analytic method for qualitative document analysis, it is not rigid due to its exploratory nature (Altheide, 1996). ECA was selected for this specific study because it is an inductive and reflexive approach that places emphasis on the emergence of themes through the discovery and description of data. This approach includes an

investigation of contexts, meanings, patterns and processes (Altheide, 1996). Further, to effectively conduct an ECA, the researcher is required to immerse themselves within the culture that they are researching (Altheide, 1987; 1996). The researcher of this study had access to the online social media group for ten months prior to the collection and analysis of data in effort to become immersed and familiar with the sub-culture of the group as suggested by Altheide (1996).

With the utilization of ECA, the researcher combined inductive searches with the use of recursive constant comparison, set forth by Glaser and Strauss (1967), allowing the researcher to identify specific constructs of interest to the study along with reporting their frequency (Porter & Ispa, 2013). This method also requires the researcher to compare new data with the previously collected data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). While ECA was originally developed for use of media such as television program (Altheide, 1996), it has since been employed with a variety of mediums including newspapers, radio broadcasts, advertisements, magazines, and more recently online community postings (Altheide, 1996; Porter & Ispa, 2013). As technology changes and we discover new ways of analyzing human behaviors, ethnographies are shifting to be more inclusive of public spaces to include social media and other internet-based virtual worlds (Boellstorff, Nardi, Pearce, & Taylor, 2012; Kozinets, 2015). This ECA utilizes the recommended steps that David Altheide suggested in his pioneering 1987 article and applies them to the modern ethnographic considerations of internet and virtual studies discussed by Boellstorff et al. (2012) and Kozinets (2015).

Participants

The participants of this study were self-reported youth and adolescents ages thirteen to nineteen who self-identified as transgender, genderqueer, or gender non-conforming. These

participants were also members of the online social media group, *Transgender and Genderqueer Teens*. As of March 2017, there were 1,511 members of the group. A breakdown and discussion of the participant demographics is described below.

Demographics

Demographics were collected as they were organically presented in the postings. No demographics were collected by any other means than from what was explicitly provided by the group member in the text of their forum posting. Demographics collected include: Gender Identity, Sexual and/or Romantic Orientation, Preferred Pronouns, and Age. Further, these demographics have been provided as intersecting matrices, as Tables 3.0-3.4.

Out of 224 postings, only a quarter (54, 24.1%) provided some form of demographic information. Of these 54 identifiers, 44 described gender identity, 11 postings described preferred pronouns, 16 stated age, and 5 described sexual and/or romantic attractions. Below, Tables 3.0-3.4 provide matrices of intersecting demographic information as it relates to the self-identified gender descriptor.

Table 3.0, shown below, provides the intersecting identities of Preferred Pronoun, Age, and Sexual and/or Romantic Attraction with a gender identity that correlates with a feminine identity (e.g. female, woman, girl, she/her). Of the 54 demographic postings, 9 (17%) described a feminine identity. Of these 9, only 1 indicated a preferred set of pronouns. Four stated their ages, which ranged from age 15-18 years. Notable, none of these 9 postings referred to either a sexual or romantic attraction.

Table 3.0: Posts Expressing Feminine Identity

Gender Identifier	Pronoun	Age	Sexual and/or Romantic Attraction
MtF	-	18	-
MtF	-	17	-
MtF	-	15	-

MtF	-	-	-
MtF	-	-	-
MtF	-	-	-
Trans Woman	-	-	-
Trans Girl	-	16	-
Transgender	She/her	-	-

Note. Demographics are provided verbatim from the original postings.

Shown below, Table 3.1, provides the intersecting identities of Preferred Pronoun, Age, and Sexual and/or Romantic Attraction with a gender identity that correlates with a masculine identity (e.g. male, guy, boy, fellow, he/him). Of the 54 demographic postings, 16 (29.6%) described a feminine identity. Of these 16, five indicated a preferred set of pronouns, all of which stated ‘he/him’ or ‘he/his’. Nine stated their ages, which ranged from 13-18 years. Two of the 9 postings described their sexual attraction as ‘bisexual’ or ‘lithosexual’. One posting described their romantic attraction as ‘panromantic’.

Table 3.1: Posts Expressing Masculine Identity

Gender Identifier	Pronoun	Age	Sexual and/or Romantic Attraction
FtM	He/him	17	-
FtM	-	15	-
FtM	He/him	13	-
FtM	-	15	-
FtM	-	13	-
FtM	-	17	-
FtM	-	-	-
Trans Male	-	-	-
Trans Guy	-	-	-
Trans Guy	-	-	-
Trans Guy	-	-	Bisexual
Transgender Boy	He/him	16	-
Nonbinary Trans Guy	-	18	Lithosexual/ Panromantic
Aro-ace Nonbinary Trans Fellow	-	-	-

-	He/his	15	-
-	He/him	-	-

Note. Demographics are provided verbatim from the original postings.

Table 3.2, below, shows the intersecting identities of Preferred Pronoun, Age, and Sexual and/or Romantic Attraction with a gender identity that correlates with a neutral or non-binary identity either through their specific gender identity or their preferred pronoun set. Sixteen out of 54 postings (29.6%) described a neutral or non-binary identity. Of these 16, four indicated a preferred set of pronouns, all of which described a neutral set, including ‘they/them’ ‘xe/xem/xyr’, or ‘ze/hir’. Notably, none of these 16 postings indicated an age. Two of the 9 postings described their sexual attraction as ‘demigraysexual’ or ‘pansexual’.

Table 3.2: Posts Expressing Neutral Identity

Gender Identifier	Pronoun	Age	Sexual and/or Romantic Attraction
Genderqueer	They/them	-	-
Genderqueer	-	-	Demigraysexual
Genderqueer	-	-	Pansexual
Genderqueer	-	-	-
Queer	-	-	-
Genderfluid	-	-	-
Gender Neutral	-	-	-
Gender Neutral	-	-	-
Nonbinary	-	-	-
Nonbinary	-	-	-
Agender/ Nonbinary	They/them	-	-
Agender	-	-	-
Alexigender/ Aquarigender/ Queer	-	-	-
-	They/them	-	-
-	Xe/xem/xyr or Ze/hir	-	-
-	They/them	-	-

Note. Demographics are provided verbatim from the original postings.

Table 3.3, below, shows the intersecting identities of Preferred Pronoun, Age, and Sexual and/or Romantic Attraction with those who did not explicitly provide a gender identifier. Eleven postings provided a form of demographic information that did not clearly express a gender identity. While 6 indicated identifying as ‘trans’ or ‘trans*’, they were combined in a separate table apart from gender-neutral identities because there was no supporting context to determine if the term was used as an adjective or as a noun to indicate a non-binary identity. Five out of the 11 provided their age, ranging from 14-17 years. Only one individual described their sexual attraction as ‘asexual’.

Table 3.3: Posts With No Gender Identity Specifier

Gender Identifier	Pronoun	Age	Sexual and/or Romantic Attraction
Trans	-	14	-
Trans	-	-	-
Trans	-	-	-
Trans	-	-	-
Trans	-	-	-
Trans*	-	-	-
-	-	-	Asexual
-	-	17	-
-	-	15	-
-	-	15	-
-	-	14	-

Note. Demographics are provided verbatim from the original postings.

All of the demographics have been totaled and provided as a matrix in Table 3.4 below. Out of 54 postings describing demographic information, 42 (77.8%) described a gender identity, 11 (20.4%) described their preferred pronoun set, 18 (33.3%) provided their age, 5 (9.3%) described sexual attraction, and only 1 (1.9%) provided their romantic attraction.

Table 3.4: Demographic Totals

N=54					
Table	# of Gender Identifiers	# of Pronoun Sets	# of Ages	# of Sexual Attractions	# of Romantic Attractions

Table A: Feminine Identity	9	1	4	0	0
Table B: Masculine Identity	14	5	9	2	1
Table C: Neutral Identity	13	5	0	2	0
Table D: No Gender Specified	6	0	5	1	0
Total	42 (77.8%)	11 (20.4%)	18 (33.3%)	5 (9.3%)	1 (1.9%)

Data Collection

The data collection process used for this study followed the recommended steps for conducting an ECA. As suggested by Altheide (1996), the researcher became familiar with the data source by identifying an appropriate social media site and becoming immersed in the field for approximately ten months prior to data collection. The selection of site, postings, and means of site membership are described in subsequent sections. Altheide then recommends to develop a protocol, or list of multiple variables, to guide the collection process (1996). The researcher created inclusionary and exclusionary criteria for determining which postings to be used for analysis to meet this ECA recommendation. These criteria are described with representative quotations below. Ethical considerations for this study are also discussed in this section.

Selection of Site and Postings

Online site. The online social media group, *Transgender and Genderqueer Teens* was specifically chosen as the identified data source due to the demographics of members and focus on general topics of daily life. The stated description of this social media group is to provide “a place to talk and chat about life, its difficulties, promises and joys...meant to be a safe space for transgender/transsexual/trans*/genderqueer/GNC (gender non-conforming) teens and youths

who need support with peers” (Transgender and Genderqueer Teens, 2017). Additionally, this group yielded a large number of potential participants with 1,511 members in March 2017, and regular weekly postings.

Postings. Postings were retroactively collected for a total of three months from March 31 to January 1, 2017. Two hundred and thirty-seven postings were initially collected and 224 were used for analysis based on the inclusionary and exclusionary criteria. These criteria are described below. Postings were not collected past January 1 because the goal of data saturation was successfully reached. Although the choice of time interval was arbitrary, there is no reason to suspect that posts beginning within this timespan are unrepresentative of the content of postings provided during any other time of the year. Only initial postings to the forum were analyzed and did not include any responses or comments because this study aims to capture the unprovoked and candid postings to the group and not the dialogue or conversations among the members.

Inclusionary and Exclusionary Criteria

The inclusionary criterion used for collected data was: 1) data must be a posting to the *Transgender and Genderqueer Teens* group, which may include text, emoticons/emojis, pictures, videos, or attached articles/documents. The intended membership of the group is for “transgender/transsexual/trans*/genderqueer/GNC (gender non-conforming) teens and youth”, therefore, for purposes of data collection, it is the assumption of the researcher that all members qualify as both a youth/teenager and as transgender or genderqueer. Postings need not explicitly state either of these demographics to meet the inclusionary criterion. An example of a posting that was included in this data set read:

“I’m so happy 😊 My parents finally bought me boxers. So happy that my parents are finally getting through to me and my feelings”.

Exclusionary criteria were developed to meaningfully eliminate postings that did not serve the intended purpose of the study. These criteria included: 1) the writer of the posting clearly identifies themselves as cisgender, such as a peer/friend, ally, or parent/guardian, 2) the writer of the posting reveals that they are outside of the 13-19 year age range, and 3) the writer of the posting indicates that they currently reside outside of the United States. A posting that was thrown out of the data set due to these exclusionary criteria included:

“I’m a 22 yr old transwoman looking for someone looking for a long term roommate/housemate as I received news from my housemate that they’d like me to leave on April 1st recently...[sic].”

Ethical Considerations

Internet-based ethnographies such as this one, also commonly referred to as either a virtual ethnography or netnography, are becoming an increasingly popular form of qualitative inquiry, and as such bring a host of new ethical decisions (Boellstorff et al., 2012; Kozinets, 2015). To ensure the production of an ethical study, the researcher exercised multiple precautions including following suggestions from Kozinets (2015) in *Netnography: Redefined*.

Because only pre-existing data was collected and analyzed, there was no need for an informed consent, nor would it have been fully possible. However, to be sure that no institutional or legal risk was involved, the researcher sought approval from the Auburn University Institutional Review Board (IRB). Because there was no intervention or interaction with human subjects based on the collection of previously existing data to a message board, the research study was considered ‘exempt’ of review. The official letter has been provided in the Appendices.

Anonymity was also ensured by following the guidelines of Boellstorff et al. (2012) and Kozinets (2015). The researcher took great care not to collect or reveal any form of confidential information that could reveal the writer of a posting. No identifiable information left the original 'field site' (i.e. the online social media group) nor was collected via original 'field notes' (i.e. collection of postings) (Boellstorff et al., 2012).

Kozinets (2015) also suggested refraining from deception particularly on a virtual site. While considered a 'publically searchable' group, meaning anyone with internet access can search for this group and contact the group administrator, there is an informal protocol in place for obtaining full membership. Provided within the group description states,

“If you are interested in joining, please send a message to one of the admins or at least have your messages on and reply to our inquiry. Please check your privacy settings for who can message you. Likely we will message you some simple questions before adding you.”

The researcher requested membership and was messaged by the primary group administrator inquiring about the reason for joining. To avoid any deception, the researcher was fully transparent about her request for membership. The researcher provided an informal and brief description of her credentials, the overall study, how data would be collected, and ensured confidentiality. In this first conversation, the researcher offered a formal letter of site entrance, her resume, and IRB approval forms. The administrator approved membership and did not request to see any of the offered paperwork. Screenshots of this conversation have been provided in the Appendices.

Taking leave by appropriately preparing informants of site departure was provided as another ethical suggestion for internet-based ethnographies (Kozinets, 2015). As such, the

researcher informed the group administrator that she was no longer collecting data or using the site for research purposes.

Lastly, the researcher developed a protocol for attending to suicide risk. This was a consideration based on supporting data from current research indicating the high numbers associated with suicidal ideation and attempts by transgender youth and teenagers (Greytak et al., 2009; Greytak et al., 2016; Kosciw et al., 2016). During the initial immersion phase of the research study (pre-collection and analysis), the researcher had access to the group in real-time, however, she was not an active participant and discussed with the group administrator beforehand that there would be no interaction or intervention with other group members. It is important to note that the group administrator has provided resources in two different places within the group for those who are struggling with suicidal thoughts. Within the group description is stated:

“If you can't wait and are feeling terrible right now and need someone to talk now, please, please, please use these chat rooms and hotlines now: Trans Lifeline: <http://www.translifeline.org/>, Laura's Playground Chatroom: <http://www.lauras-playground.com/chat.htm>, Trevor Project Hotline: <http://www.thetrevorproject.org/>.”

Additionally, the main posting that is seen by all members when logging onto the group repeated the above websites and also included phone numbers to US suicide hotlines including the Trevor Project, GLBT National Hotline, and Trans Lifeline. The researcher then developed a protocol in the event that a group member posted something indicative of suicidal thought, but did not see a quick response by the group administrator or other members, then she would privately message the administrator with the posting,

time/date, and username and request that they immediately follow up with the poster. In the event that no response was received from the group administrator, the researcher would then quickly reach out to the member by private message or direct reply to the posting. Note, this protocol was not utilized as the researcher only read 4 postings during her 10-month immersion phase which indicated potential suicide risk. All 4 of those postings received immediate attention and resources by both the group administrator and group members.

Data Analysis

For the analysis of the collected postings, the researcher chose to use an emergent coding process. To do this, original postings from three consecutive months of March 31, 2017 to January 1, 2017 were copied and pasted verbatim from the live website into a table created with a Word Processor document. The researcher intentionally chose this method over accruing screenshots to eliminate the collection of usernames and user profile pictures. If names or other identifying information were expressed within a posting, the researcher deleted and inserted a noun descriptor in brackets (e.g. [name] or [city]). Any emoji or emoticon character was also copied and pasted directly in the Word Processor. If additional materials were included in a posting other than text or emoji, they were not copied. These items were described within brackets (e.g. [attached picture of self]). The postings compiled together within the Word Processor document became the researcher's *Coding Index*. This index housed every posting that was collected along with columns used for the first cycle coding, and eventually housed the second cycle codes. The final index included 4 columns: 1) original posting, 2) thematic category, 3) subcategory, and 4) supporting codes. The process of achieving the thematic categories, subcategories, and supporting codes is described in the following sections.

Coding Process

The coding process used for this research study was emergent and inductive in nature. To ensure that the appropriate forms of coding were used to support the function of an ECA, the researcher consulted Saldāna's *Coding Manual* (2016). The coding process followed Yin's (2015) suggested phases of 'disassembling' and 'reassembling' the data followed by 'interpreting' and 'concluding' the data which can be found in chapters three and four, respectively.

Disassembling. 'Disassembling' the data refers to the phase of research for which the data is broken down and compiled into smaller fragments that will be used to later categorize the data set (Yin, 2016, pg. 186). Multiple recursive passes of open coding were completed to fully disassemble the data including the use of in-vivo, descriptive, and process codes. Open coding is an initial and open-ended procedural step that is appropriate for ethnographies and other studies that use a wide variety of data (Saldaña, 2016, pg. 115). In-vivo codes are those that use exact words or phrases from the data as the code itself (Saldaña, 2016, pg. 294). These codes were placed in singular quotation marks to increase readability. In-vivo codes used in this study include: *'Do I Pass'* and *'Add Me/Follow Me'*. Descriptive codes are most commonly nouns or short phrases assigned to a basic topic. This form of coding allows for ease of indexing or recognizing emerging patterns and is particularly useful with ethnographies (Saldaña, 2016, pg. 292). Examples of descriptive codes from this data set include: *Emotional Descriptor* and *Health/Medical*. Lastly, process codes were utilized during this phase. Process codes exclusively use gerunds to indicate conceptual action (Saldaña, 2016, pg. 296). For instance, *Celebrating Milestone* and *Engaging with Community* were used in this study.

Reassembling. Once the data had been fully disassembled, the researcher then moved into the phase of ‘reassembling’ the data. This process refers to the rearranging or manipulating of data into meaningful chunks that will later be interpreted (Yin, 2016, pg. 187). The researcher continued to code via pattern, descriptive, and subcoding (Saldaña, 2016).

Pattern coding was the primary form of coding used to uncover the emerging thematic categories based on the four types of previously created open codes. Pattern coding simply refers to the identification and organization of similarly coded data. Pattern coding attributes meaning to the groups of data and aides in the development of major themes. In this study, pattern coding revealed three major thematic categories: *Seeking*, *Sharing*, and *Providing*. Subcoding was then used via descriptive codes to deductively produce multiple subcategories under each thematic category. Subcoding is particularly useful with both ethnographies and content analyses due to the wide variety of information found within the data (Saldaña, 2016). Subcoding was used to further index the thematic categories into subcategories through the use of descriptive codes, such as *Resources* and *Support*.

When reassembling the data to form the thematic categories and subcategories, the researcher used the procedure of constant comparison to decrease discrepancies in the data (Saldaña, 2016). This method simply refers to the comparison of data with the same code to determine if they are similar or dissimilar. This process allowed the researcher to stringently question the definitions used to create a particular thematic category and subcategory and which coded items best fit as well as constantly comparing the open codes to themselves (Saldaña, 2016). As stated above, the full coding process was recursive and embodies multiple passes to attain the final product. Constant comparisons allowed the researcher to go back and forth from

renaming and embracing a more appropriate open code to restructuring the thematic categories and subcategories.

Codebook

A codebook was developed to help the researcher ensure a reliable coding process (Saldaña, 2016, pg. 28). Once the researcher attained the subcategories, she then compiled them into a tabular codebook within a Word Processor document. This codebook utilized 4 columns: 1) thematic category, 2) subcategory, 3) description, and 4) example posting. By providing both a description, or definition, of the subcategory along with multiple exemplary postings, she was able to revise and ensure that each of the coded postings were consistently categorized. Further, this codebook was provided to the outside auditor to assist with a stringent process of auditing the coding index. Both the codebook and coding index have been attached in the Appendices.

Trustworthiness

The qualitative nature of this study lent itself to the naturalistic language often used to describe the quality or goodness of the research, as described by Yvonna Lincoln and Egon Guba (1985). To preserve this naturalistic nature of inquiry, the researcher intentionally used the terms credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability in lieu of the quantitative descriptors of internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity. To adequately judge the quality of the research, Lincoln and Guba (1985) described the four criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability and their processes as the ways in which researchers and fellow reviewers of the research can judge the trustworthiness of the investigation and its findings. Trustworthiness is a broad qualitative term used to describe the quality of both the research study and the findings that lend themselves to be deemed noteworthy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Schwandt, 2007). The subsequent sections describe the

background of the researcher in addition to how each of the four criteria of trustworthiness were ensured.

The Researcher

This study was conducted solely by one researcher. She would be categorized under the criteria used in the study as a 28-year-old straight, cisgender female and woman. It is important to note that that she does not belong to any of the LGBTQ communities, but rather identifies as a straight ally. In preparing for this dissertation-based study, she has written and published within the counseling literature regarding gender identity. She has also authored and facilitated 14 counseling-based lectures, presentations, or workshops within the past four years at local, regional, national, and international programs on topics related to a variety of LGBTQ issues, trends, and topics. She has also provided professional counseling services for youth and teenagers who identify with one or more of the LGBTQ communities.

The researcher has received advanced training in both the theory and application of qualitative inquiry. She has served as co-author for multiple counseling-based presentations and is currently working on the publication of 3 qualitative studies, all of which utilize an ECA approach. Additionally, she has served as the external auditor for a research project which employed ECA, as well.

Because of her experience with this population and the personal nature of this study, she diligently chose to use multiple peer debriefers with a variety of knowledge on both the topic and qualitative nature of this study. Further, an external auditor was used during the analysis of the data. These individuals were utilized to help ensure the overall trustworthiness of the study. The peer debriefers and external auditor are described in more detail below.

Credibility

Paralleled with internal validity, credibility was the primary focus of trustworthiness for this study. Triangulation, a strategy that comprises the use of multiple data sources, multiple investigators, different theoretical perspectives, and/or multiple methods (Schwandt, 2007), was used to ensure credibility. The researcher utilized triangulation via *modus operandi*, or multiple data sources (i.e. potential 1,511 participants), along with peer debriefers to achieve optimal credibility. A *modus operandi* approach provided the opportunity for multiple instances of the same findings provided by multiple sources (Miles & Huberman, 1994). To strengthen the *modus operandi* approach, the researcher will analyze multiple forms of data to include not only written text, but also emoticon/emoji, pictures, videos, and other various attached documents.

Further, dissertation committee members along with two additional peers were used as “peer debriefers”, or individuals to question methodology and meanings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Dissertation committee members were used prior to data collection and analysis to question the intended methodology procedures. This was conducted in a formal dissertation proposal meeting for which four faculty members provided the researcher with feedback. This feedback was incorporated and used to complete the study. One peer debriefer was used to help further question and make sense of certain data and associated coding. She was chosen intentionally because she is unfamiliar with transgender and genderqueer identities but has immense personal experience in participating in online group forums such as the one used in this study. Her perspective allowed for a fresh look at how the data was being interpreted. A second peer debriefer was employed based on her knowledge of qualitative methodology and assisted the researcher in better understanding and organizing the data.

Transferability

Similar to external validity, transferability is often used to mitigate the issues related to the inappropriate generalization of data to larger groups or populations (Schwandt, 2007). To ensure this, the researcher has reported the data verbatim from the gathered postings inasmuch that readers have adequate data to determine an appropriate degree of similarity between the data and the presented findings (Schwandt, 2007). This has been provided as narrative descriptions in Chapter III in addition to the coding index provided in the Appendices.

Dependability

Associated with reliability, dependability is a way to ensure that data is gathered and analyzed in a manner that is “logical, traceable, and documented” (Schwandt, 2007, pg. 299). To ensure dependable data, the researcher utilized multiple methods for continual documentation, such as developing a codebook, keeping an organized coding index, and frequent analytic memoing. The codebook and coding index, as described in earlier sections, were kept with meticulous organization and both served as a way to show not only the data documentation methods, but also provided them in a logical and readable manner. Both are provided in the Appendices. Lastly, the researcher kept analytic memos throughout the research process. Analytic memos are personal notes regarding any part of the analysis process (Saldaña, 2016). These notes were sometimes written down in margins of the early renditions of the coding index or kept in a separate personal notebook. Memos included any “half-baked” ideas (Saldaña, 2016, pg. 195), thoughts about the data, or questions regarding the coding scheme or process. These memos were particularly useful when discussing issues with peer debriefers as they provided documentation of preliminary musings, ideas, and questions.

Confirmability

Lastly, the aforementioned methods of documentation served as resources to appropriately provide confirmability, or objectivity, to the study. The researcher employed an external auditor to review the audit trail and attest to the confirmation of findings (Koch, 2006; Schwandt, 2007). The process of auditing ensured that a third-party individual can review both the methods and data sources to confirm a clear link to the presented codes, themes, and assertions (Koch, 2006; Schwandt, 2007).

The external auditor was chosen based on her expertise of qualitative inquiry, specifically of ECA and its associated coding methods. She has received formal training on advanced practice and application of qualitative study. She has also authored and co-authored multiple counseling-based presentations and articles which have used ECA as a foundation. In addition to her qualifications for auditing the methodology, this external auditor was selected based on her expertise of gender identity. She has co-authored and facilitated over 12 counseling-based articles, presentations, and workshops related to the LGBTQ communities. Her understanding of the language, issues, and trends of these communities allowed for her to seamlessly audit the data without any learning-curve or misunderstanding of terminology provided within the original postings.

Conclusion

This chapter provided an outline and description of the methodology used for the study of the nature of the candid and unprovoked postings among transgender and genderqueer youth and adolescents within the online social media group, *Transgender and Genderqueer Teens*. An Ethnographic Content Analysis was utilized as the method of data collection and analysis based on the qualitative and exploratory nature of the study. Data consisted of online postings to the online social media group, *Transgender and Genderqueer Teens*, which serves as an online

support group for transgender and genderqueer youth and adolescents for which they can share thoughts and questions in a safe environment. Postings were collected retroactively for three consecutive months beginning March 31, 2017. Ethical considerations were noted and described including protocol for suicidal risk. Finally, the methods used for warranting trustworthiness were discussed as how they ensured data quality and goodness of the qualitative inquiry.

CHAPTER III: FINDINGS

The following chapter presents a descriptive summary of the findings from the data collected. This study utilized an inductive Ethnographic Content Analysis to examine 224 postings to the publically searchable online social media group entitled *Transgender and Genderqueer Teens*. The examination of these postings was to gather a general understanding of the subculture of transgender and genderqueer youth and adolescents by means of analyzing the nature and essence of the primary postings to better inform Counselors and Counselor Educators in their service to this population. Because conversational dialogue and social interaction was not the purpose of this study, no comments to postings or additional conversation was collected or analyzed.

The postings were initially coded through a combination of Open, In-Vivo, Description, and Process coding which resulted in the culmination of three thematic categories: 1) Seeking, 2) Sharing, and 3) Providing. Each of these thematic categories was further broken down based on emerging patterns to reveal a total of 11 Subcategories. These subcategories are as follows: 1) Seeking: Connection, Support, Opinions, Tips, Resources, 2) Providing: Resources, Support, Connection, and 3) Sharing: Positive, General, and Negative. Further, each of the 11 subcategories is supported by multiple codes. Some of the postings utilized multiple supporting codes but were only categorized into one subcategory. The frequencies and percentages of the postings as related to the thematic categories, subcategories, and supporting codes have been presented in tabular form and can be found in Tables 4.0-4.4. Quotations were used to further describe the findings which were kept in their original spelling and grammar format to keep the integrity and nature of the posting, as indicated by ‘*sic*’. All original postings that were used for analysis can be found in the Appendix with their designated Thematic Categories, Subcategories,

and Supporting Codes. Additionally, the codebook that was developed to provide definition and example for each of the 11 subcategories is attached in the Appendix.

Thematic Categories and Subcategories

From the total 224 postings, three thematic categories came to light. In rank order they include *Seeking* (42.8%, $n=96$), *Sharing* (39.7%, $n=89$), and *Providing* (17.4%, $n=39$). Table 4.0 shows the thematic categories along with their representative subcategories. Table 4.1 provides the coding description used during the analysis. The findings from each of the 11 described subcategories are provided in the subsequent sections.

Table 4.0 Thematic Categories and Subcategories

Total Postings ($N=224$)					
Thematic Category	n	%	Subcategory	n	%
Seeking	96	42.8%	Connection	35	15.6%
			Support	21	9.4%
			Tips	17	7.6%
			Opinion	17	7.6%
			Resources	6	2.7%
Sharing	89	39.7%	Positive	40	17.8%
			Negative	25	11.2%
			General	24	10.7%
Providing	39	17.4%	Resources	18	8%
			Support	12	5.4%
			Connection	9	4%

Table 4.1 Coding Description of Subcategories

Thematic Category	N	Subcategory	n	%	Coding Description
Seeking	96	Connection	35	36.5%	Posting indicates a desire to gain a personal connection with one or more fellow group members.
		Support	21	21.9%	Posting indicates a desire to gain social support or validation from fellow group members.

		Tips	17	17.7%	Posting explicitly seeks tips or advice on solving or handling situation or issue.
		Opinion	17	17.7%	Posting seeks the opinion or general thoughts of fellow group members on a decision, situation, or issue.
		Resources	6	6.2%	Posting indicates a desire to gain concrete resources, as opposed to opinions, help, or validation.
Sharing	89	Positive	40	44.9%	Posting shares a personal experience, thought, or insight that expresses a generally positive nature.
		General	25	28.1%	Posting that shares an opinion, experience, thought, or insight that is either a general statement or indicates a neutral, non-affective nature.
		Negative	24	27%	Posting shares a personal experience, thought, or insight that expresses a generally negative nature.
Providing	39	Resources	18	46.2%	Posting provides a concrete resource for other group members to utilize.
		Support	12	30.7%	Posting provides a supportive, validating, affirmative, or otherwise positive message to fellow group members.
		Connection	9	23.1%	Posting provides a direct personal connection to fellow group members.

Seeking

Seeking was the largest thematic category with 96 out of the 224 online postings, making up 42.8% of the entire data set. Within *Seeking* ($N=96$), five subcategories emerged with the most prominent subcategory being *Connection* holding 36.5% ($n=35$). *Support* was the second most popular subcategory with 21.9% ($n=21$). *Tips* and *Opinion* tied as the third largest subcategories with 17.7% ($n=17$). Lastly, *Resources* made up 6.2% ($n=6$). Table 4.2 provides these five subcategories with the frequencies and percentages of their supporting codes.

Table 4.2 Frequencies of Subcategories and Supporting Codes: ‘Seeking’

Thematic Category	Subcategory	<i>N</i>	Supporting Code	<i>n</i>	%
Seeking	Connection	35	‘Talk to Me’	11	31.4%
			Common Interests	9	25.7%
			‘Looking for Friends’	8	22.9%

‘Add Me’/Social Media Connection	8	22.9%
Emotional Descriptor	7	20%
Transition Descriptor	5	14.3%
Reaching Out	4	11.4%
Personality Descriptor	4	11.4%
Connecting Through Similar Culture	3	8.6%
Dysphoric/ia	2	5.7%

Note. Some postings contained more than one Supportive Code. This resulted in the percentages equaling greater than 100%. This Subcategory provided a total of 61 codes.

Tips	17	Coming Out	9	52.9%
		Emotional Descriptor	8	47%
		Implementing New Name/Pronouns	4	23.5%
		Passing, Physical Appearance	4	23.5%
		Health/Medical	4	23.5%

Note. Some postings contained more than one Supportive Code. This resulted in the percentages equaling greater than 100%. This Subcategory provided a total of 29 codes.

Opinion	17	‘Do I pass’	6	35.3%
		Hairstyle	5	29.4%
		New Name	4	23.5%
		Clothing/ Accessories	1	5.9%
		Relationships	1	5.9%

Support	21	Living authentically	10	47.6%
		‘Does Anyone Relate’	8	38%
		Emotional Descriptor	6	28.6%
		Dealing with Dysphoria	4	19%
		Suicidal Ideation	4	19%
		Unsupportive Family	2	9.5%
		Unsupportive School Staff	2	9.5%

Note. Some postings contained more than one Supportive Code. This resulted in the percentages equaling greater than 100%. This Subcategory provided a total of 36 codes.

Resources	6	Medical	3	50%
		School Project	2	33.3%
		Therapeutic Music	1	16.7%

Connection

The subcategory of *Seeking: Connection* included postings which indicated a desire to gain a personal connection with one or more fellow group members. This was a prominent subcategory when compared to all 11 subcategories, ranking the second largest overall with 15.6% (n=35, N=224). Moreover, *Connection* was the most common subcategory within the *Seeking* thematic category with 36.5% (n=35, N=96). The creation of this subcategory was supported by the emergence of 10 codes. In rank order within the *Seeking* subcategory are the 10 supporting codes: (1) *Talk to Me* (31.4%, n=11, N=35), (2) *Common Interests* (25.7%, n=9, N=35), (3) *'Looking for Friends'* (22.9%, n=8, N=35), (4) *'Add Me'/Social Media Connection* (22.9%, n=8, N=35), (4) *Emotional Descriptor* (20%, n=7, N=35), (6) *Transition Descriptor* (14.3%, n=5, N=35), (7) *Reaching Out* (11.4%, n=4, N=35), (8) *Personality Descriptor* (11.4%, n=4, N=35), (9) *Connecting Through Similar Culture* (8.6%, n=3, N=35), and (10) *Dysphoria* (5.7%, n=2, N=35).

Common interests. Postings that were associated with this code provided a description of a common interest, typically a form of self-expression or activity, which conveyed an attempt to connect or otherwise relate to other group members. One group member posted, “Does anyone have any trans representation tattoos? This is mine [included photo of trans-symbol tattoo on hand].” Another member stated,

“I have rather eclectic interests, so if you wanna talk to me, please feel free. I like music (all kinds of music...literally, everything), theatre, books, learning foreign languages, Tumblr...all that good stuff [*sic*].”

Other postings included interests and activities associated with playing/listening to music, being an artist, playing video games, and loving anime. Overall, postings with this assigned code indicated the common method of connecting with others by finding common ground.

Talk to me. Postings with this assigned code were typically shorter in length and explicitly communicated the desire to talk directly with another group member. This code was used to indicate when a group member was seeking connection with other members via direct conversation. Examples of these types of postings include: “Does anyone want to talk?”, “Anyone up and willing to talk”, and “I can't sleep and kinda just want someone to talk to [sic].”

'Looking for friends'. This in-vivo code was used to highlight the postings which explicitly indicated the group member was seeking or looking for friends. Postings with this code were often associated with other Seeking codes. Some postings with this assigned code included: “Hi!,17. MTF looking for friends!” and “looking for some new buds.”

'Add me'/social media connection. This code was created based on the postings that used the literal phrases ‘add me’, ‘follow me’, ‘like my page’, or otherwise asked fellow group members to connect with them through one or more social media outlets. For example, two postings stated: “Add me on wattpad xoxo [sic]” and “Please like and follow me on Facebook and Instagram.”

Emotional descriptor. This code was assigned to postings that explicitly expressed a feeling-word. Postings with this assigned code were also assigned with one or more codes created for use within this subcategory. It is notable that roughly half of the postings expressed a positive emotion, such as “excited” or “happy”. Several group members stated that they felt “bored” as the explanation for why they were reaching out to talk or engage with fellow group members. Another group member posted, “I'm very nervous to post here because everyone else is so cool.” The emotional content expressed in this *Seeking* subcategory was varied.

Transition description. Postings that made reference to their social or medical transition while also assigned with another *Seeking* code, were assigned with this code. Group members

often described their level of social transition by stating whether they were out, to whom they were out (e.g. family, friends, therapist), or how long they had been out for. The following example indicates that the group member is not out yet, but rather is closeted. In this case, ‘closeted’ suggests that this individual has not made it publically known that their gender identity is different from their gender assigned at birth. The group member wrote: “I still mostly closeted but making lots of progress in a short amount of time [*sic*].”

Other postings described their medical transition in relation to Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) or surgical procedures. The posting below indicates that the group member has not yet begun HRT, in their case ‘T’ or Testosterone, and wishes to undergo top surgery. This refers to the removal of female breasts to provide a more masculine aesthetic with the purpose of creating a physical appearance that affirms one’s gender identity. This example provides: “Hopefully will get a therapist soon to go on T and later get top surgery [*sic*].”

Reaching out. This code was created to describe the postings that conveyed an overall sense of seeking or desiring a connection with fellow group members, but did not explicitly state or ask for anything specific. These postings were typically short in length and provided some form of general greeting or salutation. Two examples that highlight this coding assignment are: “How are y’all doing?” and “Hello! Thank you for accepting me, I’ll definitely be participating in the group... Nice to meet you all!”

Personality descriptor. This code was applied to postings for which the group member described their personality in some manner while simultaneously assigned with another *Seeking* code. Several members described themselves as “shy”. Others posted that they were “talkative and outspoken”. One individual stated, “I am super funny”. While this code may not appear to

hold much importance, it was created and utilized because it highlights the spirit and individual personalities of the members of this group, further humanizing the culture being studied.

Connecting through similar culture. Some postings indicated a desire to connect with other members who share a specific intersecting identity of transgender plus something else. This code was applied to those postings. The follow showcase two examples of this assigned code:

“So, I'm just wondering do anyone want to be apart of my little group on Instagram.

It's for role models for the black transgender community [*sic*].”

Along with,

“Hello everyone, I've got an idea to make a social network with focus on LGBTQ+, and cultures that's not always accepted by society. With focus on finding friends, and communication. I was just thinking if there's anyone in here that can code like I can?”

Dysphoria. Postings that made reference to feeling dysphoric and were simultaneously assigned with another *Seeking* code, were assigned with this code. Dysphoria generally refers to a feeling of disconnect between one's gender and their physical appearance. One posting stated,

“Anyone want to chat..? I'm bored and a little dysphoric heh..” indicating an assignment of *Talk to Me* and *Emotional Indicator* codes, as well.

Support

The subcategory of *Seeking: Support* included postings which indicated a desire to gain social support or validation from fellow group members. While some of the postings in this subcategory are examples of a negative personal experience, the overall essence of the posting highlighted a need for support versus the simple sharing of an experience or story. This subcategory encompassed 9.4% (n=21, N=224) of postings from the entire data set and 21.9% (n=21, N=96) of postings from the *Seeking* thematic category. The creation of this subcategory

was supported by the emergence of 7 codes. Ranked order of these 7 codes within the *Support* subcategory include: (1) *Living authentically* (47.6%, $n=10$, $N=21$), (2) *'Does Anyone Relate'* (38%, $n=8$, $N=21$), (3) *Emotional Descriptor* (28.6%, $n=6$, $N=21$), (4) *Dealing with Dysphoria* (19%, $n=4$, $N=21$), (5) *Suicidal Ideation* (19%, $n=4$, $N=21$), (6) *Unsupportive Family* (9.5%, $n=2$, $N=21$), and (7) *Unsupportive School Staff* (9.5%, $n=2$, $N=21$).

Living authentically. Several postings made reference to being their authentic selves. Some of these postings expressed this sentiment through seeking validation for their experience, some were asking others to help them achieve this, while others just asked to be reminded to remain true to themselves. For example, the following posting provided a before/after photo of their physical transition and were seeking support in continuing to live authentically. The posting stated: “remind me not to go back to that life, but rather live it now to the fullest [photo of before/after].”

Another posting, which was also assigned the code of *Does Anyone Relate*, expressed their understanding of and desire to live authentically but was having difficulty in doing so. This individual sought support from group peers to validate this difficult experience. The posting read:

“As a person who identifies as genderqueer, I feel this unnecessary pressure to be more "neutral" and less feminine because I am afab [‘assigned female at birth’]. Does anyone else feel like being too masculine or too feminine (especially when they're biologically the sex associated with that trait) invalidates them to the people around them?”

‘Does anyone relate’. This in-vivo code was created to label the postings which asked ‘does anyone relate’, ‘does anyone feel the same’, or a similar sentiment that seems to seek a

sense of validation or normalization regarding their experience or feelings. A large portion of postings (42.9%) in this subcategory expressed this form of seeking connection from group members. Several postings with this assigned code were also assigned with one or more codes created for use within this subcategory, as well. For example, the following posting was assigned the code *Living Authentically* in addition to *Does Anyone Relate*:

“Can I get some thoughts on the term trans* as opposed to trans? It makes me cringe a little. Trans* is meant to suggest including non binary people as well, but as a non binary person, I've always considered myself just trans anyway. The trans vs trans* argument goes back to the good old "non binary people aren't trans enough" piece of phobia. Does anyone else feel the same [*sic*]?”

Emotional descriptor. This code was assigned to postings that explicitly expressed a feeling-word. Postings with this assigned code were also assigned with one or more codes created for use within this subcategory. It is notable that all of the postings expressed an emotional descriptor that conveyed a negative or otherwise undesirable feeling when asking for support from their group peers. These postings described feeling “worried”, “offended”, “deflated”, and “I’m very lost”. One poster described feeling “vulnerable” and “conflicted” about using a public restroom that matched their gender identity.

Dealing with dysphoria. Postings with this assigned code generally sought support to better deal with feeling dysphoric. An example of this type of posting is: “Does anybody else just feel like your dying on the inside when you see guys shirtless and fit on the beach with a girl because you wish you we're them [*sic*].”

Suicidal ideation. Multiple postings made reference to suicidal ideation. One posting sought the support from group members by asking for “Somebody please remind me why this life is worth living”. Another posting was explicit in stating their desire for action, as:

“does anyone know the best time of day to run away and not have anyone see you I can't take it now more I can't be the boy I really am unless I run away so please help me out if I stay much longer I'll end up killing myself because I've had enough I can't take anymore [*sic*].”

It is noted that each of these postings received several supportive comments from group members along with resources such as helplines.

Unsupportive family. Postings that sought a form of support from their group members and also shared an experience or situation involving unsupportive family members were assigned with this code. The posting below provides as an example of this. Specifically, this individual is sharing a negative experience but moreover is seeking support from group members by asking about dealing with dysphoria and living authentically. The posting read:

“I don't know how to feel about this. My parents know that I am a boy, yet my mum just uploaded her profile picture to an old photo of me, my dad, and my sister, when I looked like a girl still. I think it was purposely because of the talk we were having earlier today about me.. I really pissed me off when I saw it and now I'm really dysphoric.. How would you react [*sic*]?”

Unsupportive school staff. Postings that sought a form of support from their group members and also shared an experience or situation involving unsupportive school staff were assigned with this code. Some postings discussed school staff as being classroom teachers, while others described the school counselor as being unsupportive. The following posting is an

example of a group member sharing their experience at school with their teachers while also seeking support on living with their true identity. This posting was also assigned the code of *Living Authentically*. The posting stated:

“Today I was reprimanded by two different teachers for trying to explain non binary genders. A lot of people I thought already knew that I'm non binary apparently didn't and it sounds silly but I'm not used to being called so many slurs at once. My identity normally gives me strength but now I'm finding it's dragging me, so I need some trans positivity. If anyone has had any real positive experiences gender-wise recently or ever, could you comment them here? I really love this group. Thank you all.”

Tips

The subcategory of *Seeking: Tips* included postings which explicitly sought tips or advice on solving or handling a situation or issue. This subcategory covered 7.6% (n=17, N=224) of postings from the entire data set and 17.7% (n=17, N=96) of postings from the *Seeking* thematic category. The creation of this subcategory was supported by the emergence of 5 codes. The following shows, in rank order within the *Tips* subcategory, the 5 supporting codes: (1) *Coming Out* (52.9%, n=9, N=17), (2) *Emotional Descriptor* (41.2%, n=7, N=17), (3) *Implementing New Name/Pronouns* (23.5%, n=4, N=17), (4) *Passing/Physical Appearance* (23.5%, n=4, N=17), and (5) *Medical* (11.8%, n=2, N=17).

Coming out. Postings that asked for tips or advice from fellow group members specifically regarding the coming out process were provided with this code. These postings related to coming out in general society, to family, or to friends. Examples of this type of posting include, “Guys, I need some advice... Should I come out as trans to my mom?? And if so how

should I do so??” and “im thinking of coming out of ftm soon but im really scared does anyone have any tips for me [*sic*].”

Emotional descriptor. This code was assigned to postings that explicitly expressed a feeling-word. Postings with this assigned code were also assigned with one or more codes created for use within this subcategory. It is notable that all of the postings expressed an emotional descriptor that conveyed a negative or otherwise undesirable feeling when asking for tips from fellow group members. These postings described feeling “scared”, “panic[ed]”, and “lost”.

Implementing new name/pronouns. Postings that asked for tips or advice from fellow group members specifically regarding how to go about implementing a new name or pronoun set that matches their gender identity were provided with this code. Many of these postings were also assigned with additional codes from this subcategory, as well. For example, the following posting described feelings of dysphoria as it related to their current pronoun set. They have explicitly asked for advice on how to begin implementing masculine pronouns in public. This posted stated,

“Hello, been feeling very dysphoric lately and I want people to start using guy pronouns but I feel awkward when I bring it up to anyone because I think they will judge me, any advice.”

The next example shows a posting that asked for advice regarding pronouns and a new name. Similar to the example provided above, this posting also shows how overwhelming and insecure this process can feel. It read,

“I would like to be called he/him pronouns and I thinking I want my name to be [name deleted]. I don't know how to change things at school and I guess I'm very lost. Feel free to message me if you can help.”

Passing/physical appearance. This code was assigned to postings that asked for tips or advice from fellow group members specifically regarding their physical appearance in some manner. The majority of these postings asked for tips on how to ‘pass’. Passing refers to the ability to fully express one’s gender identity through physical appearance (e.g. clothing, makeup, hairstyle/cut, mannerisms, etc.) that matches with societal expectations or gender norms. Other postings with this assigned code simply asked for general tips or advice related to physical appearance. An example of a posting about passing stated, “Tips on passing as androgynous?” Whereas a general physical appearance posting provided,

“Does anyone have any tips from picking up an order of dresses? (would be going in male, im MtF, but just dont have what i need to go in as female) [*sic*].”

This person is most likely at the beginning stages of social transition and does not yet have the clothing items needed to pass in public. However, they present as insecure about picking up feminine clothing items in person while presenting with masculine expression which serves as their rationale for seeking tips from group members.

Health/medical. Many group members sought tips and advice from others in the group regarding physical health, mental health, or a related medical topic. These postings were assigned with this code. The topics ranged from asking about hormonal treatment and health insurance, as seen in the following example, to mental health concerns. One posting read, “How hard would it be to get HRT after I move in with my mom and start my transition I am in the us by the way [*sic*].”

Another posting discussed severe mental health concerns. It is unclear if these concerns are directly related to their gender identity or are due to an organic mental illness, drug interaction, hormone imbalance, or something else. Regardless, this individual is clearly concerned about their current mental health and are reaching out for advice from fellow group members. This example stated:

“So I've been becoming more paranoid and anxious the past month and my mood has been more fluctuating than the tide at sea and it's extremely easy to set me off. The biggest concern I have is that I've been getting vivid hallucinations and nightmares. I was supposed to see my psychiatrist about it and my psychologist is aware of everything but she doesn't really understand why I'm like this either. Does anyone go through something similar and have information as to why I've been like this? I'm not seeing my psychiatrist until a month and it's started to get increasingly worse .-. I'm really worried.. [sic].”

Opinion

The subcategory of *Seeking: Opinion* included postings which sought the opinion or general thoughts of fellow group members on a decision, situation, or issue. This subcategory was comprised of 7.6% (n=17, N=224) of postings from the entire data set and 17.7% (n=17, N=96) of postings from the *Seeking* thematic category. The creation of this subcategory was supported by the emergence of 5 codes. In rank order within the *Opinion* subcategory are the 5 supporting codes: (1) ‘*Do I pass*’ (35.3%, n=6, N=17), (2) *Hairstyle* (29.4%, n=5, N=17), (3) *New Name* (23.5%, n=4, N=17), (4) *Clothing/ Accessories* (5.9%, n=1, N=17), and (5) *Relationships* (5.9%, n=1, N=17).

‘Do I pass’. This in-vivo code was created based on the emergence of this phrase. Postings that expressed this phrase or a similar sentiment were assigned with this code. While

‘passing’ can refer to an androgynous or other type of gender expression, all postings with this code provided in this data set referred to passing as a binary gender (i.e. boy or girl). Most of these postings included an attached picture of themselves and asked their group members if they passed or not, such as “Do I pass? Be honest [pics of self]”, and “how well do I pass [pics of self]”. Others provided the answer they were looking for by explicitly stating their gender identity, such as “Do I pass as a boy? If so how much do I pass? [pics of self].” While the conversations and responses to postings were not part of the formal data collection, the researcher found an interesting notable occurrence of almost only supportive comments to these postings. This particular code highlights the need of approval and desire to fit in among peers.

Hairstyle. Postings that sought opinions on personal hairstyle, cut, or color were provided with this code. These postings were not seeking tips on how to achieve a particular look, but rather the opinion of their peers. Examples of these coded postings include, “Thinking about putting extensions in tomorrow. What colors do you guys think would look good? My natural hair is a medium auburn”, “Does very short hair look bad on me? [pics of self]”, and “Hey guys any opinions between my old and new hair? Ik they look kinda the same but one spunk and purple the others blue and red [attached picture of self] [*sic*].” These postings highlighted the need and desire for peer and general group approval.

New name. Postings that sought opinions on a new, gender-affirming name were provided with this code. These postings were not seeking tips on how to implement the name change, but rather the opinion of their peers on what it should be. Examples included, “What would you name me? (Gender neutral names please) [attached picture of self]” along with:

“Please input! I feel like having [deleted name] as a full name doesn't feel right.

What's a better suited name for me? (I'm an Asian trans male who likes macabre things, if that helps at all!) Thanks ☺[sic]!”

Similar to *Hairstyle*, these coded postings also highlighted the need and desire for peer and general group approval.

Clothing/accessories. Posting that sought the opinion regarding clothing or some kind of clothing accessory was provided with this code. An example of a posting that asked for opinions on a particular brand of chest binding tape follows: “has anyone ever binded with kt tape? My mom says she will get me some this weekend and ive never used it. Any pros and cons [sic].”

Relationships. Some postings sought the opinion of their group members on matters regarding relationships. These postings were assigned with this code. For example, the following posting asked about terminology for a significant other who identifies as Genderfluid:

“I have a legit question, if your dating someone who is gender fluid do you call them your girlfriend or boyfriend, or does it depend on the day or whatever [sic]??”

Resources

The subcategory of *Seeking: Resources* included postings which indicated a desire to gain concrete resources, as opposed to opinions, help, or validation. This subcategory was the least common among all 11 subcategories to make up only 2.7% (n=6, N=224) of postings from the entire data set and 6.2% (n=6, N=96) of postings from the *Seeking* thematic category. The creation of this subcategory was supported by the emergence of 3 codes. In rank order as compared within the *Support* subcategory are the 3 supporting codes: (1) *Medical* (50%, n=3, N=6), (2) *School Project* (33.3%, n=2, N=6), and (3) *Therapeutic Music* (16.7%, n=1, N=6).

Medical. Postings with this assigned code seek tangible resources that are medically-related. These postings differ from *Seeking Tips* because they seem to be wanting specific and

concrete resources rather than conceptually asking about ‘which is best?’ For example, the following postings are asking for various over-the-counter or at-home methods to change their physical appearance: “vitamins, over the counter products, any exercise that would help me become more masculine looking” and “Does anyone know where I can buy cheap hormone supplements that work just as well as hormones you get from the doctor?”

School project. Some of the postings in this subcategory described projects concerning trans-related issues. While they could be interpreted as advocacy efforts, none of these postings directly mentioned the motive for their project. As such, they best fit within the *Seeking Resources* subcategory and were assigned this code. The postings that were used to create this code are:

“I’m writing a script for a short film. It’s based on the struggles a trans youth may experience when coming home from university to a not-so-accepting family.”

Along with,

“Hey so in school I’m doing a project on how being transgender affects (please someone tell me if that’s the right one) family relationships and I have to do a survey so can you please fill this in for me thank youuuu [link to survey] [sic].”

Therapeutic music. This code was created to describe postings that sought out music as a resource. Similar codes were developed within other subcategories, however, this one relates specifically to seeking music that can be used as a method for coping rather than sharing it as a common interest or for support. For example, “Does anyone have a certain song that helps them with dysphoria, slurs, conflicting religious views, etc.?”

Sharing

Sharing was the second largest thematic category with 89 out of the 224 online postings, making up 39.7% of the entire data set. Within *Sharing* ($N=89$), three subcategories emerged

with the most prominent subcategory being *Positive* holding 44.9% (n=40). *General* and *Negative* were nearly equal with 28.1% (n=25) and 27% (n=24) respectively. Table 4.3 provides these three subcategories with the frequencies and percentages of their supporting codes.

Table 4.3 Frequencies of Subcategories and Supporting Codes: ‘Sharing’

Thematic Category	Subcategory	N	Supporting Code	n	%
Sharing	Positive	40	Self-Confidence	20	50%
			Emotional Descriptor	11	27.5%
			Engaging with Community	9	22.5%
			Celebrating Milestone	6	15%
			Supportive Family	5	12.5%
			Supportive Friends	5	12.5%
			‘Came Out’	4	10%
			Mental Health Improving	2	5%
			Supportive School Staff	2	5%

Note. Some postings contained more than one Supportive Code. This resulted in the percentages equaling greater than 100%. This Subcategory provided a total of 64 codes.

General	25	Current Trends/Issues	10	40%
		Self-Expression	9	36%
		Transition Descriptor	6	24%
		General Intro	5	20%
		Appearance	3	12%

Note. Some postings contained more than one Supportive Code. This resulted in the percentages equaling greater than 100%. This Subcategory provided a total of 32 codes.

Negative	24	Emotional Descriptor	10	41.6%
		Unsupportive Family	9	37.5%
		Experiencing Transprejudice	8	33.3%
		Invalidated	7	29.2%
		Lacking Self-Confidence	7	29.2%
		Lacking Peer Support	4	16.6%
		Dysphoria	4	16.6%
		Giving Up on Transition	3	12.5%

Note. Some postings contained more than one Supportive Code. This resulted in the percentages equaling greater than 100%. This Subcategory provided a total of 52 codes.

Positive

The subcategory of *Sharing: Positive* included postings which shared a personal experience, thought, or insight that expressed a generally positive nature. This subcategory was the top ranking out of all 11 subcategories encompassing 17.8% (n=40, N=224) of postings from the entire data set and 44.9% (n=40, N=96) of postings from the *Sharing* thematic category. The

creation of this subcategory was supported by the emergence of 9 codes. These 9 codes were ranked as follows: (1) *Self-Confidence* (50%, $n=20$, $N=40$), (2) *Emotional Descriptor* (27.5%, $n=11$, $N=40$), (3) *Engaging with Community* (22.5%, $n=9$, $N=40$), (4) *Celebrating Milestone* (15%, $n=6$, $N=40$), (5) *Supportive Family* (12.5%, $n=5$, $N=40$), (6) *Supportive Friends* (12.5%, $n=5$, $N=40$), (7) ‘*Came Out*’ (10%, $n=4$, $N=40$), (8) *Mental Health Improving* (5%, $n=2$, $N=40$), and (9) *Supportive School Staff* (5%, $n=2$, $N=40$).



Self-confidence. This code was the most commonly assigned code within the subcategory. Postings that were provided this code shared personal stories and experiences that described a sense of self-confidence and internal validation. Most of these were due to some form of outward appearance or gender expression. Topics included liking their new chest binder, being excited about upcoming facial surgery, and feeling confident in a swimsuit in public. Some example postings provided: “Wearing a suit. Feeling manly 🍌 [attached picture of self in a masculine suit]” and “A good ass haircut always makes me feel better [attached picture of self].”

Emotional descriptor. In sharing positive personal stories and experiences some explicitly expressed a feeling-word, for which this code was then applied. Postings with this assigned code were also assigned with one or more codes created for use within this subcategory. Expectedly, every emotional descriptor used in this subcategory was positive in nature with the vast majority using the word “happy”. Many others included the smiling face and/or heart-shaped emoji icons to supplement their text.

Engaging in community. Postings that shared a positive experience engaging with the community in some manner were assigned this code. These postings typically described activities that were advocacy, educational, or otherwise supportive in nature. For example, “Yo I’m going to be speaking at a seminar at the University of Reno Nevada as a trans advocate 😊.”

Another posting described being at the Washington D.C. Women's March the day after the new presidential administration took office in January 2017:

“There were so many people at the march today. I haven't felt so much love and acceptance around me ever. There were over 100,000 people there and everyone was nice to each other and everyone was together as a team. It's moments like these that make me feel like there's hope for our country yet PS. There were so many trans rights and LGBTQ rights posters that I almost cried [attached photo of Women's March in January] [sic].”


Celebrating milestone. Postings that not only shared a positive story, but celebrated a milestone of their transitional journey were assigned with this code. Most of these postings described an anniversary of coming out or beginning HRT, such as these postings: “Today is my one year on hormones ” and “Hey guys just thought I'd share that its my 2 year Transversary! I've been officially out for 2 years and I couldn't be happier  [sic].”

Supportive family. This code was provided for postings that shared an experience for which their family members were in some manner supportive of the situation described in the posting. The following posting described coming out to a sibling and their returned response of acceptance and pride: “I came out to my sister and she is fully accepting and is now proudly calling me her brother.” Another example described a discussion between the poster and their parent for which the father supported their name change and made reference to them becoming a contestant on RuPaul's Drag Race, a popular television competition series for drag queens. This posting stated:

“Me and my dad had a nice talk about my name change and he said that he wants me to use my birthname when I do drag. He said and I quote "when you are on

rupauls drag race you should be called [name deleted]" I had no objections lol
[sic].”


Supportive friends. This code was provided for postings that shared an experience for which their friends were perceived as supportive of the situation described in the posting. The following posting discussed coming out socially to friends and a sibling and received positive reactions:

“So today I came out to a good group of friends and one of my sisters. Good reactions all around! One friend told me he already knew and it was probably the highlight of it all. A few steps closer to being out completely .”

‘Came out’. Postings that shared a generally positive experience related to coming out socially received this in-vivo code. Many postings with this code were also assigned one or more additional codes within this subcategory. One example of this code provided:

“Today I came out to my old art teacher who is one of my best friends. He is on the younger side and acts like a big child and he really helped me find myself. I was super excited when he said "I've always wanted a little brother to give hand-me-downs to." So now I get a bunch of his old clothes.”

Another posting described their experience with coming out on social media. It stated,

“So uh, I came out this past Friday on my normal Facebook. I go to a gender therapist on Thursday to talk about getting hormones. Once I start hormones I start living as myself full time.  [attached picture of self] [sic].”

Mental health. Postings that shared an overall positive experience in describing their mental health were assigned this code. Some postings generally discussed feeling less dysphoric.

Other postings such as the following specifically described seeing a therapist and the perceived improvement to their mental health:

“So after coming out to my family I took a few people to my therapist and I think everything's panning out for the better!! Everyones been supportive and I hope the fighting with my mom will stop now that she's had a chance to talk to my therapist. Overall I think my mental health has been improving the more I ease myself into things [*sic*].”

Supportive school staff. This code was provided for postings that shared an experience for which staff members at school (e.g. teachers, counselors, administrative members) were perceived as supportive of the poster or situation described in the posting. The following posting describes a general happiness and love for both their alterative school and the school counselor by stating, “I swear I love alt school. [Name deleted] is the counselor there just omg. I'm so happy [*sic*].”

General

The subcategory of *Sharing: General* included postings which shared an opinion, experience, thought, or insight that is either a general statement or indicates a neutral, non-affective nature. This subcategory was comprised of 11.2% (n=25, N=224) of postings from the entire data set and 26% (n=25, N=96) of postings from the *Sharing* thematic category. The creation of this subcategory was supported by the emergence of 8 codes. In rank order within the *General* subcategory are the 8 supporting codes: (1) *Current Trends/Issues* (40%, n=10, N=25), (2) *Self-Expression* (36%, n=9, N=25), (3) *Transition Descriptor* (24%, n=6, N=25), (4) *General Intro* (20%, n=5, N=25), and (5) *Appearance* (12%, n=3, N=25).

Current trends/issues. Postings that shared a general opinion or statement regarding current topical trend or issue was assigned with this code. The overall essence of these postings

spoke to a specific topic of discussion rather than a personal or egocentric-based sharing. One posting that received this code discussed a general opinion regarding the normalization of gender identities. The posting read:

“Something I wish I could see a documentary about would be regular transgender people lives. But not another one focusing solely on hormones and surgery . I want one showing transgender people have lives like everyone else, we just have slightly different struggles than everyone else. I wanna see the 13 year old transgender boy who had to go to the doctor because he was binding wrong. I wanna see the transgender woman who hates wearing heels and makeup but does so because she wants to be more accepted as a woman. I wanna see the middle aged nonbinary person trying to figure out life when alot of people say you don't exist. BUT. I also want people to know that the transboy loves Disney movies and painting his nails, the transgender woman loves listening to Against Me! music and has a passion for football, and that the nonbinary person loves to binge watch Wentworth and that they have a crush on Ryan Reynolds. I want to normalize transgender people and to do.that you've gotta show that transgender people aren't just transgender, but they're human to [sic].”

Other topics that were discussed included current movies and television shows, gender-neutral terminology, sexism and cisphobia, and current political happenings.

Self-expression. Several postings revealed forms of self-expression. Postings that shared these without an overall essence that better fit within either the *Positive* or *Negative* subcategories, were coded here within the *General* subcategory. Forms of self-expression that were shared included pictures of personal artwork, such as:

“How is everyone doing and what have you been up too this is what I've been doing lol haven't posted in forever [2 photos of drawings/paintings of mermaids]”.

Others posted pictures of themselves practicing with makeup, shared blogs and websites describing their transitional journey, or videos of themselves discussing a variety of topics such as mental illness, self-esteem, and sexuality.

Transition descriptor. Postings that made reference to their social or medical transition while also assigned with another *Sharing* code, were assigned with this code. Group members often described their level of social transition by stating whether they were out, to whom they were out (e.g. family, friends, therapist), or how long they had been out.

General intro. Postings that simply described themselves and/or provided a general greeting to the group without any additional content that allowed it to better fit within another thematic category or subcategory was assigned with this code. Examples of these kinds of posting included: “Hellooo, I'm [name], I'm 15 and nice to meet you everyone ☺♥ [photo of self] [*sic*]” and,

“Hi everybody. I am new here and tbh I am a bit shy so this post probally isn't going to be long. I am 15 and new with getting to know myself on more levels if you catch my drift. Ps thank you [deleted name] for inviting me to this group [*sic*].”

Appearance. Postings that provided a general statement or thought about physical appearance without any associated affective content was assigned with this code. One example stated,

“Oh yeah i cut all my hair off and im in the process of growing it back out. Its at the awkward short/long phase. Equivalent to a mullet lol [attached picture of self with head facing down] [*sic*].”

Another posting added, “I really want a beard ugh.” Both of these postings were considered *General* because they did not provide any punctuation, emoji, or explicit statement describing their associated emotion. This one in particular was challenging to code because of the added ‘ugh’ to the statement. While it seems to be affective, the researcher was careful not to assume to know the meaning or intention of the poster’s statement.

Negative

The subcategory of *Sharing: Negative* included postings which shared a personal experience, thought, or insight that expresses a generally negative nature. This subcategory was comprised of 10.7% (n=24, N=224) of postings from the entire data set and 25% (n=24, N=96) of postings from the *Sharing* thematic category. The creation of this subcategory was supported by the emergence of 8 codes. Ranked within the *Negative* subcategory are the 8 supporting codes: (1) *Emotional Descriptor* (41.6%, n=10, N=24), (2) *Unsupportive Family* (37.5%, n=9, N=24), (3) *Experiencing Transprejudice* (33.3%, n=8, N=24), (4) *Invalidated* (29.2%, n=7, N=24), (5) *Lacking Self-Confidence* (29.2%, n=7, N=24), (6) *Lacking Peer Support* (16.6%, n=4, N=24), (7) *Dysphoria* (16.6%, n=4, N=24), and (8) *Giving Up on Transition* (12.5%, n=3, N=24).

Emotional descriptor. In sharing negative personal stories and experiences some explicitly expressed a feeling-word, for which this code was then applied. Postings with this assigned code were also assigned with one or more codes created for use within this subcategory. Expectedly, the feelings that were associated with their shared postings were all negative in nature. These words included “stressed”, “annoyed”, “worthless”, “ugly”, “stupid”, “upset”,

“lonely”, and “awful”. This type of description code was included alongside the process codes as a means to further provide a rich description of the overall nature and essence of the posting itself.

Unsupportive family. This was the second most commonly used code within the *Negative* subcategory and was provided for postings that shared an experience for which their family members were in some manner unsupportive of the situation or circumstances described in the posting. An example of this stated,

“So now my parent is complaining to my own brother about me being openly trans, with the words "I don't want it to be talked about, around me. She doesn't need to post that stuff on Facebook" Whose really hurting here dad, your pride, or my life? If I'm such a fucking embarrassment, KICK ME OUT. It's better to live alone and cold, than to live in a house where I can't even get help now because of your selfishness [*sic*]!!!!”

The posting above shared an experience with a parent who clearly expressed to the poster that their identity was not supported or welcomed in the house.

Experiencing transprejudice. Postings that shared experiencing some form of Transprejudice were assigned with this a Priori code. Some of these postings were also assigned with additional codes from this subcategory, often *Unsupportive Family*, *Invalidated*, or *Inadequate*. Some experiences of Transprejudice were considered an act of ‘Genderism’, which is described in the literature as a form of Transprejudice for which a belief set that reinforces the negative view of non-conforming gender identities is displayed (Hill & Willoughby, 2005). An example of this described a situation for which the poster overheard a discussion among family

members discussing their negative beliefs regarding the LGBTQ communities that demonstrated a preference for straight and gender-conforming identities. This posting stated:

“When your brother and dad are saying the gays and trans should go back into the closet because "It didn't hurt nobody for all them years" And basically saying trans people don't have a right to use the bathroom [‘feeling annoyed’ emotional tag added] [*sic*].”

Another example of Genderism was found in a posting that shared general experiences of overhearing conversations in public regarding a negative view of a non-binary gender classification. This posting read:

“Over the past weekend, I have heard a lot of shit about genders and there only existing two genders, male and female and that there are no other variations of genders. I tried to pick a side: girl or boy. Only to realize that, you know what, fuck it, I am who I am and there is no way I could _choose which one of these two_ I am. Saying that there are only two genders makes my brain just stop working entirely...[*sic*].”

Other postings described experiences with ‘Transphobia’, which is considered to be a form of Transprejudice in which a negative emotional or affective response towards a person of transgender or a non-conforming gender identity is displayed (Hill & Willoughby, 2005). This was shown in the following posting: “My dad called me disgusting for wearing a trans pride shirt.”

Invalidated. Postings that shared an experience for which the overall tone conveyed feeling as if others were telling them that ‘your identity isn’t real’ or ‘you’re making this identity

up' were assigned with this code. Some of these postings were also assigned with additional codes from this subcategory, as well. An example of this included,

“Im currently a freshman in high school, and me and my dad were talking about college. I asked him how they chose your roommate. He said "well obviously you will be rooming with another girl" . i got so pissed off. I think hes totally denying my transition and that im serious about it. It made me feel stupid tbh [*sic*].”

This posting referred to feeling invalidated because it conveyed a sense that their parent did not believe or take their desire for identity transition to be real.

Lacking self-confidence. Postings that shared an experience for which the overall tone conveyed feeling as if they were ‘not good enough’ or otherwise described a lack of confidence of themselves were assigned with this code. Some of these postings were also assigned with additional codes from this subcategory, as well. An example of this included, “How come my new a set of pictures isn't getting any feedback? I thought I was beautiful – feeling ugly.”

Another posting stated, “It's pretty much impossible for me to gain the courage to walk into the men's bathroom when there are other people around and it's low-key destroying me.”

Lacking peer support. Some postings made reference to having a perceived lack of support from peers or a friendship base. While similar, these postings do not present the same essence as postings coded with Unsupportive Friends, as that code referenced specific instances of friends or peers explicitly acting in an unsupportive manner. Postings with this code indicated more of a perceived lack of friends. For example,

“I'm thinking leaving this group already ☹ I am sorry but I don't feel that I am getting enough support here ☹ and I've been trying to make friends here but no

one likes me and I feel socially unacceptable and would rather live in a dark room everyday ☹ [sic].”

Dysphoria. Postings that shared personal stories or experiences related to dysphoria were provided with this code. Both terms ‘dysphoric’ and ‘dysphoria’ were grouped together under this coded. While ‘dysphoric’ describes a feeling, it also describes the overall essence of experiencing dysphoria. Therefore, this was used as the primary code and was not simultaneously coded as an *Emotional Descriptor*. An example of this coded posting stated,

“I can't stand it when people think being trans is a choice. If I had the choice I'd rather not feel this way on this daily basis. I hate being trans, it's not fun its not "trendy" its awful. I can't look in the mirror without feeling like I want to puke, I dread getting in the shower, shaving, and getting dressed because I hate my body. Unless people know how it feels to have Dysphoria they can't say its a choice or judge me, they have no clue what goes through my head. I hope your all doing well and hanging in there. Try to ignore the haters they're just ignorant and have no clue what they're talking about. [sic]”

Giving up on transition. Postings that stated that they were choosing to forego or otherwise ‘give up’ on continuing their transitional process were assigned with this code. This was described as being due to the unfeasible expenses, too much stress, or a lack of support from others. The following posting shared this sentiment:

“I'm giving up on my gender transition..... I'm tired of having to go through the stress and anxiety of thinking about it every single day... I've literally reached my limit and I cannot do this anymore you all are great friends and I'm glad I have a great support system but I just can't do this anymore – feeling stressed [sic].”

Providing

Providing was the smallest thematic category with 39 out of the 224 online postings, making up 17.4% of the entire data set. Within *Providing* ($N=39$), three subcategories emerged with the most prominent subcategory being *Resources* holding 46.2% ($n=40$). *Support* provided for 30.7% ($n=12$) and *Connection* provided for 23.1% ($n=9$). Table 4.4 shows the three subcategories with the frequencies and percentages of their supporting codes.

Table 4.4 Frequencies of Subcategories and Supporting Codes: ‘Providing’

Thematic Category	Subcategory	<i>N</i>	Supporting Code	<i>n</i>	%
Providing	Connection	9	‘I’m Here for You’	5	55.5%
			Connecting via Self-Expression	4	44.4%
			‘Add’/‘Follow Me’	2	22.2%
<i>Note.</i> Some postings contained more than one Supportive Code. This resulted in the percentages equaling greater than 100%. This Subcategory provided a total of 11 codes.					
Support	Support	12	‘Proud’	5	41.7%
			Celebrating Identity	5	41.7%
			Validating Message	5	41.7%
			‘We Will Overcome’	2	4.2%
<i>Note.</i> Some postings contained more than one Supportive Code. This resulted in the percentages equaling greater than 100%. This Subcategory provided a total of 17 codes.					
Resources	Resources	18	Type: Event	4	22.2%
			Type: Online Article	3	16.7%
			Type: Online Blog	3	16.7%
			Dealing with Societal Norms	3	16.7%
			Type: Music	2	11.1%
			Type: Chat Group	2	11.1%
			Type: Media Representation	2	11.1%
			Physical and Mental Health Issues	1	5.5%
			College Guidance	1	5.5%
			Selling Clothing	1	5.5%
<i>Note.</i> Some postings contained more than one Supportive Code. This resulted in the percentages equaling greater than 100%. This Subcategory provided a total of 22 codes.					

Resources

The subcategory of *Providing: Resources* included postings which provided a concrete resource for other group members to utilize. This subcategory was comprised of 8% ($n=18$, $N=224$) of postings from the entire data set and 46.2% ($n=18$, $N=39$) of postings from the

Providing thematic category. The creation of this subcategory was supported by the emergence of 10 codes. These codes include both the types of resources and topics. In rank order as compared within the *Resources* subcategory are the 10 supporting codes: (1) *Type: Event* (22.2%, $n=4$, $N=18$), (2) *Type: Online Article* (16.7%, $n=3$, $N=18$), (3) *Type: Online Blog* (16.7%, $n=3$, $N=18$), (4) *Topic: Dealing with Societal Norms* (16.7%, $n=3$, $N=18$), (5) *Type: Music* (11.1%, $n=2$, $N=18$), (6) *Type: Chat Group* (11.1%, $n=2$, $N=18$), (7) *Type: Media Representation* (11.1%, $n=2$, $N=18$), (8) *Topic: Physical and Mental Health Issues* (5.5%, $n=1$, $N=18$), (9) *Topic: College Guidance* (5.5%, $n=1$, $N=18$), and (10) *Type: Selling Clothing* (5.5%, $n=1$, $N=18$).

Type and topic. Postings that provided a tangible or specific resource were assigned with a typology code, such as *Type: Event*, *Online Article*, *Online Blog*, *Music*, *Chat Group*, *Media Representation*, or *Selling Clothing*. The most common type of resource that was provided was an invitation to an event. This subcategory also included the general topical codes of *Dealing with societal norms*, *Physical and mental health issues*, and *College guidance*. These codes were assigned to the posting that were assigned with a *Type:* code to help further describe the nature of the posting. The following posting provides a link to an online article for group members who are interested in locating a LGBTQ-friendly college:

“I guess this is a bit late, but for anyone still choosing colleges, I'd recommend this site. They tell you if they have easy HRT access, if HRT and Surgeries are covered under the insurance, discrimination coverage, and a lot more [link to pride index top 10 colleges, online article].”

The posting below provides a link to an online blog written about dealing with a common issue of playing gendered sports for transgender youth:

“Does anybody take part in sport? I've wrote a post regarding sports and being transgender as I feel it's an issue for LGB+ individuals, especially the trans community [link].”

Additionally, the following posting provides an example of the kind of event that was provided for other group members to attend:

“Pride for Youth is proud to announce that our #TransAction program is expanding! Starting January 1, 2017 TransAction is now open to #Trans & #GenderNonConforming identified individuals ages 15-30. For more information or to get linked to our #TGNC focused programming contact [name] via private message or [phone number] #Transgender #NonBinary #Thisiswhattranslookslike #TransSupport [sic].”

Support

The subcategory of *Providing: Support* included postings which provided a supportive, validating, affirmative, or otherwise positive message to fellow group members. This subcategory was comprised of 5.4% (n=12, N=224) of postings from the entire data set and 30.7% (n=12, N=39) of postings from the *Providing* thematic category. The creation of this subcategory was supported by the emergence of 4 codes, ranked as follows: (1) ‘*Proud*’ (41.7%, n=5, N=12), (2) *Celebrating Identity* (41.7%, n=5, N=12), (3) *Validating Message* (41.7%, n=5, N=12), and (4) ‘*We Will Overcome*’ (4.2%, n=2, N=12).

‘**Proud**’. This in-vivo code was used to highlight the postings that used the word ‘proud’ with a supportive tone. Group members either stated that they were proud of each other or were proud to be a part of this group/identity. Postings assigned with this code were often coded with one or more additional *Support* codes. Two examples that showcase the use of this code include:

“I’m proud of you all for being honest with yourself and those around you” and “I’m super proud to be trans, and of all of you - whether you're visible or not!”

Celebrating identity. Several postings provided a supportive statement that was aimed at celebrating the transgender identity. It is notable that the national Transgender Day of Visibility fell during the timeframe that the postings were collected for study. The majority of postings with this assigned code made reference to this. For example,

“Happy TDOV everyone! Today is the day to show your colors, love yourself, and know you are not alone and you are DEFINITELY visible! ❤️ Love to each one of you [*sic*].”

Validating message. The code was created for the postings that provided a generally validating, supportive, or otherwise uplifting message for fellow group members. Some of these postings contained text only while many contained emojis of hearts and smiling faces to convey an uplifting tone. Others provided graphics or memes to add additional support. One example includes: “Hi. I just wanted to tell you that you're an awesome person and that you matter. 😊 I hope you're having a good day today <3 [*sic*].” Another posting provided no personally written text, but rather posted a meme that flashed a rotation of validating messages to include: “Don’t forget your loved”, “You’re alive for a reason”, “Needed”, “Beautiful”, and “Don’t give up”.

‘We will overcome’. This code is similar to *Validating Message* but also conveyed a sense of survival or overcoming a tough situation together. It is noteworthy that the sociopolitical climate during that time was that of uncertainty surrounding the perceived lack of support for the LGBTQ communities from the incoming Presidential administration. This posting was added in early February and seems to be referring to the newly elected President entering office.

“Hope you all are taking the recent news in strides. Just know that there are plenty of us who are actively trying to make changes, despite things looking a bit worse lately. We will survive this.”

Connection

The subcategory of *Providing: Connection* included postings which provided a direct personal connection to fellow group members. This subcategory was comprised of 4% (n=9, N=224) of postings from the entire data set and 23.1% (n=9, N=39) of postings from the *Providing* thematic category. The creation of this subcategory was supported by the emergence of 4 codes and were ranked in the following order: (1) ‘*I’m Here For You*’ (55.5%, n=5, N=9), (2) *Connecting via Self-Expression* (44.4%, n=4, N=9), and (3) ‘*Add/Follow Me*’ (22.2%, n=2, N=9).

‘I’m here for you’. This in-vivo code was applied to the postings which conveyed a sense of empathy and support. These postings were provided to let other group members know that they are there for them if any support is needed. This posting provided a sense of spiritual connection: “Follow me @[X] on ig for spiritual quotes and I hope they can help [*sic*].” Another posting provided a personal connection within their introductory posting:

“Hey everyone, I haven't properly introduced myself. I'm [name]. I've been out as transgender 4 going on 5 years I believe idek I lose track lol but yeah. I'm 18 and 4 months on estrogen as I'm MTF ... I figured I'd just say if anyone ever needs someone to talk to I'm always here just send a request and shoot me a message. Anyways I hope you all had a good day [*sic*].”

Connecting via self-expression. This code represents the postings that used a method of self-expression or a common interest to provide connectivity with fellow group members. These

postings share a sense of relating to others by providing an outlet for creative expression and to embrace their true selves without fear of judgement. Two postings that exemplified this code are: “My nerd corner. Post pics of yours! [Attached picture of Pokémon items]” and “BODYPOSITIVITY THREAD! GO! I love my furry legs [*sic*].”

‘Add/follow me’. This code has the same meaning in this subcategory as it was described in previous subcategories. Postings that used the literal phrases ‘add me’, ‘follow me’, ‘like my page’, or otherwise asked fellow group members to connect with them through one or more social media outlets were assigned this code. These postings were also assigned with one or more additional codes used in this subcategory. Two examples of these postings include: “Go follow me on instagram if you ever wanna talk for no reason [*sic*]” and “Follow me @[X] on ig for spiritual quotes and I hope they can help [*sic*].”

Conclusion

In total, 224 postings collected within the three-month period of January to April 2017 from the online social media group *Transgender and Genderqueer Teens* were analyzed for this study through the use of an inductive Ethnographic Content Analysis. Three overarching thematic categories emerged from the data to reveal that all postings could be described as *Seeking*, *Sharing*, or *Providing* something within the group or among group members. A further look into these overarching thematic categories revealed a total of 11 subcategories. *Seeking* included 5 subcategories: *Connection*, *Support*, *Tips*, *Opinion*, and *Resources*, listed in rank order. *Sharing* included 3 subcategories: *Positive*, *General*, and *Negative*, listed in rank order. Lastly, *Providing* included 3 subcategories: *Resources*, *Support*, and *Connection*, listed in rank order.

A full analysis of the data set consisting of 224 online postings revealed the most common behavior within the group was associated with *Seeking* something from peers (n=96, 42.8%). Most group members sought *Connection* from each other and sought concrete *Resources* the least. The *Sharing* thematic category was second common, yielding 89 postings (39.7%). Members shared *Positive* experiences and stories the most often and *Negative* experiences the least. Lastly, the thematic category of *Providing* was the least common among all 224 postings showing 17.4% of data set with 39 postings. Members provided *Resources* most often and provided a personal *Connection* to others the least amount.

CHAPTER IV: DISCUSSION

Currently, there is a lack of available counseling literature regarding the general culture and specific needs of the transgender youth and adolescent population, a population with growing visibility within the United States (Singh & Burnes, 2009). The majority of research that does exist for this age group is primarily focused on the negative experiences within the school setting. As we begin to increase our understanding of gender identity, there has been a push for more holistic and wellness-based modalities versus the pathology-based treatments for therapeutic services (Avera et al., 2015; Carroll et al., 2002; Myers & Sweeney, 2008; Singh & Burnes, 2009). This study was conducted to look at the general online postings of transgender youth and adolescents among peers with shared gender and age demographics with the goal of better understanding their shared culture. As such, the specific and unique needs of this population were also able to come to light. Increased understanding of transgender youth and adolescents may help counselors working with this population to better serve from a holistic point of view.

Data from this study was gathered from the publically searchable online social media group, *Transgender and Genderqueer Teens*. Two hundred and twenty-four individual postings were collected retroactively for three consecutive months from March 31 to January 1, 2017. This study examined the culture of this population by isolating the themes in each postings utilizing the qualitative method of an inductive Ethnographic Content Analysis (Altheide, 1996). The data emerged three broad thematic categories: Seeking, Sharing, and Providing. Further exploration of these categories revealed several additional subcategories, as well, providing greater insight to the common postings within the culture being studied. The discussion below will present concluding points based on the interpretation of the findings in a format that

describes implications for counseling professionals along with suggestions for future and/or continued research.

Unique Issues and Concerns

The inductive nature of this study allowed for the researcher to note specific topics, issues, or trends within this community. While there were many common themes, three stood out as being particularly beneficial for counselor awareness. The salient and unique issues found in this study included dysphoria, passing, and re-naming oneself.

Dysphoria

The formal definition of Gender Dysphoria as provided by the DSM-5, refers to the experience of a marked incongruence between one's natal gender, or gender assigned at birth, and one's outward gender expression/inward gender experience *and* an associated experience of distress (APA, 2013, pg. 451-453). The DSM-5 goes on to further describe multiple criteria and specifiers of incongruence and distress in order to make a formal diagnosis. 'Dysphoria' or 'feeling dysphoric' were common phrases found across three subcategories and twice within one thematic category. However, the postings that used this language referred strictly to the associated feelings of distress and not regarding feelings of incongruence. These postings often described feeling dysphoric, or otherwise distressed, and as such sought support, validation for the experience, and/or advice on how to deal with it. This was a telling finding in that the lay definition of these phrases indicates distress which could be associated with other mental health concerns such as anxiety, depression, suicidality, among others.

Passing

A common question asked among the group was 'do I pass' with an attached picture of oneself. 'Passing' in this context refers to whether or not an individual physically expressed in a

manner that matched their desired gender expression. It is indicative of the desire to outwardly express in a manner that affirms one's inner identity. However, these postings did not indicate a passing, or meeting of, one's own personal goals for gender affirmation in the form of self-acceptance. Rather, they seemed to beg social validation and acceptance from other group members. This also seems to be associated with self-identity and self-confidence. This is a useful finding for counseling professionals to better understand specific concerns of this population in serving them within a clinical setting. Counselors can help clients question and clarify their need for social validation and to better understand their own perceived gender expectations from society.

Affirmative Name Change

Many postings asked the opinion of fellow group members to help them choose a new name that better suited or affirmed their gender identity. Many of the group members would provide several options and ask for group members to pick their favorite, while others simply asked as an open question. Similar to above, these postings seemed to be longing for validation and acceptance from others in the group. However, it also shows the individual's desire to affirm their gender identity across multiple features of expression. This was clearly presented in the findings an imperative aspect to one's identity. Likewise, this is another example of a unique issue for this population that cisgender counselors may not be aware of, and better understanding this aspect of identity can prove beneficial for both the client and the counselor.

Importance of Supportive Family, Peers, Community

Current research has shown that having a social and family support system is critical for transgender and genderqueer youth and adolescents' wellbeing (Travers, Bauer, Pyne, Bradley, Gale, & Papadimitriou, 2013). Significant differences in general health, mental health, and

overall life satisfaction are clearly found between adolescents who feel supported by others and those who do not. More specifically, research shows significantly higher rates of self-esteem and confidence, less depression, and less reports of suicidality for those youth and adolescents who indicate having strong family support (Travers, et al., 2013).

Postings within this data set explicitly described accounts of both supportive and unsupportive experiences not only with family, but also peers, teachers, therapists, and the community. Within the postings that shared personal stories regarding unsupportive others, they described instances of transphobia and genderism. These postings indicated feelings of inadequacy and invalidation, while others described feeling stupid, annoyed, or ugly. Overall, many of these postings led to describing a lack of self-confidence. While this study did not produce a statistical analysis to assess correlation or significance, the qualitative findings seem to map on the current research indicating a link between a lack of support from others and a decrease in mental wellbeing and self-esteem.

Alternatively, this study also found several instance of supportive and positive experiences with family, peers, teachers, counselors, and community. These stories used emotional descriptors such as happy, excited, and proud. They also indicated a sense of self-confidence, and in one case, an explicit statement regarding increased mental health due to a supportive family and participating in both individual and family therapies. Others described a decrease in feelings of dysphoria. There were no contradictory examples showing a negative response to an experience of support from others, which indicates a probable link between support and positive mental wellbeing.

Desire for In-group Acceptance

One of the most profound conclusions that can be drawn from this specific set of data is that these particular transgender and genderqueer youth and adolescents have a need and desire for social acceptance from the other members of this sub-culture. This is clearly shown by nearly every subcategory and supporting code found within the thematic category of *Seeking*. There were 96 total *Seeking* postings which made up 42.8% of the full data set. Some of the most indicative postings showing a desire for group acceptance are the ones which ask ‘do I pass’, ‘what name would you pick for me’, and ‘do you like my new hairstyle’. These imply value placed on the opinion of virtual strangers because they are members of the subculture of transgender or genderqueer youth and teenagers, showing more than seeking general social acceptance but rather in-group acceptance.

Even more so, there are a multitude of postings that invite other group members to ‘add’ or ‘follow’ them on various social media accounts, ask group members to privately message them, share personal interests (e.g. bands, video games, anime, etc.), and share personal stories followed up by asking, ‘does anyone relate’. While these are forms of seeking connection, opinion, tips, and support as the subcategories suggest, when grouped together they showcase the need for those within this group to befriend them, thus validating and accepting them into group.

This finding indicates a higher level of connection and need to feel like one belongs to a group. It highlights the desire to be able to live authentically and to be not only accepted by a particular group or culture of people, but to fit in thus truly belonging.

Empowerment

It was the preliminary assumption and expectation of the researcher to find high levels of postings that shared a perceived negative experience based on findings from current research and literature on the experiences of transgender youth (Avera et al., 2015; Harris Interactive &

GLSEN, 2005; Greytak et al., 2009; Kosciw et al., 2016; Greytak et al., 2016; James et al., 2016; Singh & Burnes, 2009). Instead, what emerged from this data set was that these individuals were full of empowerment, pride, and resounding strength. So many of these postings shared stories of their personal lives where they accepted, loved, and celebrated their identity. Many others shared uplifting and supportive messages to the group reminding each other of their worth and empowering each other to be themselves.

The most common subcategory was that of *Sharing: Positive* with 40 total postings, making up 17.8% of the full data set. These postings shared a range of stories including celebrating milestones and anniversaries of personal transition achievements, positive interactions with community members, and uplifting stories about their families and friendships.

To build upon those postings, the three *Providing* subcategories yielded 39 postings which made up 17.4% of the full data set. Postings within the *Providing* thematic categories included those which provided support, such as validating messages and expressing pride in transgender and genderqueer identities. Others invited group members to join community or advocacy-based events, watch videos, or read articles that empowered group members to embrace their gender diversity and to be themselves.

Overall, these types of postings made up over a third of the entire data set (n=79, N=224, 35.3%). This finding indicates high levels of empowerment, resiliency, and strength among a group that is faced with high levels of adversity. When expected to struggle or display postings showing disempowerment, these group members proudly told stories and shared messages that shared hope, positivity, and an empowered sense of unity.

Limitations

One limitation of this study is that it analyzed a singular data source by only one researcher. To help strengthen the study and reduce researcher bias, it would have been useful to collect postings from multiple sources to compare findings, along with having additional researchers to independently code and compare the data sets. Additionally, while the collection of pre-existing data served as a great strength in being able to collect the data with greater ease, it simultaneously presented as a limitation for different reasons. Because pre-existing data was used, there was no ability to contact the writer of any given posting to clarify its meaning. This would have been helpful as some postings were vague, used terminology unfamiliar to the researcher, or expressed emotional content (via emotional tag or emoji) that seemed contradictory to the context of the wording. Clarification would have allowed the researcher to more accurately code and categorize some of the postings.

Implications for Counseling Professionals

While not an exhaustive list, the three unique concerns of dysphoria, passing, and names that were expressed multiple times in multiple forms throughout this data set highlight the fact that there are many specific concerns of this population. Singh and colleagues (2010) remind counseling professionals that “the importance of understanding the issues salient to these identities cannot be understated...” (pg. 415). It is important for counseling professionals to stay abreast of common issues, trends, and concerns of any population in order to mitigate the need for the client to educate the professional, to increase ability to build rapport, and allow for easier access to the heart of the issues during a therapeutic meeting (Singh, et al., 2010; Pickering, 2005).

Additionally, findings from this study are supported by the current research on the importance of family, professional staff, and community support on mental health (Travers, et

al., 2013). This information can be used to increase psychoeducation on parent support and encourage family therapies. Community outreach and education can benefit from this information, as well by providing information to schools and other community-based centers for a more inclusive community. Furthermore, these findings highlight the crucial need for continued training of school teachers and counseling professionals on the importance of affirmative care for transgender and genderqueer youth and adolescents.

Current counseling literature reminds counseling professionals of the American Counseling Association's mission to provide strength and wellness-based therapeutic services to all clients (ACA, 2014; Avera et al., 2015; Chaves-Korell & Johnson, 2010; Myers & Sweeney, 2008; O'Hara et al., 2013). This literature goes on to suggest that counselors move away from the historically pathologizing treatment modalities (Avera et al., 2015; Myers & Sweeney, 2008). Findings from this study highlight the naturally occurring strengths and wellness focused attitudes of this population. This data set presented a clear indication of the need to be surrounded by uplifting, positive, and empowered messages and attitudes rather than being reminded of the adversity and stigma often associated with gender variance. These group members did not post high levels implying pity, grief, sorrow, or anger. This shows the kinds of support that group members found most helpful, and it was not pity, pathology, or a desire to be fixed. These group members have shown counselors the multiple forms of resiliency and strength that can be used and embraced within a therapeutic setting.

Implications for Future Research

More research is needed within the counseling field specifically to better understand the causes, effective treatment modalities, and general experiences surrounding dysphoria, particularly as it relates to feelings of distress. The number of postings in this data set indicate

that individuals within this age population are reporting distress associated with gender dysphoria, however, it is unclear if the distress is significantly correlated to age development, external factors (e.g. unsupportive family), internal factors (lack of self-confidence), etc. Additionally, more research is needed to better understand the outward expression-based concerns, such as passing and name change. More specifically, how these concerns are connected to societal gender norms and how they affect one's overall mental health is needed within the counseling literature.

This study did not look at any correlations between age, puberty markers, phase of transition and general topics of discussion. While this specific finding indicates a very general desire for belonging, it begs the question of whether this could be linked to any of the recognized stages of human development available in current literature. More research is needed to better understand gender identity development as it relates to gender variance.

Conclusion

This study utilized an inductive ECA to explore 224 postings to the online social media group, *Transgender and Genderqueer Teens* over the span of three consecutive months of January through March 2017. This study sought to explore the culture and unique trends associated with this population to better provide more informed counselor training and therapeutic services. This study was also conducted with the purposeful approach of broad and inductive inquiry with the aim of discovering informed research questions for future studies.

Overall, data analysis revealed 3 overarching thematic categories of *Seeking*, *Sharing*, and *Providing*, with an additional 11 subcategories. Moreover, the researcher was able to draw several conclusions based on the analyzed findings along with implications for counseling professionals and future research. Findings from this study highlighted unique concerns

associated with this population such as dysphoria, passing, and name changes. Also, this study showed that support systems are linked to increased mental wellness and self-confidence. It was further found that postings within this study indicated a desire for in-group acceptance and belonging. Lastly, it was found that group members more often posted forms of uplifting and positive messages showing empowerment, resilience, and pride in one's identity rather than posting messages negatively focused on adversity.

References

- Almeida, J., Johnson, R.M., Corliss, H.L., Molnar, B.E., Azrael, D. (2009). Emotional distress among LGBT youth: The influence of perceived discrimination based on sexual orientation. *Journal of Youth and Adolescent Development*, 38(7), 1001-14. doi: 10.1007/s10964-009-9397-9
- Altheide, D. L. (1996). *Qualitative media analysis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Altheide, D. L. (1987). Ethnographic content analysis. *Qualitative Sociology*, 10, 65-77.
- American Counseling Association. (2014). ACA code of ethics. Alexandria, VA: Author.
- American Psychiatric Association. (2000). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (4th ed., revised). Washington, DC: Author.
- American Psychiatric Association. (2013). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (5th ed.). Washington, DC: Author.
- Association for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Issues in Counseling. (2003). *Competencies for counseling gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) clients*. Retrieved from <http://www.algbtic.org/resources/competencies.html>
- Association for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Issues in Counseling (2010). Competencies for counseling with transgender clients. *Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling*, 4(3), 135-159. doi: 10.1080/15538605.2010.524839
- Association for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Issues in Counseling LGBQIA Competences Taskforce. (2013). Competencies for counseling with lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, questioning, intersex, and ally individuals. *Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling*, 7(1), 2-43. doi:10.1080/15538605.2013.755444

- Avera, J., Zholu, Y., Speedlin, S., Ingram, M., & Prado, A. (2015). Transitioning into wellness: Conceptualizing the experiences of transgender individuals using a wellness model. *Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling, 9*(4), 273-287.
doi:10.1080/15538605.2015.1103677
- Bockting, W. O. (1997). Transgender coming out: Implications for the clinical management of gender dysphoria. In B. Bullough, V. L. Bullough, & J. Elias (Eds.), *Gender blending* (pp. 48-52). Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.
- Bockting, W. O., Knudson, G., & Goldberg, J. M. (2006). Counseling and mental health care for transgender adults and loved ones. *International Journal of Transgenderism, 9*(3/4), 35-82. doi:10.1300/J485v09n03_03
- Boellstorff, T. Nardi, B., Pearce, C., & Taylor, T. L. (2012). *Ethnography and virtual worlds: A handbook of method*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Bornstein, K. (1998). *My gender workbook: How to become a real man, a real woman, the real you, or something else entirely*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Carroll, L., & Gilroy, P. J. (2002). Transgender issues in counselor preparation. *Counselor Education & Supervision, 41*(2), 233-242. doi:10.1002/j.1556-6678.2002.tb00175x
- Carroll, L., & Gilroy, P. J., & Ryan, J. (2002). Counseling transgendered, transsexual, and gender-variant clients. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 80*(2), 131-139.
- Chavez-Korell, S. & Johnson, L. T. (2010). Informing counselor training and competent counseling services through transgender narratives and the transgender community. *Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling, 4*(3/4), 202-213.
doi:10.1080/15538605.2010.524845

- Chen-Hayes, S. (2001). Counseling and advocacy with transgendered and gender variant persons in schools and families. *Journal of Humanistic Counseling, Education and Development*, 40, 34–49.
- Council of Accredited Counseling and Education Related Programs. (2009). *2009 standards for accreditation*. Alexandria, VA: Author.
- Dane County Youth Commission. (2015). Dane county youth assessment: Summary report grades 9th-12th. Madison, WI: Dane County Human Services. Retrieved from https://danecountyhumanservices.org/yth/dox/asmt_survey/2015/2015_hs.pdf
- deVries, A., Cohen-Kettenis, P., & Delmarre-van de Waal, H. (2006). Clinical management of gender dysphoria in adolescents. *International Journal of Transgenderism*, 9(3/4), 83-94.
- Gates, G. J. (2011). How many people are lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender? *The Williams Institute*. Los Angeles, CA: University of California, Los Angeles School of Law.
- Gender Identity in U.S. Surveillance (Gen IUSS). (2014). Best practices for asking questions to identify transgender and other gender minority respondents on population-based surveys. *The Williams Institute*. Los Angeles, CA: University of California, Los Angeles School of Law.
- Glaser, B. G. & Strauss, A., L. (1967). *Discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Chicago, IL: Aldine Publishing Company.
- Grant, J. M., Mottet, L. A., Tanis, J., Herman, J. L., Harrison, J., & Keisling, M. (2011). Injustice at every turn: A report of the national transgender discrimination survey. *National Center for Transgender Equality and National Gay and Lesbian Task Force*. Washington, DC: NCTE.
- Greytak, E. A., Kosciw, J. G., & Diaz, E. M. (2009). Harsh realities: The experiences of

- transgender youth in our nation's schools. *Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network*. New York, NY: GLSEN.
- Greytak, E.A., Kosciw, J.G., Villenas, C. & Giga, N.M. (2016). From teasing to torment: School climate revisited, a survey of U.S. secondary school students and teachers. *Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network*. New York, NY: GLSEN.
- Harris Interactive & GLSEN (2005). From teasing to torment: School climate in america, a survey of students and teachers. *Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network*. New York, NY: GLSEN.
- James, S. E., Herman, J. L., Rankin, S., Keisling, M., Mottet, L., & Anafi, M. (2016). The report of the 2015 U.S. transgender survey. *National Center for Transgender Equality*. Washington, DC: NCTE.
- Kilerman, S. (2016). *Comprehensive* list of LGBTQ+ vocabulary definitions*. Retrieved from itspronouncedmetrosexual.com
- Koch, T. (2006) Establishing rigour in qualitative research: The decision trail. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 53(1), 91–100.
- Kosciw, J. G., Greytak, E. A., Giga, N. M., Villenas, C. & Danischewski, D. J. (2016). The 2015 national school climate Survey: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer youth in our nation's schools. *Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network*. New York, NY: GLSEN.
- Kosciw, J. G., Greytak, E. A., Palmer, N. A., & Boesen, M. J. (2014). The 2013 National School Climate Survey: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth in our nation's schools. *Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network*. New York, NY: GLSEN.

- Kozinets, R. V. (2015). *Netnography: Redefined* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Lev, A. I. (2004). *Transgender emergence: Therapeutic guidelines for working with gender-variant people and their families*. Binghamton, NY: Haworth Clinical Practice Press.
- Lewis, J., Arnold, M., House, R., & Toporek, R. (2003). *Advocacy competencies [Electronic version]*. Retrieved from <http://www.counseling.org/Resources/Competencies/AdvocacyCompetencies.pdf>
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Lombardi, E. (2009). Varieties of transgender and transsexual lives and their relationship with transphobia. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 56(8), 977-992.
- Meerwijk, E L. & Sevelius, J. M. (2017). Transgender population size in the united states: A meta-recognition of population-based probability samples. *American Journal of Public Health*, 107(2), e1-8.
- Meyers, L. (2016). License to deny services. *Counseling Today: A Publication of the American Counseling Association*, 59(1), 25-31.
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *An expanded sourcebook: Qualitative data analysis* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Myers, J. E., & Sweeney, T. J. (2008). Wellness counseling: The evidence base for practice. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 86(4), 482-493. doi:10.1002/j.1556-6676.2000.tb01906.x

- O'Hara, C., Dispenza, F., Brack, G., Blood, R. (2013). The preparedness of counselors in training to work with transgender clients: A mixed methods investigation. *Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling*, 7(3), 236-256. doi:10.1080/15538605.2013.812929
- Pickering, D. L. (2005). Counselor self-efficacy with transgendered clients: Implications for training. *Dissertation Abstracts International*, DAI-A66/100, 3577.
- Porter, N. & Ipsa, J. M. (2013). Mothers' online message board questions about parenting infants and toddlers. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 69(3), 559–568. doi: 10.1111/j.1365-2648.2012.06030.x
- Ramsay, K., East, C., & Evans, A. (2015). Inclusivity of the transgender population in counselor education curriculum: Implications for educators. *ACA VISTAS*, 58.
- Russo, F. (2016). Debate is growing about how to meet the urgent needs of transgender kids. *Scientific American Mind*, January/February, 26-35.
- Saldaña, J. (2016). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Schwandt, T. A. (2007). *The SAGE dictionary of qualitative inquiry* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Singh, A. A., Boyd, C. J., & Whitman, J. S. (2010). Counseling competency with transgender and intersex individuals. In J. Cornish, B. Schreier, L. Nadkarni, L. Metzger, & E. Rodolfa (Eds.), *Handbook of multicultural competencies* (pp. 415–442). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.
- Singh, A. & Burnes, T. R. (2009). Creating developmentally appropriate, safe counseling environments for transgender youth: The critical role of school counselors. *Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling*, 3(3/4), 215–234. doi:10.1080/15538600903379457

- Sue, D. W., Arredondo, P., & McDavis, R. J. (1992). Multicultural counseling competencies and standards: A call to the profession. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 70*, 477–486.
- Tebbe, E. A., Moradi, B., & Ege, E. (2014). Revised and abbreviated forms of the genderism and transphobia scale: Tools for assessing anti-trans* prejudice. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 61*(4), 581-592.
- Tobin, J., Freedman-Gurspan, R., Mottet, L. (2015). A blueprint for equality: Federal agenda for transgender people. *National Center for Transgender Equality*. Washington, DC: NCTE.
- Trans Student Educational Resources. (2016). LGBTQ+ definitions. *Trans Student Educational Resources*. Retrieved from <http://www.transstudent.org/definitions>
- Travers, R., Bauer, G., Pyne, J., Bradley, K., Gale, L., & Papadimitriou, M. (2013). Impacts of strong parental support for trans youth. *Trans PULSE Project*. Retrieved from <http://transpulseproject.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/Impacts-of-Strong-Parental-Support-for-Trans-Youth-vFINAL.pdf>
- Vanderburgh, R. (2009). Appropriate therapeutic care for families with pre-pubescent transgender/gender-dissonant children. *Child & Adolescent Social Work Journal, 26*, 135-154.
- Walinsky, D. & Whitcomb, D. (2010). Using the *ACA competencies for counseling with transgender clients* to increase rural transgender well-being. *Journal for LGBT Issues in Counseling, 4*, 160-175. doi:10.1080/15538605.2010.524840
- White, C. H. & Goldberg, J. M. (2006). Social and medical transgender case advocacy. *International Journal of Transgenderism, 9*(3/4), 197-217.
- WMA Statement on Transgender People. (2015). WMA statement on transgender people. 66th *World Medical Association General Assembly*. Moscow, Russia.

World Professional Association for Transgender Health. (2011). Standards of care for the health of transsexual, transgender, and gender nonconforming people, 7th version. *World Professional Association for Transgender Health*. Retrieved from. www.wpath.org

Yin, R. K. (2016). *Qualitative research from start to finish* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: The Guilford Press.

APPENDIX A: OPERATIONAL VOCABULARY

Several terms will be used within the context of this paper for which the understanding of their meanings are pertinent to the reader's full comprehension of the issues, data and discussions that will follow. Presented below are the relevant operational vocabulary and their most current and widely accepted definitions. As an important caveat, the language and meanings that surround the current understanding of gender is constantly evolving as we learn more about the transgender population (Kilerman, 2016). As such, this set of definitions is not to be understood as the "true" or "accurate" definitions, but as the most commonly accepted definitions used within the mental health field at this time. For counselors, it is suggested to allow the client to provide their meaning and understanding of terms as they see best fitting for their own identity (ACA, 2010). In congruence with the competencies for working with transgender clients set forth by the American Counseling Association, counselors are also encouraged to use an affirmative language that mirrors the client's expressed identity, which includes the use of the client's preferred pronouns (he/him/his, she/her/hers, xe/hir/hirs, they/their/ theirs, etc.) (ALGBTIC, 2010; Singh & Burnes, 2009).

Cisgender/cis – *adj.*: A term for someone who exclusively identifies as their sex assigned at birth. The term cisgender is not indicative of gender expression, sexual orientation, hormonal makeup, physical anatomy, or how one is perceived in daily life (Kilerman, 2016; Trans Student Educational Resources [TSER], 2016).

Gender-Non Conforming (GNC) – *adj.*: A descriptor used to indicate a non-traditional gender expression (Kilerman, 2016). Or, an individual whose gender identity, role, and/or expression is different from what is considered normative for their assigned sex at birth (WPATH, 2011).

Gender Expression – *noun*: The external display of gender through social behaviors, clothing, hairstyle, voice, body shape, etc. (typically referred to as masculine or feminine). Many transgender people seek to make their gender expression (how they look) match their gender identity (who they are), rather than their sex assigned at birth. Someone with a gender nonconforming gender expression may or may not be transgender (Kilerman, 2016; TSER, 2016).

Gender Identity – *noun*: An individual's internal sense of being man, woman, male, female, neither of these, both, or other gender(s) and how they label themselves. For transgender people, their sex assigned at birth and their gender identity are not necessarily the same. Gender identity is often enacted in the use of chosen pronouns (i.e., he, she, him, her, ze, hir) (Kilerman, 2016; TSER, 2016)

Genderqueer – *adj.*: An identity label used by some individuals whose gender identity or role does not conform to the binary conception of gender (i.e. boy or girl) (WPATH, 2011; Brockting, 2008). Or can be used as an umbrella term to include gender non-conforming identities such as 'agender', 'bigender', or 'genderfluid' (Kilerman, 2016).

Transgender/Trans – *adj.*: Encompassing term of many gender identities of those who do not identify or exclusively identify with their sex assigned at birth. The term transgender is not indicative of gender expression, sexual orientation, hormonal makeup, physical anatomy, or how one is perceived in daily life (TSER, 2016).

APPENDIX B: RESEARCHER MEMBERSHIP APPROVAL

05/20/2016 4:13PM

Hi There!

I'm an admin for the Transgender and Genderqueer Teens group. We talk to most potential new members before we add them. Can you please let me know your reasons for joining the Transgender and Genderqueer Teens group? Thanks!

05/30/2016 6:12PM

You accepted Gend's request.

Hi Gend - I apologize greatly for my very slow response! It has been a whirlwind with a new summer semester beginning up! Thank you so much for messaging me. This message is a little long so I'm hopeful you don't give up reading after the next line haha

I want to start with being completely transparent - I am not a transgender or genderqueer teen. I am a third year counseling doctoral student (cisgender) and my area of focus is with transgender clients, primarily the younger kids and teenagers. I am doing my dissertation on the experiences (all experiences - good, bad, supported, unsupported) of transgender youth. I am hopeful to begin a better conversation among counselors and mental health therapists so that our profession can provide the best and most supportive services to all youth including those we often overlook - the transgender and genderqueer youth.

All of that said, I know that this group is private for a reason and I don't wish to intrude or make anyone feel violated. If you are interested, I have an official statement that I can send you with all information regarding confidentiality. Absolutely NO names or identifying information would ever be used. And I would never interact with the group members as to not invalidate their experiences.

How I wish to use your group: I'd like to "gather" data by looking at the posts and simply taking note of what happens the most often within a certain time frame (a few months). Again, I will not use any identifying information used including names, school names, cities, etc. I'm only interested in general experiences.

NOTE. "Gend" is a pseudonym, short for 'gender', used to describe the group itself and is not connected to the identity of any specific individual.

Sure okay I'll approve you. Some of the kids personally message me sometimes so I guess if there's any data you want to know about, I could let you know when they occurred. I totally understand by the way... I used to be a psychology student until I jumped into film.

(This account's actually the group account to message new members. You'll notice which moderator is actually me once you join

Let me know if you have any questions too.

APPENDIX C: IRB FORM

Office of Human Subject Research
844-5966 115 Ramsay Hall (basement)
844-4391
Auburn University, AL 36849



Telephone: 334-
Fax: 334-

IRBadmin@auburn.edu
IRBsubmit@auburn.edu

May 09, 2017

MEMORANDUM TO: Ms. Courtney East
College of Education

PROTOCOL TITLE: “Transgender Youth and Adolescent Population: An Ethnographic Content
Analysis of Posts on Social Media”

IRB FILE NUMBER: 17-186

Thank you for submitting your request to the Institutional Review Board for review. According to your description of this project and your peripheral involvement, the IRB has determined that your activities as described **do not** require Auburn University IRB oversight.

If there are any changes made which would constitute human subjects research requiring AU IRB oversight, or if there are any events adverse or otherwise which concern the investigator(s), we encourage you to contact this office for further consultation.

We wish you success in your endeavors and look forward to working with you in your future research activities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Bernie Olin, PhD', written in a cursive style.

Dr. Bernie Olin, Phar.D.
Chair of the Institutional Review
Board #2 for the Use of Human
Subjects in Research

APPENDIX D: CODEBOOK

Thematic Category	Subcategory	Description	Example Posting
Seeking	Connection	Member addresses wanting to connect with peers. This can be by asking others to “add” them on other forms of social media, seeking out common interests, asking to talk, explicitly asking for friendship, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • im MTF and trying to make friends! • Hey, I'm so bored right now so if your looking for a great conversation inbox me ☹️☹️ • Does anyone have any trans representation tattoos? This is mine [photo of trans tattoo on hand] • Add me on wattpad xoxo Poetry based content
	Opinion	Member is seeking out opinions, advice, or tips from peers on a personal situation or issue. This is separate from seeking out concrete resources.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tips on passing as androgynous? • Do I pass? Be honest [pic of self] • has anyone ever binded with kt tape? My mom says she will get me some this weekend and ive never used it. Any pros and cons • Does very short hair look bad on me? [pics of self] • Guys, I need some advice... Should I come out as trans to my mom?? And if so how should I do so?? • Please input! I feel like having [name] as a full name doesn't feel right. What's a better suited name for me? (I'm an Asian trans male who likes macabre things, if that helps at all!) Thanks ☹️!
	Support	Member is seeking out support or validation from peers. These posts have a more emotional undertone than those seeking opinion or advice. These posts beg the need for social validation of their feelings or experiences in a way that warrants ‘does anyone relate to me?’	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Somebody please remind me why this life is worth living. • Anybody else find it incredibly crippling and disheartening when your family doesn't try to call you by your preferred name or use your preferred pronouns? I do 😞 • What do you do when from the moment you wake up till the moment you go to bed all you can

			think about is if any of this is even worth it? I sleep. I sleep 90% of the day and I'm up all night thinking, I wish I could stop. Any suggestions on how to be positive when surrounded by negativity? Because I'm at a loss.
	Resources	Members are seeking out concrete resources as opposed to opinions or validation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As a trans person who cannot get on T, is there any advice someone can give me as in what I can take until I can transition, like vitamins, over the counter products, any exercise that would help me become more masculine looking? • Does anyone have a certain song that helps them with dysphoria, slurs, conflicting religious views, etc? I listen to Amen by Halestorm to help
Providing	Connection [personal]	Member is providing a direct personal connection to peers. They are inviting other members to join them in engaging in some form of connecting activity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • So, I'm just wondering do anyone want to be apart of my little group on Instagram. It's for role models for the black transgender community. • Follow me @[handle] on ig for spiritual quotes and I hope they can help
	Support	Posting that is aimed primarily at providing a supportive, validating, affirmative, or otherwise uplifting and positive message to fellow members.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hi all you beautiful creatures hope you are all having a fantastic weekend • With all the depressing stuff going on I feel like you guys could use a flapjack octopus to feel better. [photo of octopus] • [graphic that reads "be proud of who you are"] • To all of my siblings, happy Transgender day of visibility. I'm proud of you all for being honest with yourself and those around you
	Resources [additional or outside resource]	Member is providing a concrete resource for other members. This is something that the	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pride for Youth is proud to announce that our #TransAction program is expanding! Starting January 1, 2017 TransAction is

		members an either use or attend (i.e. advocacy event, support group, website, news article, blog, video)	<p>now open to <u>#Trans</u> & <u>#GenderNonConforming</u> identified individuals ages 15-30. For more information or to get linked to our <u>#TGNC</u> focused programming contact X via private message or XXX-XXXX</p> <p><u>#Transgender</u> <u>#NonBinary</u> <u>#Thisiswhattranslookslike</u> <u>#TransSupport</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I guess this is a bit late, but for anyone still choosing colleges, I'd recommend this site. They tell you if they have easy HRT access, if HRT and Surgeries are covered under the insurance, discrimination coverage, and a lot more. [link to pride index top 10 colleges] • If any of you are genderfluid and want a safe space, check out the genderfluid teens closed facebook group.
Sharing	Positive	Posting that shares a personal experience, thought, or insight that is positive (e.g. happy, exciting, validating, etc.) in nature.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My god!! 18 months of fighting and I am finally here!! 2nd puberty here I come!!! I am so relieved and happy!! [pic of estrogen rx] • Got a haircut I really like it [photo of self] • On a brighter note I came out to my sister and she is fully accepting and is now proudly calling me her brother. • Transgender pianist???? Totally bruh. Music is my life. [video of self playing piano]
	Negative	Posting that shares a personal experience, thought, or insight that is negative in nature.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It's pretty much impossible for me to gain the courage to walk into the men's bathroom when there are other people around and it's low-key destroying me • I want to be a girl so so so bad but I honestly will never be able to afford it ☹️

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My dad called me disgusting for wearing a trans pride shirt
	General	Posting that shares a personal opinion, experience, thought, or insight that is either a general statement or indicates a neutral tone.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • So apparently "nibbling" is a gender neutral term for niece and nephew. • Makeup is fun [photo of self in drag makeup] • How is everyone doing and what have you been up too this is what I've been doing lol haven't posted in forever [2 photos of drawings/paintings of mermaids]

APPENDIX E: CODING INDEX

	Color Legend: Purple: March Post; Pink: February Post; Blue: January Post			
Post #	Original Posting	Thematic Category	Sub-category	Supporting Process Codes
2	Hello everyone, I've got an idea to make a social network with focus on LGBTQ+, and cultures that's not always accepted by society. With focus on finding friends, and communication. I was just thinking if there's anyone in here that can code like I can?	Seeking	Connection	Connecting through similar culture Add me/Social Media Connection Common Interests
196	So, I'm just wondering do anyone want to be apart of my little group on Instagram. It's for role models for the black transgender community.	Seeking	Connection	Connecting through similar culture Add me/Social Media Connection
3	any guys here with long hair? like really long hair :p or growing out their hair?	Seeking	Connection	Common Interests
6	anyone play acnl??	Seeking	Connection	Common Interests
15	Hey every one . Thanks for the add , I'm mtf and lookong for friends add or pm me .	Seeking	Connection	Looking for friends Add me/Social Media Connection
240	Add me on wattpad xoxo Poetry based content	Seeking	Connection	Add me/Social Media Connection
244	Hi, I'm 17 I'm from Florida. Im FTM and hope to start hormones soon. I prefer to be called male pronouns such as he/him. Please call me [name]. Whichever you'd like. I don't know how to come out to my friends because I am very shy. But once you get to know me I am super funny. Don't be afraid to message me!	Seeking	Connection	personality description Talk to me transition description
245	16 year old transgender boy I'm shy but like making friends I'm not out yet but please use him/he pronouns i may live as a girl still but call me a girl i will get really upset i also love anime	Seeking	Connection	personality description Common Interests
34	im MTF and trying to make friends!	Seeking	Connection	Looking for friends
44	Hi!, 17. MTF looking for friends!	Seeking	Connection	Looking for friends
47	i'm a 19y/o trans girl living in and trying to get out of texas i like meeting and talking to new people and love talking about music thanks for having me here	Seeking	Connection	Common Interests
62	I am so happy to be here. Hope to meet lots of new friends	Seeking	Connection	Emotion Looking for friends
73	I can't sleep and kinda just want someone to talk to? I use they/them pronouns	Seeking	Connection	Talk to me
74	Anyone want to talk..?	Seeking	Connection	Talk to me
99	Hey, I'm so bored right now so if your looking for a great conversation inbox me☺☺	Seeking	Connection	Talk to me Emotion
108	Good Morning! My name is [deleted] I am an up-and-coming transmodel an activist for LGBT rights and equality as well as an aspiring musician. Please like and follow me on(Facebook	Seeking	Connection	Add me/Social Media Connection Common Interests



	👍 Instagram 👍 and stay tuned for the really awesome projects coming up including my documentary at HBO and Netflix have a great Saturday.. Xoxo [photo of self]			
126	I'm very nervous to post here because everyone else is so cool.Hi, I'm [name]. I'm a trans girl, I'm 16 and haven't done any HRT. I make jokes and play lots of video games. I also like to be nice to people.	Seeking	Connection	Emotion Common Interests transition description
137	Heyo, I realized that I never made an introductory post, so I'm going to take care of that now and not procrastinate that any more no matter how tempting that may be. I'm [name], and I use xe/xem/xyr or ze/hir/hir pronouns. I identify as alexigender and aquarigender, and queer (af). I have rather eclectic interests, so if you wanna talk to me, please feel free. I like music (all kinds of music...literally, everything), theatre, books, learning foreign languages, Tumblr...all that good stuff. Thanks for reading, peeps.	Seeking	Connection	Relating to others: self-expression
143	How are y'all doing? [photo of self]	Seeking	Connection	Reaching out
147	ck, Hi there! My name is [name], I still mostly closeted but making lots of progress in a short amount of time. I use she/her pronouns. I use a lot of humor in my conversation and posts and always seem to end up debating with someone over something. I am very outspoken about my beliefs and am prepared to back them up by citing sources and bible verses(works for them religious types). I also talk a LOT, and will prob clog any group chat I am in. I joined this group because I love to give/get support to/from other people, and learn more along the way. Also, the group was recommended to me because a friend of mine is in it. Thanks for reading TL;DR Joined the group, name is [name], i use She/her pronouns and i am talkative and outspoken	Seeking	Connection	transition description Common Interests personality description Reaching out
148	Anyone want to talk...	Seeking	Connection	Talk to me
155	Looking for some new buds	Seeking	Connection	Looking for friends
156	Hey I am new. I am a 18 year old non binary trans guy. I am about to turn 19 on the 24 of this month. I am lithosexual and pan romantic. Thank you so much for approving me. I am happy to be here 😊	Seeking	Connection	Reaching out emotion
157	Hello! I'm [name], and I'm new to this group. I'm 17 (soon to be 18), and currently pre-everything. I've been out for about a year, and once I turn 18 I'll get to legally change my name. I'm an aro-ace nonbinary trans fellow, and I'd love to make some new friends.	Seeking	Connection	transition description Looking for friends
232	Does anyone wanna talk? Bored and a little dysphoric.	Seeking	Connection	Talk to me emotion Dysphoric

237	Anyone wanna snapchat? I'm embarrassed by my name but I'll message you my snap name if you want it!	Seeking	Connection	Add me/Social Media Connection
162	Anyone up and willing to talk.	Seeking	Connection	Talk to me
179	Texas people add me I wanna make friends	Seeking	Connection	Looking for friends Add me/Social Media Connection
192	Hello! Thank you for accepting me, I'll definitely be participating in the group. There's not much to say, I'm a trans guy and I go by he/they pronouns. Hopefully will get a therapist soon to go on T and later get top surgery. Nice to meet you all!	Seeking	Connection	Reaching out transition description
203	Does anyone want to talk?	Seeking	Connection	Talk to me
205	Anyone want to chat..? I'm bored and a little dysphoric heh..	Seeking	Connection	Talk to me bored Dysphoric
208	I don't think I ever introduced myself so..Hey I'm X I'm FtM transgender and I'm an artist. I'm excited to make friends..so feel free to add me and chat. 😊	Seeking	Connection	Looking for friends Add me/Social Media Connection Happy Common Interests
209	Hello all! I'm new to the group so I guess this is my little introduction post. I'm genderqueer and an artist, and I'm excited to make friends and get to know this community C:	Seeking	Connection	Common Interests Emotion Looking for friends
216	Does anyone have any trans representation tattoos? This is mine [photo of trans tattoo on hand]	Seeking	Connection	Common Interests
217	m 15 and on my long adventure of becoming a woman i would love to talk to you guys and girls as part of the lgbt community it makes me feel accepted when im friends with people undergoing transitions or even just allies in general but if you took the time to read this dont be afraid to say hi im very friendly	Seeking	Connection	Talk to me Connecting through culture
214	I have a legit question, if your dating someone who is gender fluid do you call them your girlfriend or boyfriend, or does it depend on the day or whatever??	Seeking	Opinion	Relationships
5	K I need some ideas in looking for some short hairstyles....not to short tho...I have come up with these so far but they will cause a lot of work every day....I am looking for an Emo,scene punk hairstyle....can u give me some advise maybe some that look awesome but aren't to much of a hassle and some comments on the ones on this post, thanks. [pics of short hair examples]	Seeking	Opinion	Hairstyle
18	Do I pass? Be honest [pic of self]	Seeking	Opinion	'Do I pass'
21	Do I pass as a boy? If so how much do I pass ? [pic of self]	Seeking	Opinion	'Do I pass'
23	Everybody seems to be asking if they pass (and they all do 100%) so I wanna know if I do. [pic of self]	Seeking	Opinion	'Do I pass'

36	what name do you guys think would fit me best? (just curious. i love the name [name] and am more than likely going to stick with it) ftm	Seeking	Opinion	New Name
37	Do I pass as a female? [pic of self]	Seeking	Opinion	'Do I pass'
63	Someone message me, I wanna know what photo I pass most in, out of 2	Seeking	Opinion	'Do I pass'
78	ATTENTION MY FTM BROS has anyone ever binded with kt tape? My mom says she will get me some this weekend and ive never used it. Any pros and cons	Seeking	Opinion	Clothing
241	how well do I pass Im 15 he/him [photo of self]	Seeking	Opinion	'Do I pass'
109	Hey guys any opinions between my old and new hair? Ik they look kinda the same but one spunk and purple the others blue and red [photo of self]	Seeking	Opinion	Hairstyle
114	What would you name me? (Gender neutral names please) (I know I look feminine just go with it) (ft weird hand) [photo of self]	Seeking	Opinion	New Name
96	What name should I put on my Facebook. I am thinking of a babe that can go both genders. Out a mass name... Hello me out here. [3 photos of self]	Seeking	Opinion	New Name
134	Please input! I feel like having [name] as a full name doesn't feel right. What's a better suited name for me? (I'm an Asian trans male who likes macabre things, if that helps at all!) Thanks ☹!	Seeking	Opinion	New Name
141	ew wig, what do y'all think? [photo of self]	Seeking	Opinion	Hairstyle
236	Thinking about putting extensions in tomorrow. What colors do you guys think would look good? My natural hair is a medium aburn.	Seeking	Opinion	Hairstyle
176	Does very short hair look bad on me? [pics of self]	Seeking	Opinion	Hairstyle
221	Tips on passing as androgynous?	Seeking	Tips	Passing, Physical Appearance
224	i have a serious question, i havent saved my arm pits for 9months and theres literally no hair there, same for my legs (havent shaved my legs for a year) im a natural blonde and im pre-t. but my hairs is black just not thick, i see all these guys pre-t with a full armpit of hair, someone please tell me what im doing wrong.	Seeking	Tips	Passing, Physical Appearance
201	This is kinda a personal experiment, from my own curiosity. Please comment and tell me about things that you didn't expect while transitioning, and things that took you by surprise. Be it good or bad things, social or medical transition.	Seeking	Tips	coming out
194	Hello 🙄:3 My names [name] and thanks for the group accept. I want to go through ftm but my parents don't want it and also that I lied to them saying that I would never bring up the fact I wanna be transgender and to forget about it. It kills me more lying to them but they get pissed if I bring it up. Any help?	Seeking	Tips	coming out
175	Guys, I need some advice... Should I come out as trans to my mom?? And if so how should I do so??	Seeking	Tips	coming out

150	Hello, been feeling very dysphoric lately and I want people to start using guy pronouns but I feel awkward when I bring it up to anyone because I think they will judge me, any advice.	Seeking	Tips	implementing new name/pronouns
101	K this is a stupid question...my moms liberal and knows I'm pan....but she doesn't know I'm gender queer....how can I tell her? I'm honestly more scared about this then when I came out as pan....cus I guess gender is more hated on now then sexuality [2 photos of self]	Seeking	Tips	coming out Emotional Descriptor
118	im kinda spooked. so my mom just bought me some binder without measuring me or anything or reading reviews on amazon and argued that it's cheaper and would come faster that way...but I just wanted one where I know I was getting the right thing. I want to stay safe because of the health problems I already have. im just really paranoid that if I put it on, the measurement will be wrong or something and I'll injure myself since I'm not really experienced with this yet. my chest area is sort of fragile and I wanted to be as safe as possible since it could easily go wrong. does anyone have advice on what I should do? I really want to bind, but I don't want to hurt myself right away and I feel like i might just end up avoiding it out of fear. I'm sorry if I sound kind of stupid with this, but everything's still new to me.	Seeking	Tips	Passing, Physical Appearance Emotional Descriptor
121	I have a question for you guys. I work at a Christian based nursing home. Should I stay closeted or come out at work? (I have worked here 3 months under my birth name)	Seeking	Tips	coming out
124	Anyone with medi-cal or more specifically Health plan of san joaquin: have you ever had your insurance cut off with no warning in the middle of the month? I had my insurance until two days ago when I scheduled my first appointment with my gender therapist and he called my insurance to confirm. After he called, my insurance was cut off, and I cant reach anyone to help me. My case manager from HPSJ just called to pretty much tell me I'm on my own until I get this straightened out and I don't know what to do. I was set to go on hormones in two weeks, but now thats been put on an indefinite pause until I get this figured out, and it's making me panic like a lot.	Seeking	Tips	Health/Medical Emotional Descriptor
71	How hard would it be to get HRT after I move in with my mom and start my transition I am in the us by the way	Seeking	Tips	Heath/Medical
72	Does anyone have any tips from picking up an order of dresses? (would be going in male, im MtF, but just dont have what i need to go in as female),	Seeking	Tips	Passing, Physical Appearance
53	Hey people's, I've been wondering what you would say to people that don't understand you being trans. Sense I'm still in middle School people don't understand anything about being trans and genders. People tell me they won't call me [name] in till I am	Seeking	Tips	implementing new name/pronouns

	really a guy after I have surgery. No one will respect me about how I say that im a bisexual guy that is more on the gay side or about how I want to be called a guy. I feel no one understands. What do you guys say when stuff like that comes up			
111	How to come out as non binary agender and that people stop to use my birth name?	Seeking	Tips	coming out
42	Okay, so im having a bit of an issue right now. I feel like the current name I've chosen doesn't feel masculine enough for me. But I've already changed my name multiple times. From my birth name, to x, to x, and then to x. (I actually really liked the name x but got talked out of going by it for long because 'it didn't fit me' but I may consider going by it again.) My mother doesn't like the name x, and she thinks I should change it to something more fitting. (Don't get me wrong, I like x a lot but some days it just doesn't feel like me.) Anyways, im afraid of trying to change my name to something I see more fitting because I feel like people won't take me seriously. People already don't believe that I am trans* because of how frequently I have changed my name, gender, and pronouns. Im also worried about being a bother to other people. People are now just getting used to calling me x and that's what my parents know me as (Though they don't call me it.) Im afraid that if I try to change it, it will cause too many issues. So im compelled to stick with x and just deal with it on days where it doesn't feel right. Any advice on what I should do? Anything helps. Have any of you ever dealt with something like this? Thanks so much for listening and sorry about my rambling.	Seeking	Tips	implementing new name/pronouns Emotional Descriptor
246	im thinking of coming out of ftm soon but im really scared does anyone have any tips for me	Seeking	Tips	coming out Emotional Descriptor
229	Hi I'm just starting my transition ftm. I came out to my parents first but it didn't go well, they where shocked. I'm 13 years old and live in Vancouver WA. I came out to my friends. I would like to be called he/him pronouns and I thinking I want my name to be X. I don't know how to change things at school and I guess I'm very lost. Feel free to message me if you can help.	Seeking	Tips	coming out Emotional Descriptor Implementing new pronouns
50	Anyone who has started T could you please be kind enough to mail me ?	Seeking	Tips	Health/medical
116	So I've been becoming more paranoid and anxious the past month and my mood has been more fluctuating than the tide at sea and it's extremely easy to set me off. The biggest concern I have is that I've been getting vivid hallucinations and nightmares. I was supposed to see my psychiatrist about it and my psychologist is aware of everything but she doesn't really understand why I'm like this either. Does anyone go through something similar and have information as to why I've been like this? I'm not seeing my psychiatrist until a month and it's	Seeking	Tips	Health/medical Emotional Descriptor

	started to get increasingly worse -. I'm really worried..			
226	I feel so lost, I have come out to my parents but how do I tell them I want to be called a guy, feel free to message me. and I thought I looked awesome in this so I'm sharing it [photo of self]	Seeking	Tips	Emotional Descriptor coming out
77	Hey, everybody. Just thought I'd share my feelings for the day. Typically, I have no issues with using the men's room or anything like that. But today, we are camping at a KOA site and my mom had me use the men's shower room. Glad she's being supportive, but I felt extremely vulnerable using it. I asked her if I could just use the private one we have in the camper and she told me no and to "man up." It's conflicting. Anyone else have similar situations?	Seeking	Support	Neg. Emotional Descriptor 'Does Anyone Relate' Living authentically
85	Can I get some thoughts on the term trans* as opposed to trans? It makes me cringe a little. Trans* is meant to suggest including non binary people as well, but as a non binary person, I've always considered myself just trans anyway. The trans vs trans* argument goes back to the good old "non binary people aren't trans enough" piece of phobia. Does anyone else feel the same?	Seeking	Support	'Does Anyone Relate' Living authentically
19	Does anybody else just feel like your dying on the inside when you see guys shirtless and fit on the beach with a girl because you wish you we're them.. 	Seeking	Support	'Does Anyone Relate' Dealing with dysphoria
24	Im having a very dsyphoric day already. Any tips on how to push through it?	Seeking	Support	Dealing with dysphoria
79	Anybody else find it incredibly crippling and disheartening when your family doesn't try to call you by your preferred name or use your preferred pronouns? I do 	Seeking	Support	'Does Anyone Relate' Unsupportive family Living authentically
97	1) I know it's not safe to bind with an ace bandage but it was only for this photo and 2) I absolutely hate my chest do you? [photo of self wearing binder with text over reading 'I hate my chest']	Seeking	Support	'Does Anyone Relate' Dealing with dysphoria
123	I don't know how to feel about this. My parents know that I am a boy, yet my mum just uploaded her profile picture to an old photo of me, my dad, and my sister, when I looked like a girl still. I think it was purposely because of the talk we were having earlier today about me.. I really pissed me off when I saw it and now I'm really dysphoric.. How would you react?	Seeking	Support	Unsupportive family Dealing with dysphoria Living authentically
145	Somebody please remind me why this life is worth living.	Seeking	Support	Suicidal ideation
158	does anyone know the best time of day to run away and not have anyone see you I can't take it now more I can't be the boy I really am unless I run away so please help me out if I stay much longer I'll end up killing myself because I've had enough I can't take	Seeking	Support	Suicidal ideation

	anymore [*posts with hotlines and referral sources were provided by group members]			
239	remind me not to go back to that life, but rather live it now to the fullest [photo of before/after]	Seeking	Support	Living authentically
161	I have had a kind of deflating few days. More specifically, today I was reprimanded by two different teachers for trying to explain non binary genders. A lot of people I thought already knew that I'm non binary apparently didn't and it sounds silly but I'm not used to being called so many slurs at once. My identity normally gives me strength but now I'm finding it's dragging me, so I need some trans positivity. If anyone has had any real positive experiences gender-wise recently or ever, could you comment them here? I really love this group. Thank you all.	Seeking	Support	Neg. Emotional Descriptor Unsupportive teachers Living authentically
180	What do you do when from the moment you wake up till the moment you go to bed all you can think about is if any of this is even worth it? I sleep. I sleep 90% of the day and I'm up all night thinking, I wish I could stop. Any suggestions on how to be positive when surrounded by negativity? Because I'm at a loss.	Seeking	Support	Living authentically
190	I have a question. How did you find out you are not cisgender? Cause I'm still not sure what I am, even though I've felt like this since I was 7. I didn't even know that there are such terms as 'genderqueer', 'genderfluid', 'non-binary' etc, before last November. I told my few internet friends and my psychotherapist that I feel like I'm androgynous. I'm always so afraid of the response, since I look like a girl, and at the moment, can do nothing about it. At holidays I told my crush I like him, and he told me he's not into girls. That just hurt too much - not because my feelings are not returned, but because he called me a girl, he put me into this category as 'girl'. And I laid in bed for days, feeling like I'm a boy, the feeling I have tried to fight so much against. :/ At the moment I feel like this again. At the moment I feel like a boy, and the other day, I'll feel like a girl again. Ps. If you feel like it, feel free to write me a whole story of your life. I'll read it. Cause seriously, I want to know, and this is the only place I can seek answers from.	Seeking	Support	Neg. Emotional Descriptor Living authentically
127	Someone please remind me why life's worth living....	Seeking	Support	Suicidal ideation
215	Hey I was just wondering what crazy comments have you gotten when telling someone your trans? For example someone asked me did I have both parts even tho they didn't know the proper term for that which is being intersex which I'm not .	Seeking	Support	'Does Anyone Relate'

17	Hey I was wondering is it wrong of me to get offended when my therapist said she should go on T to stop her menstrual cycle as a joke ?	Seeking	Support	Neg. Emotional Descriptor 'Does Anyone Relate'
70	As a person who identifies as genderqueer, I feel this unnecessary pressure to be more "neutral" and less feminine because I am afab. Does anyone else feel like being too masculine or too feminine (especially when they're biologically the sex associated with that trait) invalidates them to the people around them?	Seeking	Support	'Does Anyone Relate' Living authentically
144	advice advice??? next weekend, i have an Event where I will be performing onstage with my a cappella group, and I have to dress Nicely for the Event. I would also really like to pass during the performance, but I don't own much in the way of mens' dress clothing and I don't have much extra money either so shortways, WHERE and HOW am i to purchase cheap dress clothes, and also, <u>please just give me validation</u> , im already anxious just to go to the store, thank you	Seeking	Support	Neg. Emotional Descriptor Living authentically
178	As a trans person who cannot get on T, is there any advice someone can give me as in what I can take until I can transition, like vitamins, over the counter products, any exercise that would help me become more masculine looking?	Seeking	Resources	Medical
160	Does anyone have a certain song that helps them with dysphoria, slurs, conflicting religious views, etc? I listen to Amen by Halestorm to help	Seeking	Resources	Therapeutic Music
165	Does anyone know where I can buy cheap hormone supplements that work just as well as hormones you get from the doctor?	Seeking	Resources	Medical
186	Have any MTF people gotten bottom surgery in another country? Does your insurance cover any of it? Most doctors in the US do inversion still and I don't like that method	Seeking	Resources	Medical
91	Hey folks! I'd love some writing help! I'm writing a script for a short film. It's based on the struggles a trans youth may experience when coming home from university to a not-so-accepting family. I want to make it authentic and fair to other trans youth and I understand that in order to do that I need to do my own research. like, what sort of anxieties/thoughts do you experience visiting unaccepting family? Or, how are some ways friends/family have made the trip back home more or less bearable? Any feedback and ideas would be greatly appreciated, and if you contribute i'll reference you in the credits!~	Seeking	Resources	school project
238	Hey so in school I'm doing a project on how being transgender affects (please someone tell me if that's the right one) family relationships and I have to do a	Seeking	Resources	School project

	survey so can you please fill this in for me thank youuuu [link to survey]			
--	---	--	--	--