The Experience of Being Gender Nonbinary: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

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The Experience of Being Gender Nonbinary:
An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

by

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The Experience of Being Gender Nonbinary: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
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ABSTRACT

The call for research on the growing population of persons who identify as gender nonbinary includes the need for in-depth explorations of lived experience, especially among Persons of Color. This study focuses on four individuals, 27 to 32 years of age, who identify as gender nonbinary as well as Hispanic/Latinx and reside in the unique minority-majority, conservative/progressive state of New Mexico. Interpretative phenomenological analysis, with its idiographic approach, was used to gather data through interviews and present the findings in both descriptive and interpreted terms. Results focus on three themes: realization required a unique journey, allowances are made for mothers regarding acceptance, and being out or not out is not a simple question. The surprisingly diverse data from the small number of participants is a critical finding in itself. Results are offered to guide mental health professionals as well as to inform a broader discussion of gender in America.

Keywords: gender nonbinary, genderqueer, genderfluid, gender diverse, Hispanic, Latinx, Persons of Color, New Mexico, interpretative phenomenological analysis
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Within this dissertation, I report on a study using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) to increase knowledge about persons who identify as gender nonbinary. The participants also identified as Hispanic/Latinx, resided in New Mexico, and fell within the age range of 27 to 32. This introductory chapter begins by clarifying selected terms as used within the dissertation. Following that is the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, and the research question. Finally, the rationale and significance are stated as supported by selected pieces from the review of literature.

Terminology

Within this proposal, gender nonbinary is the term I use for persons who do not identify with the gender binary or at least not in the traditional male-female manner. At the time of this writing, it appears to be the most widely used term in the literature and among participants in surveys and other studies. It is not, however, the only term in use. Genderqueer seems to be the next most used term. Some academic writers differentiate between gender nonbinary and genderqueer; others use the terms interchangeably. Additional related terms include genderfluid and gender nonconforming.

Both gender nonbinary and genderqueer are usually used as umbrella terms. According to Thorne et al. (2019b), gender diverse is gaining in use as an umbrella term. An advantage is that it does not rely on binary—either the word or the concept. In my discussion of studies included in the review of literature, I maintain the terminology of the articles rather than imposing my chosen term. I try to make clear where I do so. Likewise, all participants endorsed the term gender nonbinary. When they stated using additional terms, I have reported those.
Other terms used in the proposal that may not be familiar to all readers or whose use may not match other writers’ include *transgender* and *trans*. I use *transgender* as an umbrella term for those whose gender identity does not match the gender assigned at birth. I use *transgender* and *trans* interchangeably. Those under the umbrella who identify within the binary (*trans men* and *trans women*) are referred to as *trans binary* persons, as contrasted with *trans nonbinary*. Some article authors use *transgender* to mean trans binary only; they do not regard nonbinary persons as transgender. Related terms are *transprejudice* and *transnormative*; *transprejudice* referring to prejudice directed toward any transgender person and *transnormative* to a concept that trans binary is or should be the norm as opposed to trans nonbinary. Some participants discussed their own use of the term *trans* as reported in Chapter 4.

*Cisgender*, a term for those persons whose gender identity aligns with their gender assigned at birth, has reached wide use. The term appears in multiple online and print dictionaries. It is often shortened to *cis* in common usage. Within this proposal, *cisnormative* references the view that cisgender is the normative and superior state of being.

Other terms that may be of less-than-common usage are defined as they appear. Matsuno and Budge (2017) wrote of the continuing change in terms regarding gender nonbinary persons. They recommended Internet searches to remain up to date. A fuller treatment of language and terminology is provided in Chapter 2 including commonly used definitions.

**Statement of the Problem**

Persons identifying as gender nonbinary are a small but growing population
Estimates of the number vary. Byne et al. (2018) reported .6% of the U.S. population may be transgender based on CDC statistics. The proportion of transgender persons who identify as nonbinary ranged from 33% to 52% (Monro, 2019; James et al., 2016). All of these numbers are affected by differences in definitions and openness of respondents. Of those who identify as nonbinary, the largest proportion seems to be under 30 (Monro, 2019; Yeadon-Lee, 2016).

Some of the challenges faced by gender nonbinary persons are discussed in detail in Chapter 2. Minority stress, stigma, and social exclusion are common experiences (e.g., Mizock & Hopwood, 2018; Monro, 2018; Todd et al., 2019; Matsuno & Budge, 2017) as are discrimination, misunderstanding by the general public, self-concealment due to anticipated rejection, a sense of invisibility, and microaggressions such as wrong gender pronoun use often referred to as misgendering (Lefevor, Boyd-Rogers, Sprague, & Janis, 2019; Jackman, Edgar, Ling, Honig, & Bockting, 2018; Monro, 2019; Conlin et al., 2019; Matsuno & Budge, 2017; Galupo, Henise, & Davis, 2014). Brassel and Anderson (2019) described the pervasiveness of transprejudice—discrimination toward both trans binary and nonbinary. Trans nonbinary persons face transnormativity or the concept that there is only one way in which to be trans, which is to adhere to gender binary by transitioning physically (Nicolazzo, 2016).

U.S. governmental policy has failed to benefit trans persons (Byne et al., 2018; van Anders et al., 2017). Two reviewed studies looked at issues related to legal protections. Holt, Hope, Mocarski, and Woodruff (2019b) examined how protections are reflected in mental health providers’ websites. Tebbe, Allan, and Bell (2019) looked at vocational and emotional well-being as affected by the perception by employees of legal
or organizational protections. Trans people’s employment and financial status are often strongly affected by prejudice and discrimination. The effects include career underdevelopment, underemployment, low income, unemployment, poverty, and even homelessness (Tebbe et al., 2019; Mizock & Hopwood, 2018). Financial issues often limit access to health care as well (Holt et al., 2019b).

Mental and physical health are understandably compromised due to such challenges. Multiple studies reviewed in Chapter 2 reported gender nonbinary individuals as showing a higher incidence of depression, anxiety, self-harm, suicidal ideation, and overall psychological distress than trans binary (e.g., Lefevor et al., 2019; Thorne et al., 2019a; Warren, Smalley, and Barefoot, 2016). Todd et al. (2019) wrote that both binary and nonbinary trans persons engage in higher levels of health risk behaviors than the general population. Nonbinary trans individuals do not access health care services as frequently as even binary trans persons (Clark, Veale, Townsend, Frohard-Dourlent, & Saewyc, 2018; Jones, Bouman, Haycraft, and Arcelus, 2019b). While there were seeming contradictions between findings of the various studies, almost universally cisgender persons scored greater well-being than trans binary or nonbinary.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to increase awareness of and knowledge about gender nonbinary persons. Specifically, individuals who also identified as Hispanic/Latinx, fell within the age range of 22 to 32, and resided in New Mexico. New Mexico is a state of unique features such as multiple cultures, minority-majority population ethnically, and high poverty levels. My primary goal was to examine the ways in which my participants reported their gender experience.
As this research relates to my studies in counselor education, my hope is for the knowledge gained through to be disseminated so as to inform mental health professionals in their work with gender nonbinary clients. As part of my IPA approach, this dissertation includes transparency regarding my procedures through use of extensive verbatim data extracts that support my interpretative findings (Smith & Osborn, 2008; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009; Smith, 2011a). It will be for the reader to then determine the validity of the study and discern the applicability of my findings to their situations or to the specific clients with whom they are working (Smith et al., 2009; Smith, 2011a).

In a broader sense, I hope that the knowledge gained through this study and reported in this dissertation will contribute to the societal-wide conversation about gender including the pressure placed on all persons to conform to hegemonic expectations—with their awareness or without—from childhood through adulthood. A better understanding of how gender nonbinary persons make sense of their experience may shed light on the experience of gender for the general population.

**Research Question**

How do persons who identify as gender nonbinary understand, interpret, or make sense of their experience? More specifically, persons who identify as gender nonbinary as well as Hispanic/Latinx, reside in Albuquerque, New Mexico, metropolitan area, and fall within the ages of 22 to 32.

**Rationale and Significance**

Through this study, I have considered multiple needs identified in the existing literature. First, the study addressed the lack of gender-nonbinary research. As a qualitative study, it closely and in depth explored the lived experiences of four gender-
nonbinary participants. Additionally, all participants reported Hispanic/Latinx identities. As such, they represent the broader term *Persons of Color* as used within the literature reviewed as well as by one of the participants directly (Nicolazzo, 2016; Marshall et al., 2019; Monro, 2019; dickey, Hendricks, and Bockting, 2016; Yeadon-Lee, 2016; Chang & Singh, 2016; Flores et al., 2018; Mizock & Hopwood, 2018; Van Schuylenbergh, Motmans, & Coene, 2018). An exception to other studies discovered and reviewed, my participants all resided in New Mexico, a state with unique features such as multiple cultures, minority-majority population ethnically, and high poverty levels.

In line with IPA guidelines, my participants made up a reasonably homogeneous sample (Smith et al., 2009). As stated, all participants identified as Hispanic/Latinx. All met the residence criterion of living in New Mexico. In actuality, all currently lived in the Albuquerque metropolitan area, the least number of years being eight. With New Mexico’s vast rural areas, the urban residency increased the homogeneity of the participants. The age criterion during recruitment was 22 to 32. In actuality, all participants fell within the age range of 27 to 32, again increasing homogeneity.
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this literature review is to develop awareness of published research related to the phenomenon of living in as a person who identifies as gender nonbinary. I describe first how I located the literature and determined the publications on which I would primarily focus. I outline how the literature supports the research reported in this dissertation and the way in which my study fits into existing knowledge and addresses identified needs. Terminology and language are extremely important for the phenomenon of being gender nonbinary; I look at how it may affect individuals’ experiences as reported in related studies. Citing and describing literature, I show that the gender binary concept is being questioned academically, before I describe how existing research portrays gender nonbinary persons, the challenges they face, and the importance of support and resilience.

Database Searches and Sorting of Articles

Late in 2019 in preparing this review of literature, I identified three databases as best fitting the topic: GenderWatch, Social Services Abstracts, and PsycARTICLES. As these database searches returned what I determined to be a sufficiently large number of articles, I did not make use of further databases. I searched each database for “gender” + “nonbinary” and for “gender dysphoria.” The searches returned several hundred articles, including the expected overlap between databases. The majority of the articles were dated 2019, indicating the recent interest in the topic as well as the dearth of published studies earlier. It is appropriate in an area of such fast-paced change for the literature used here to be as recent as possible.

To focus most closely on my topic, I first screened the articles by reading the
titles and abstracts. That resulted in my downloading 134 articles for closer review including electronically searching the texts of the articles. I sorted the articles into the following less-than-precise categories: identity and experiences; research; gender dysphoria; mental health, including self-harm and suicide; minority stress and prejudice; health and health care; Persons of Color; disability; higher education experiences; and legal matters. Additional articles were added to the various categories from citations of reviewed publications.

I determined 63 articles to best contribute toward the background I needed for conducting my study—39 of which were study reports with the remaining articles a mixture of systematic reviews, guidelines and standards, and commentary published in peer-reviewed journals. Articles were set aside for various reasons—similar to the initial online screening—such as age of participants or subjects and lack of nonbinary focus. I did not retain studies limited to children or adolescents unless the age range extended into adulthood. If a publication focused on binary trans to the exclusion or near exclusion (one participant) of nonbinary trans, I removed it. I retained articles that included both binary and nonbinary trans, even if the study’s focus or participants were primarily binary trans. Although my study looked at the gender nonbinary phenomenon in New Mexico, U.S.A., I retained 13 UK articles, two each from Canada and Belgium, one each from Australia and the European Union, and one using results from multiple countries. I deemed the content of these articles as transcending geographic regions. The nonstudy articles by UK authors contained particularly meaningful scholarship.

Articles too generally focused on LGBTQI topics were set aside. I did not keep articles on counseling or psychotherapy interventions, specific theoretical approaches, or
assessments. Unfortunately, the full categories of disability and legal matters were set aside due to the paucity of identified articles. It is lamentable that the specific intersection of disability and gender nonbinary has not received more attention. Likewise, I set aside articles concerning higher education, as the category was too narrowly focused.

As described in Chapter 3, IPA guidelines (Smith & Osborn, 2008; Smith et al., 2009) suggest incorporating only the most pertinent extant literature into the discussion section of the final report as opposed to an extensive and general literature review. The guidelines call for including only previous studies that support, contradict, or come into question due to the current study’s findings. The extensive review of literature reflected in this chapter served to create a broad collection from which to select literature to include in the discussion chapter as well as to meet the requirements of the dissertation process.

**Literature Support for the Study**

A specific goal of a literature review is to establish how the new research adds to the existing knowledge. As I have stated, the majority of articles identified during my database searches were dated 2019, with 2018 the next most frequent date. The increased number of publications was quite surprising as compared to a topical search in early 2017. Repeatedly, the articles reviewed noted the lack of research on gender nonbinary topics even as public awareness is growing (e.g., Motmans, Nieder, & Bouman, 2019; Todd et al., 2019; Tebbe et al., 2019; Marshall et al., 2019; McNeil, Ellis, & Eccles, 2017). While research on transgender topics has greatly expanded, it is overwhelmingly focused on binary trans persons and their experiences (Fiani & Han, 2019; Nicholas, 2019; Monro, 2019; Jackman et al., 2018; Lefevor et al., 2019). The point was further
made that there is a need for studies on the lived experiences of nonbinary trans persons (Taylor, Zalewska, Gates, & Millon, 2019; Yeadon-Lee, 2016; Nicolazzo, 2016). Fiani and Han (2019) wrote, “Historically, the ‘T’ in ‘LGBTQ’ has often been rendered silent. . . . [N]on-binary narratives have been rendered doubly silent” (p. 181).

Of the 39 new studies described, 23 carried out online quantitative surveys, qualitative questionnaires, or a mixed methods combination. Authors dickey et al. (2016) questioned whether the use of the Internet for finding participants resulted in a diverse sample, suggesting respondents would more likely be White and well educated, as persons identifying as African American and Hispanic continue to have less online access than White or Asian populations.

In addition to the studies that took place online, two studies used online material and one was carried out via telephone. Thirteen studies were performed in person. Overall, 21 studies were quantitative, 16 qualitative, and two mixed methods.

Multiple authors called for additional research looking at how gender nonbinary identity intersects with other identities, such as identifying as a Person of Color (Nicolazzo, 2016; Marshall et al., 2019; Monro, 2019; dickey et al., 2016; Yeadon-Lee, 2016; Chang & Singh, 2016; Flores et al., 2018; Mizock & Hopwood, 2018; Van Schuylenbergh et al., 2018). The writers also mentioned the need for studies exploring class, employment, income, housing, and citizenship status—all of which disproportionately affect Persons of Color. As Flores et al. (2018) noted, the multiple identities of any gender nonconforming person will bring both privilege and oppression. Only two of the four articles addressing Persons of Color were studies—both qualitative studies done in person (Nicolazzo, 2016; Flores et al., 2018).
Through my study, I considered multiple needs delineated above. First, obviously, my study addressed the general lack of gender nonbinary research. The qualitative study closely and in depth explored the lived experiences of my gender nonbinary participants. While the interviews took place via online video meetings, the sessions were live and interactive as opposed to online surveys or questionnaires. As described in Chapter 3, I followed IPA guidelines’ call for a reasonably homogeneous group of participants (Smith et al., 2009); the ways in which my participants met that goal were previously delineated including falling within the 27 to 32 age range. Very importantly, with my participants identifying as Hispanic/Latinx, my study contributes to the need for research concerning Persons of Color. In differentiating my study further from existing research, my participants all resided in New Mexico, a state with unique features such as multiple cultures, minority-majority population ethnically, and high poverty levels.

Some articles (e.g., Yeadon-Lee, 2016; Todd et al., 2019; Motmans et al., 2019; Rimes, Goodship, Ussher, Baker, & West, 2019; Taylor et al., 2019) differentiated participants or findings based on gender assigned at birth. The Rimes et al. (2019) study in particular found different mental health scores between trans persons who were female assigned at birth as opposed to those who were male assigned at birth. For my study, however, I considered it an unnecessary demographic to request, especially as it could be damaging to the researcher-participant rapport. Taylor et al. (2019) noted that one participant (of eight total) objected to being asked their gender assigned at birth. Yeadon-Lee (2016) reported that 30% of the “younger” participants (teens to 29) in that study did not reveal gender assigned at birth in posts or online profiles. In my data gathering, all participants did discuss their gender assigned at birth without my asking. This is
discussed further in Chapter 4.

Researchers using IPA seek to identify convergence and divergence within the individual cases as well as across cases (Smith et al., 2009). These are explored in Chapter 4. Additionally, convergence and divergence between the findings of my study and those in published research are discussed in Chapter 5.

**Terminology and Language Use**

Terminology and language surrounding the phenomenon of being gender nonbinary are important and challenging. Byne et al. (2018) wrote of how humans label using words as well as nonverbal cues, all providing positive and negative reinforcement of stereotypes. In Chapter 3, I outline how I did not impose a definition of gender nonbinary upon participants. While all endorsed the term, three provided an additional term they used as well. Here, however, I address how academia has attempted to define the term, although the literature is far from any uniform use.

First, a look at gender binary, the dominant concept gender nonbinary challenges yet by which it is commonly defined (Thorne, Yip, Bouman, Marshall, & Arcelus, 2019b). *Gender binary* represents the perception that gender has two possibilities—male and female—which are distinct, independent, and opposite (Browne, 2016). Further complicating matters, *sex* and *gender* are often conflated, although in simplest terms *sex* is physical whereas *gender* is behavioral and cultural (Matsuno & Budge, 2017). The concepts of sex and gender are further discussed in the next section.

A common way of looking at gender nonbinary is between, outside of, or beyond the gender binary (Motmons, 2019; Matsuno & Budge, 2017; Thorne et al., 2019b; Monro, 2019). Monro (2019) used words such as “resist,” “challenge,” and “transcend”
the gender binary. There are also descriptions of experiencing both male and female, but not exclusively either, perhaps a mixture of or some point between, fluidly or statically (Monro, 2019; Vincent, 2019). There are those as well who reject the concept of a gender identity entirely (Monro, 2019). Obviously, there is a great deal of diversity (Motmans et al., 2019) not only within terminology but within experience (Conlin et al., 2019).

Currently, but not universally, gender nonbinary is seen as an umbrella term that falls under the broader terms of trans or transgender (Yeadon-Lee, 2016; Thorne et al., 2019b; Monro, 2019; Nicolazzo, 2016; Puckett, Cleary, Rossman, Mustanski, & Newcomb, 2019). Some consider trans as the more inclusive term (Buck & Obzud, 2017). Vincent (2019) suggested that those who identify as gender nonbinary “inevitably” are trans as they do not accept the gender assigned at birth, though the author went on to acknowledge not all gender nonbinary persons accept the term trans.

Likewise, some see genderqueer as an umbrella term for those who are gender nonbinary; for many, genderqueer takes on a political significance (Thorne et al., 2019b). Thorne et al. (2019b) noted that the term gender nonbinary is dependent on a binary’s existence. Taylor et al. (2019) wrote, “This reliance on negation to articulate identity created a conflict, as there was also a need to be defined and understood as a person, not merely an absence” (p.198). Gender diverse may be gaining in use as a gender nonbinary umbrella term in part due to the more “positive” connotation (Thorne et al., 2019b).

Yeadon-Lee (2016) described how terms may take on an agentic role, an opportunity to self-define. The author also noted, however, that for others, terminology can bring a sense of restriction or confusion, especially if words are used as a form of dominance. Flores et al. (2018) reported study participants noting that “power” comes
from individuals identifying and defining their terms.

As Matsuno and Budge (2017) noted, terminology is in constant flux. I see this as positive in that individuals are embracing words that are meaningful to them individually and best suit them. Many persons use more than one term either at the same time or as alternatives (Yeadon-Lee, 2016; McNeil et al., 2017). Table 1 includes examples of the variety of terms reported in the literature (Chang & Singh, 2016; Harrison, Grant, & Herman, 2012; Marshall et al., 2019; Motmans et al., 2019; Nicholas, 2019; Tebbe et al., 2019; Thorne et al., 2019b; Yeadon-Lee, 2016).

Related terminology and language include the use of pronouns by gender nonbinary persons. More and more, the general public is becoming aware of and more comfortable with the use of they/them/their as singular (Matsuno & Budge, 2017). Use of the singular they has even been incorporated into the style guide of the Washington Post (Jones & Mullany, 2019). Attempts have been made to bring zie/hir/hirs, xe/xem/xyr, and/or ey/em/eir into more common usage as nonbinary pronouns (Matsuno & Budge, 2017). Yeadon-Lee (2016) reported some gender nonbinary persons simply use gendered pronouns due to their common and easier use. Mx has gained some acceptance as a nongendered honorific (Yeadon-Lee, 2016). Jones and Mullany (2019) described how language changes come about most commonly from “grassroots” usage.
Table 1.

*Examples of Gender Nonbinary Terms*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agender</td>
<td>Intergender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggressive (Black or African American)</td>
<td>Libramasculine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Androgyne</td>
<td>Mahuwahine (Hawaiian)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aporagender</td>
<td>Male Herm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bigender</td>
<td>Neuter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birl</td>
<td>Neutrois</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Butch Femmes</td>
<td>No Label</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demi-Gender</td>
<td>Non-Gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demi-Guy</td>
<td>Otherwise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dual Gender</td>
<td>Pangender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genderfluid</td>
<td>Polygender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genderless</td>
<td>Third Gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender Neutral</td>
<td>Transgenderist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender Non-Conformist</td>
<td>Transpupper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genderqueer</td>
<td>Travesty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender Variant</td>
<td>Twidget</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hybrid</td>
<td>Two-Spirit</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* Chang & Singh, 2016; Harrison et al., 2012; Marshall et al., 2019; Motmans et al., 2019; Nicholas, 2019; Tebbe et al., 2019; Yeadon-Lee, 2016).
Bradford et al. (2019) wrote of the importance of legitimizing experience through language. The lack of commonly used terminology too often prevents persons even conceptualizing a nonbinary identity. Taylor et al. (2019) quoted a participant, “‘there was no language or model outside the binary for me to make sense of myself’” (p. 198). Motmans et al. (2019) called for making “these identities part of language, culture, society, and crucially, reality and history” (p. 121). Schudson, Beischel, and van Anders (2019) reported some movement in the understanding and use of more diverse language, although the majority of the cisgender participants in their study continued to use language that represented a more biological than sociocultural understanding.

**Gender Binary Under Question**

Nicolazzo (2016) proclaimed false the idea that there are two genders aligned with two sexes, “discrete, natural, and immutable” (p. 1175). The binary continues, however, to seem ubiquitous in use and acceptance (Yeadon-Lee, 2016). Monro (2019) pointed out the connections to patriarchy and heterosexism, both of which are institutionalized and maintain the binary system. Motmans et al. (2019) declared the gender binary not representative of reality; Monro (2019) concurred, noting divergence has historical precedence as well as evidence across cultures and societies.

Matsuno and Budge (2017) provided a clear distinction between *sex* and *gender*, though they are often conflated. Sex may be considered as a physical phenomenon, beginning with chromosomes and including hormones, sex characteristics, and reproductive organs. Gender, Matsuno and Budge went on to note, relates to traits and behaviors and is dependent on cultural constructs. Many scholars discussed moving beyond the gender binary to a spectrum or pluralistic concept (e.g., Monro, 2019). Monro
went as far as to suggest a corresponding pluralism for sex allowing for the variation in sex characteristics. This is an intriguing idea to me; to acknowledge that the physical manifestations of sex are far more varied than the simple male-female dichotomy would suggest, beyond those who identify as intersex.

Hyde, Bigler, Joel, Tate, van Anders (2019) scientifically confronted the concept of a gender binary through a fascinating review of neuroscience, behavioral neuroendocrinology, psychology, and developmental research. I will very briefly note a few highlights from each field. So-called dimorphism of the human brain has been refuted by neuroscientists; instead finding considerable overlap with men and women falling into what is supposedly the opposite territory. A fascinating aspect from the neuroendocrinology section noted not only that both males and females produce estrogens and androgens, but if there is in fact a binary, it is between pregnant women and all others (men and nonpregnant women). A metaanalysis of sexual attitudes showed little difference between men and women; instead, regardless of sex/gender, people are a “gender mosaic” of both “masculine” and “feminine” traits. Psychological research on “transgender” (presumably binary) and nonbinary individuals has shown that gender assigned at birth by physicians based on apparent sex characteristics is fallible. Additionally, while most people (cisgender and binary transgender) may appear to align with traditional gender categories, obviously many people do not. I suggest that given more flexibility in what is regarded as acceptable gender performance from birth, many more people might not adhere so closely to the hegemonic roles. The last area Hyde et al. (2019) examined was developmental research. In this discussion, they pointed out how children are taught from birth to categorize others by gender, reinforced by multiple
cultural and linguistic indications, many of which have even been strictly maintained legally. The evidence presented by Hyde et al. dismantled many if not most of the claims that the gender binary is anything but a social construct.

**Findings From Studies Regarding Gender Nonbinary Persons**

In this section, I relate findings from studies regarding gender nonbinary persons and their experiences. Some of the information appeared to be inconsistent across studies, although direct comparisons were difficult as the researchers looked at similar but differing constructs as well as compared different or differently defined populations. It is possible that the contradictions may be explained by the extreme heterogeneity of the population of persons who identify as gender nonbinary. In fact, I suggest that what members of the group share—not identifying with the traditional gender binary—is far less than the many aspects they do not share. Certainly the challenges the individuals face, described in the next section, represent shared adversity.

By the numbers: Byne et al. (2018) reviewed CDC 2016 data that estimated the proportion of “transgender” adults as .6% of the U.S. population; Byne et al. noted that this was twice the proportion as the data indicated a decade prior. Byne et al. also reported a Massachusetts survey that found .5% of the adult population identified as “transgender,” a New Zealand statistic of 1.2% among high school students, and a finding of 1.3% among San Francisco middle school students. The connection with age is noteworthy along with location. Hyde et al. (2019) highlighted geographic differences within the United States: .3% for North Dakota and .8% for Hawaii. Within the trans population, the proportion that identifies as nonbinary differs as well: 52% of a U.K. study’s sample, 41% of those surveyed in Canada (Monro, 2019), and one-third of a U.S.
survey’s respondents (James et al., 2016). Byne et al. (2018) suggested that the numbers may be low as many who are not involved in seeking care or treatment may have gone uncounted.

Multiple studies drew comparisons between binary trans persons and nonbinary trans persons. Similarities and differences between the groups appeared among the findings. As well, conflicting results were reported between studies. I see the importance of this information as indicating the need for more research specifically on those who identify as gender nonbinary as opposed to lumping them together under the transgender umbrella, as has so often occurred. I want to be careful, however, not to perpetuate issues between the binary and nonbinary groups; see the discussion below concerning transnormativity and “trans enough.”

Lefevor et al. (2019; U.S. study of the data of 3,568 participants from a database of 278,100) showed statistics indicating that “genderqueer” participants reported a higher incidence than binary trans participants on anxiety, depression, eating concerns, alcohol use, and overall psychological distress. Likewise, genderqueer participants reported higher risk of self-injury, contemplated suicide, current suicidal ideation, and suicide attempt. Cisgender individuals (male and female) reported a higher incidence than trans binary or nonbinary for alcohol use. Similarly, Thorne et al. (2019a; U.K. study of 388 participants) looked at scores from various scales and concluded that nonbinary trans respondents were more likely to report anxiety, depression, and self-esteem issues than binary trans. In that study, only 14.7% of participants identified as nonbinary.

Warren et al. (2016; U.S. study of 2,932 participants drawn from a parent study) explored psychological well-being as demonstrated by scores on depression, anxiety,
stress, social support, self-esteem, self-assessed mental health care needs, family mental health history, self-history of mental health concerns, and being in recovery. This study looked at trans women, trans men, genderqueer/nonbinary persons, and cisgender sexual minority individuals. The researchers reported that the gender minority participants experienced a higher incidence of stressors than the sexual minority participants. They determined trans subgroup scores differed enough that trans women, trans men, and genderqueer/nonbinary should not be considered as a single population. Examples of differences included nonbinary scores substantially lower on depression and stress and higher on self-esteem than the trans binary groups. Note that these findings appeared to be a reverse of the two studies in the previous paragraph.

Rimes et al. (2019; U.K. study of 677 participants) conducted a survey study comparing nonbinary and binary trans specifying gender assigned at birth within each identity. Respondents identifying as female assigned at birth—nonbinary or binary—reported greater likelihood of mental health issues, self-harm, and childhood sexual abuse than those assigned male at birth. As well, male assigned at birth participants reported lower probability of suicide attempts, depression, and anxiety. Overall, nonbinary participants reported a higher life satisfaction score than binary trans.

Jones et al. (2019b; U.K. study of 526 participants) looked at mental health and quality of life across cisgender, binary trans, and nonbinary trans participants using several existing instruments. The researchers found that nonbinary individuals scored significantly higher psychological functioning than binary trans participants. They reported no significant difference between nonbinary and binary trans respondents in quality of life. As in other studies, cisgender participants scored higher on psychological
functioning and quality of life scales.

Jones, Bouman, Haycraft, and Arcelus (2019a; U.K. study of 526 participants) compared cisgender participants, nonbinary participants, and binary trans people who had not yet received gender-affirming medical treatments. Researchers explored scores of gender congruence and body satisfaction. When comparing scores for both congruence and satisfaction as related to specific sex-related body parts, nonbinary respondents scored higher than trans binary participants. Nonbinary and trans binary were similar in scores for congruence and satisfaction related to social gender role recognition. In all areas, cisgender respondents reported much greater congruence and body satisfaction than either trans group. The authors suggested that their findings may indicate that at least some nonbinary individuals could want to pursue gender-affirming medical treatments.

Smalley, Warren, and Barefoot (2015; U.S. study of 3,279 participants drawn from a parent study) looked at 28 “health risk behaviors” across gender identity and sexual orientation groups. The researchers found significant differences across gender groups in 18 of the behaviors. Of particular note, higher likelihood of risk was reported by trans women in diet and exercise, by cisgender men in alcohol use, and by trans men in self-harm. Cisgender men reported the highest likelihood of risk in nine behaviors; trans women scored highest in seven behaviors; trans men in two. Genderqueer/nonbinary respondents had the lowest likelihood of risk in the highest number of behaviors (10 of 28); they scored highest in no behaviors. These authors too pointed out how trans binary and nonbinary participants are often considered together in one group; their findings provided more evidence that this is not an appropriate approach.
Todd et al. (2019; U.S. study of 202 participants) found similarities and discrepancies in their online survey of trans binary and nonbinary respondents. Health-risk behaviors were similarly frequent among binary and nonbinary groups. These behaviors were defined by the researchers as number of sexual partners; condom use; and alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, and other drug use. Binary and nonbinary participants reported no significant discrepancies in resilience; however, nonbinary persons described higher degrees of stress. Findings from nonbinary respondents indicated a higher number not living as the gender most affirming to them. Gender-affirming medical treatments were sought by only 8.4% of nonbinary participants as compared to 46.2% of binary. The difference between groups of those planning to seek such treatments was much less pronounced at 43.4 (nonbinary) versus 49.6 (binary), although the combined numbers (having sought and planning to seek) were quite different (51.8% versus 96.8%). I speculate that this may be due in part to the fact that binary trans persons (and many providers) have a clearer concept of interventions they may wish to pursue as well as fewer barriers in doing so.

Inconsistencies and difficulties in comparison aside, these findings are interesting. In regard to my study of the life experiences of a group of gender nonbinary individuals, the reviewed studies proved extremely beneficial as background information. This was especially true during the development of my interview schedule as well as the actual interviews.

**Challenges Faced by Gender Nonbinary Persons**

Jackman et al. (2018) wrote, “Participants reported difficulty coming to an understanding of their gender identity, and they also faced lack of comprehension from
other people about gender identities outside of the binary of man/woman” (p. 590). This double coming out, as it might be described, first to oneself and then to others, is certainly a challenge. It may be more problematic if the lack of vocabulary regarding a gender nonbinary identity compromises a person’s conceptualizing or recognizing such a possibility—within themselves or others. The increasing awareness of and allowance for nonbinary gender identities, I suggest, are likely among the reasons for an increasing number of people so identifying. It would be extremely interesting, though likely impossible, to know if as many individuals in older or past generations would have identified as gender nonbinary given the awareness and, in essence, permission that is more available today.

**Minority Stress, Stigma, and Social Exclusion**

Multiple authors described the extreme minority stress endured by gender nonbinary persons (e.g., Mizock & Hopwood, 2018; Monro, 2018; Todd et al., 2019; Matsuno & Budge, 2017). Contributing to the interpersonal, social, and structural stressors were factors such as discrimination, misunderstanding by the general public, self-concealment due to anticipated rejection, a sense of invisibility, and microaggressions such as wrong gender pronoun (Lefevor et al., 2019; Jackman et al., 2018; Monro, 2019; Conlin et al., 2019; Matsuno & Budge, 2017; Galupo et al., 2014).

As the number of gender nonbinary persons has grown (Clark et al., 2018; Fiani & Han, 2019), awareness has increased in the general public (dickey et al., 2016; Nicolas, 2019). Awareness and accurate knowledge have not gone hand in hand, even among healthcare and mental health providers (Puckett et al., 2018). Matsuno and Budge suggested “non-binary individuals must navigate a world with little allotment for their
identity” (p. 118).

Stigmatization and social exclusion create potentially dangerous situations as the majority of the general public works to maintain and even reassert the gender binary (Byne et al., 2018; Holt et al., 2019b; Holt et al., 2019a; Monro, 2019; Taylor et al., 2019). Public and social institutions reinforce cisgender realities, such as expressed in restrictions regarding restrooms, competitive sports, and dormitories (Buck & Obzud, 2017; Mathers, 2017). Taylor et al. (2019) suggested

It’s possible that this phenomenon could operate along different lines than that directed against binary trans individuals, as in addition to violating gender norms, non-binary people can challenge perhaps at a deeper level what it means to be a person, destabilising deeply-held notions of self. (p. 202)

Bradford et al. (2019) similarly wrote, “[A]ll transgender people transgress a cisnormative master narrative, but genderqueer people further transgress normative understandings of a medicalized, binary transgender identity” (p. 155).

Taylor et al. (2019; U.K. study of eight participants) and Nicolazzo (2016; U.S. study of three participants) wrote of the common experience of social exclusion. This may take the form of invisibility or, as Taylor et al. (2019) quoted from one participant, “‘being actively ignored or erased’” (p. 198). Invisibility was the most persistent theme expressed by those in Conlin et al.’s research (2019; U.S. study of 14 participants); participants reported the lack of awareness of nonbinary persons by the public. Related is the concept of passing. Flores et al. (2018; U.S. study of 15 participants) discussed the very different relationships binary and nonbinary trans people may have with passing. While binary trans individuals may look positively on passing—being perceived as their
identified gender—nonbinary persons may wish for a recognition of the legitimacy of a presentation that is outside the binary. As Fiani and Han (2019; U.S. study of 15 participants) quoted a participant as saying, “‘Passing as what?’” (p. 188). These researchers went on to describe passing as “unattainable” for nonbinary persons. Mizock and Hopwood (2018) described *passing privilege* as it relates to the safety a trans person may experience if regarded as nontrans. Flores et al. (2018) as well as Fiani and Han (2019) also discussed the very real aspect of safety as it relates to passing.

**Transprejudice and Transnormativity**

Brassel and Anderson (2019; U.S. study of 1,036 participants) wrote of the pervasiveness of transprejudice. In their study, they determined that cisgender heterosexual men were more transprejudice than were the female participants, although “traditionalism and feminist attitudes” affected the responses of both men and women. Buck and Obzud (2017; U.S. study of 189 participants after removing respondents who did not identify as heterosexual or cisgender) explored transprejudice as it occurred in gender-integrated and gender-segregated settings. They found that for both men and women, prejudice against trans persons increased in segregated settings (restrooms, for example). Kanamori, Pegors, Hulgus, and Cornelius-White (2016; U.S. study of 483 participants) compared transprejudice as expressed by evangelical Christians and nonreligious individuals. The Christian group measured significantly lower on comfort interacting with trans people and reported a much more dichotomous (nonfluid) view of gender. The study also measured respondents’ views of trans persons’ intrinsic value; in this factor, the Christian group scored only slightly lower than the nonreligious participants. In all three measures, women of both the Christian and nonreligious groups
measured more positive attitudes toward trans people than did their male counterparts.

Additionally, trans nonbinary persons face transnormativity. This is the concept that there is only one way in which to be trans, and the acceptable path is from one side of the binary to the other (Nicolazzo, 2016), thus living within and helping to preserve the gender binary. This view may be subtly or overtly promoted by cisgender or even binary trans people. Bradford et al. (2019; U.S. study of 25 participants) reported that one of their sample talked of name calling due to nonbinary presentation; the researchers suggested that “their transgression of transnormative expectations may be seen as calling into question the assumptions that grant legitimacy to certain trans identities” (p. 164). Vincent (2019) wrote of the “close but nonessential relationship between transness and transition” (p. 133) that can prevent nonbinary people from becoming a part of the transgender community. Nicolazzo (2016) stated that there is a “cultural imperative” for persons identifying as trans to transition biomedically, matching the celebrity trans persons whose stories have become well known. “[T]hose who choose not to biomedically transition occupy a liminal space in which they are neither quite trans* enough nor not quite not-trans* enough” (Nicolazzo, 2016, p. 1175; Nicolazzo noted using the asterisk to indicate an inclusionary concept of trans). In their study of transgender microaggressions, Galupo et al. (2014; U.S. study of 207 participants) reported the most hurtful statements came from friends who were also trans but seemed to have a different idea of what trans meant. The authors suggested “an implied hierarchy.” Matsuno and Budge (2017) wrote of not only microaggressions but macroaggressions aimed at nonbinary people, at times by binary trans individuals. This contributed to the internalized oppression experienced by so many minority individuals.
As Vincent (2019) wrote, “Many non-binary people struggle with accepting themselves as ‘trans enough (to be trans)’” (p. 133).

**Mental and Physical Health Consequences**

Understandably, challenges such as described here have mental and physical health consequences. As noted above in reports of the various studies, stress results in anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation, as well as other negative outcomes (Borgogna, McDermott, Aita, Kridel, 2019; Matsuno & Budge, 2017; Lefevor et al., 2019). Regardless of whether gender nonbinary persons experience these issues to greater or lesser degrees than trans binary persons, findings consistently show trans mental health concerns greatly outweigh those of cisgender individuals (Borgogna et al., 2019; Monro, 2019; Puckett et al., 2019; Thorne et al., 2019a).

Jackman et al. (2018), Morris and Galup (2019), and dickey, Reisner, & Juntunen (2015) undertook studies of nonsuicidal self-injury (NSSI) that included genderqueer and/or gender nonbinary participants. Jackman et al. (2018) tied NSSI directly to minority stress. Morris and Galup (2019) suggested NSSI may have been used to reduce the effects of gender dysphoria by some participants. Genderqueer individuals were differentiated from other nonbinary participants in the dickey et al. (2015) study finding that 41.9% of genderqueer participants reported a lifetime history of NSSI. That may be compared to a 20% level for adult psychiatric patients and 4% among adults in nonclinical samples (dickey et al., 2015).

Suicide risk is greater among trans individuals, again tied to minority stress (Tebbe & Moradi, 2016; Matsuno & Budge, 2017). Byne et al. (2018) reported deaths by suicide had increased “dramatically” in the population. McNeil et al. (2017) noted that
accurate numbers may not be discoverable since death certificates do not list a person’s trans status.

Holt et al. (2019a; U.S. study of 10 participants) noted the difficulties in dealing with both mental health and physical health care in describing the role played by the mental health care providers in their study. As with mental health, physical health disparities were reported between trans nonbinary, trans binary, and cisgender persons (Mizock & Hopwood, 2018), such as chronic issues, disability, and illness (Monro, 2019). Mizock and Hopwood (2018) described barriers to care including health insurance. As well, Todd et al. (2019) wrote that both binary and nonbinary trans persons engage in higher levels of health risk behaviors than the general population. Nonbinary trans individuals do not access health care services as frequently as even binary trans persons (Clark et al., 2018; Jones et al., 2019b); no explanation had been found as to why.

Gender-affirming medical treatments include hormone therapy as well as various surgical procedures. It is a misconception that nonbinary trans persons do not pursue treatment to better align their bodies with their gender. Information is not widely available regarding nonbinary individuals seeking treatment, and what is reported differs from one source to another. Motmans et al. (2019) suggested that the numbers are “largely unknown.” Matsuno and Budge (2017) stated that “fewer nonbinary” persons request interventions, but that it is “fairly common.” Clark et al. (2018) reported that, among their participants, the number of nonbinary individuals seeking hormone therapy was much lower than for binary trans (13% as opposed to 52%). Puckett et al. (2018) stated that 28.6% of genderqueer participants and 33.3% of nonbinary had received
hormone treatment; much lower than their reports for trans men (76.8%) or trans women (80.3%). As noted previously, Todd et al. (2019) provided figures of 8.4% versus 46.2% (nonbinary to binary). Taylor et al. (2019) reported an increasing number of nonbinary individuals coming to U.K. gender identity clinics for treatment. Beckwith, Reisner, Zaslow, Mayer, and Keuroghlian (2017) stated a lack of awareness of any research assessing the likelihood of nonbinary trans persons to seek gender-affirming surgeries as compared to binary trans individuals.

Beckwith et al. (2017) discussed the “unique barriers” faced by gender nonbinary persons in being considered for surgeries as prerequisites are aligned with binary desires. Taylor et al. (2019) also wrote of challenges faced by nonbinary persons desiring surgical treatment, as did Puckett et al. (2018), who described nonbinary patients feeling mistreated by providers. Vincent (2019) suggested, however, that there has been progress in opening doors for nonbinary trans individuals to address their desires concerning surgery; note that Vincent is located in the United Kingdom. Vincent told of some doctors now offering vaginoplasty while preserving the penis. Vincent discussed nonbinary persons who might have such desires but fear that appearing other than seeking traditional binary surgeries could result in rejection for surgery. I wonder to what degree nonbinary individuals, especially in the United States, are even aware of how gender-affirming treatments could be beneficial to them in countering gender dysphoria or simply in bringing their bodies more comfortably in line with their identity. Many may believe such treatments are only for those who wish to fully transition within the binary rather than a more nuanced use of treatments considered affirming by nonbinary persons.

Legal and Financial Concerns
While gender nonbinary is gaining acceptance in some countries, for instance legally allowed as gender of record in Australia, Germany, India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal, New Zealand, and Thailand (Yeadon-Lee, 2016), it is still often experienced as problematic (Monro, 2019). Nonbinary identity has attained greater support in the United Kingdom, yet a survey of nonbinary individuals reported 76% chose to hide their identity out of fear of retribution (Monro, 2019). Mizock and Hopwood (2018) wrote of the negative effects faced by gender nonbinary persons in legal matters, employment, and healthcare.

U.S. governmental policy has created roadblocks rather than progress (Byne et al., 2018; van Anders et al., 2017). Two reviewed studies looked at issues related to legal protections. Tebbe et al. (2019; U.S. study of 175 participants) researched the effect of awareness of protections against discrimination toward transgender and gender nonconforming employees; these included state, city, workplace, or “any” protections. They found that for employees who knew there were no protections or did not know whether there were protections, both vocational and emotional well-being were negatively impacted. The researchers concluded that protection from discrimination significantly countered the negative effects of marginalization in the workplace.

Holt, Hope, Mocarski, and Woodruff (2019b) looked at a U.S. sample of mental health providers’ websites and online intake forms for affirmatively worded questions regarding gender and sex. Only websites of clinicians who advertised as working with transgender or gender nonconforming clients were included. In a correlation of language used with locations that provide protections for transgender and gender nonconforming individuals, the researchers found that there was more likelihood of stigmatizing
language in states without legal protections. The authors cited Blosnich et al. (2016) as finding greater occurrence of mental health issues among transgender and gender nonconforming persons in states without protections. The findings in the Holt et al. (2019b) study indicated less likelihood of these individuals finding affirmative language on websites of potential mental health providers; therefore, these individuals in greater need of services would be less likely to find welcoming and affirming language when searching for providers online.

Additionally, gender nonbinary individuals face a greater likelihood of the effect of stigmatization and marginalization within employment or income matters, affecting in particular those of low-income backgrounds (Mizock & Hopwood, 2018). Besides their findings regarding vocational and emotional well-being (described previously), Tebbe et al.’s (2019) article also noted how marginalization can affect career development.

Mizock and Hopwood (2018) described how such treatment may result in transgender and gender diverse individuals facing unemployment, underemployment, low income, poverty, and even homelessness. Financial matters have other effects, especially related to health care and access to gender-affirming medical treatments (Holt et al., 2019b; Mizock & Hopwood, 2018). Mizock and Hopwood (2018) noted as well that income can affect social networks resulting in reduced peer support.

Support and Resilience

Multiple authors wrote of how support and resilience, in various forms, help to combat the effects of the daunting challenges faced by gender nonbinary individuals (e.g., Conlin et al., 2019; Marshall et al., 2019; Puckett et al., 2019). Support may come from families, friends and other relationships, and society (Marshall et al., 2019). Puckett
et al. (2019) wrote of social support “buffering” the toll of the challenges resulting in greater well-being. Nicolazzo (2016) suggested nonbinary individuals have differing levels of resilience, based in part on whether they have a sense of belonging. Warren et al. (2016) also wrote of the importance of community belongingness as well as social support. Religious organizations, where many individuals find support, may not be available as opportunities for community for trans persons (Kanaromi et al., 2016). Holt et al. (2019a), in their study of rural transgender and gender nonconforming individuals, noted the need to connect with support systems. Smith et al. (2018) also looked at rural transgender well-being and specific protective factors. Included in that study were persons who identified as Two-Spirit. The importance of Two-Spirit individuals for some Native cultures was seen as a potential protective factor. Chang & Singh (2016) focused on Persons of Color and the intersection of gender identity with race and ethnicity and the challenges of multiple oppressions.

Mental health providers may be supporters of trans nonbinary persons or they may create additional challenges. Byne et al. (2018) provided a “primer” for psychiatrists and other mental health professionals in which they emphasized being respectful, competent, and culturally attuned. In particular they wrote of care in requesting and appropriately using names and pronouns. An affirmative approach was promoted by multiple authors (e.g., Taylor et al., 2019; Bettergarcia & Israel, 2018; Holt et al., 2019b). Taylor et al. (2019) wrote of how this would allow nonbinary persons to “develop and articulate their identities and desires . . . [and] explore psychological, social, physical and legal expressions of their identities” (p. 201). Chang and Singh (2016) encouraged providers to be aware of the “creativity” among transgender Persons of Color in their
unique terminology. Brown et al. (2019; U.S. study of 15 participants) looked at the experiences of transgender and gender nonconforming individuals who sought letters from mental health providers needed for gender affirming medical treatments. The themes of “bullshit” and “blessings” represented either difficulty in securing the needed letter or an affirming experience. Holt et al. (2019a) also discussed the support of mental health providers through writing letters for medical treatment. In both articles it was noted how supportive approaches strengthened the therapeutic relationship. Holt et al. (2019a) reported that the mental health providers in their study had needed to educate themselves on trans matters. Mizock and Hopwood (2018) as well wrote of few medical or mental health educational programs providing information and training for working with transgender and gender diverse individuals. Multiple articles directed readers to the publications of the American Counseling Association (ALGBTIC Transgender Committee, 2009) and the American Psychological Association (American Psychological Association, 2015) for guidance in working with transgender clients.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I review the IPA methodology used for this study of participants who identify as gender nonbinary. Included are the purpose of the study and the corresponding research question. I discuss the IPA research design noting its application to this particular study. I describe the target phenomenon along with the participant inclusion criteria. I present the procedures used for participant selection, data gathering, and data analysis, all following IPA guidelines, with my role as researcher explained. Finally, I review ethical considerations including risk factors and protection of participants.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to increase awareness of and knowledge about persons who identify as gender nonbinary. Specifically, the participants identified as gender nonbinary as well as Hispanic/Latinx, resided in Albuquerque, New Mexico, metropolitan area, and fell within the age range of 22 to 32. My goal was to examine the ways in which my participants understood, interpreted, or made sense of their gender experience. The participants touched on intrapersonal, interpersonal, and society-wide aspects of their experience as well as how their gender identity has been expressed across different settings, including work, social, public, and family.

My desire is for the knowledge gained through this study to contribute to the conversation about gender in the broader society including the pressure placed on all persons to conform to hegemonic expectations—with their awareness or without—from childhood through adulthood. A better understanding of how gender nonbinary persons make sense of their experience may shed light on the experience of gender for the general
Additionally, as this research relates to my studies in counselor education, my hope is for the knowledge gained through this study be disseminated so as to inform mental health professionals in their work with gender nonbinary clients. More specifically, clinicians working with persons who identify as gender nonbinary as well as Hispanic/Latinx or more broadly Persons of Color may find information that relates or may be applicable to their clients. As per IPA approach, this final report of my study includes transparency regarding my procedures with sufficient verbatim data extracts to support my interpretative findings (Smith & Osborn, 2008; Smith et al., 2009; Smith, 2011a). It is for the reader to determine the validity of the study and discern the applicability of my findings to their situations or to the specific clients with whom they are working (Smith et al., 2009; Smith, 2011a).

Research Question

How do persons who identify as gender nonbinary understand, interpret, or make sense of their experience? More specifically, persons who identify as gender nonbinary as well as Hispanic/Latinx, reside in Albuquerque, New Mexico, metropolitan area, and fall within the ages of 22 to 32.

Research Design

Introduction to IPA and Its Philosophical Bases

The methodology chosen for this qualitative study is IPA as introduced initially by Jonathan Smith for use in health psychology (Smith, 1996). Smith went on to further develop the methodology in various articles and book chapters (Smith, 2004; Smith & Osborn, 2004; Smith & Osborn, 2008; Smith, 2010; Smith, 2011a; Pietkiewicz & Smith,
The culmination of his work and most extensive description of the methodology, including an in-depth review of the underlying philosophy as well as a step-by-step guide, was provided in what is considered the handbook of IPA (Smith et al., 2009). Noteworthy as well is Smith’s (2011a) article in which he delineated guidelines for evaluating an IPA study and report with detailed lists and descriptions, useful for researchers as well as reviewers. Smith’s colleagues have extended the development and understanding of IPA on their own as well (e.g., Reid, Flowers, & Larkin, 2005; Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006; Larkin, Eatough, & Osborn, 2011; Larkin, & Thompson, 2012). Smith has published numerous IPA studies using IPA that informed the procedures of this study.

As described by Smith et al. (2009), “interpretative phenomenological analysis is an approach to qualitative, experiential and psychological research which has been informed by concepts and debates from three key areas of the philosophy of knowledge: phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography” (p. 11). Smith et al. (2009) traced the phenomenology connection back to Edmund Husserl’s emphasis on experience and the awareness or consideration of it. The authors credited Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Jean-Paul Sartre with adding “a view of the person as embedded and immersed in a world of objects and relationships, language and culture, projects and concerns” (p. 21); a more situated and perspectival approach. Additionally, according to Smith et al. (2009), these philosophers helped develop an interpretative phenomenology beyond the descriptive phenomenology of Husserl. IPA’s phenomenology is focused on experience, the awareness of it, and how it is situated; interpretation is considered necessary to making meaning.
IPA is also indebted to Heidegger for hermeneutics, the second theoretical basis of IPA (Smith et al., 2009). Hermeneutics has its roots in the study of Biblical texts, and Smith et al. (2009) quoted Friedrich Schleiermacher as having suggested that through analysis, original authors may be better understood even than they understood themselves. Smith et al. (2009) stopped short of agreeing with this assertion but proposed that interpretation may “offer meaningful insights which exceed and subsume the explicit claims of our participants. . . . [T]he interpretative analyst is able to offer a perspective on the text which the author is not” (p. 23). Smith et al. (2009) credited a “systematic and detailed analysis” for value beyond the original words, noting the benefit of a broader view (the whole of the data) as well as application of psychological theory.

Smith et al. (2009) discussed the common notion in qualitative research of bracketing through Heidegger’s idea of fore-conception (or fore-meanings, fore-projection, fore-structure, or fore-understanding). The concept concerns that which a researcher brings to a study due to previously held ideas, experience, or prejudices. These are what other methodologies would instruct researchers to bracket or separate off. IPA, based on the work of Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer, considers bracketing a more dynamic and cyclical endeavor, realistically acknowledging that a disconnection prior to engagement in a study cannot be fully accomplished. Smith et al. (2009) discussed how a researcher may not even identify aspects of their fore-conceptions until they are involved in a study; additionally, the research process may bring on new fore-conceptions. As well, fore-conceptions change through the experience of working with participants and analyzing data. Thus, the need for the dynamic and cyclical approach, always asking questions of oneself toward greater self-awareness.
As with other methodologies, IPA is described in terms of steps—seemingly a linear process. The IPA guidelines, however, strongly promoted an iterative approach to all aspects of data analysis. This “back and forth” plays out from the first readings of an interview transcript through the development of superordinate themes and on to the cross-participant analysis—all of which must ring true when checked against the raw data of the various participants. Smith et al. (2009) presented the concept of the hermeneutic circle:

It is concerned with the dynamic relationship between the part and the whole, at a series of levels. To understand any given part, you look to the whole; to understand the whole, you look to the parts. This has been criticized from a logical perspective, because of its inherent circularity. In analytical terms, however, it describes the processes of interpretation very effectively and speaks to a dynamic, non-linear, style of thinking. (p. 28)

The hermeneutic circle demands that the researcher never lose sight of the parts—down to specific words used by a participant—when looking at the whole. A full understanding and interpretation cannot rely on one or the other exclusively.

The third theoretical basis for IPA is idiography or the focus on the particular (Smith et al., 2009). This plays out in two ways:

Firstly, there is a commitment to the particular, in the sense of detail, and therefore the depth of analysis. As a consequence, analysis must be thorough and systematic. Secondly, IPA is committed to understanding how particular experiential phenomena (an event, process or relationship) have been understood from the perspective of particular people, in a particular context. (Smith et al.,
This idiographic approach informs both the detailed analysis of the individual participants as well as the specific whole the group creates.

Smith et al. (2009) tied the theoretical bases together by noting that IPA is phenomenological in the exploration of human lived experience in a detailed manner on the participants’ terms. IPA is hermeneutic in accepting that all inquiry is interpretative but embracing that interpretation requires a systematic and transparent approach. IPA is idiographic by noting participants contexts and completing the analysis of each participant prior to focusing on the next and finally on the group of participants as a whole.

Smith et al. (2009) continued by describing their concept of the double hermeneutic. The idea is that every person applies interpretation to make sense of their experiences. Therefore, when an IPA researcher is interpreting participants’ experiences, they are making meaning of the participants’ making meaning of their lives. Smith et al. (2009) went on to suggest another form of the double hermeneutic. In his work on phenomenology and hermeneutics, Jean Paul Gustave Ricoeur described two interpretative approaches: hermeneutics of empathy and hermeneutics of suspicion. As explained by Smith et al. (2009), hermeneutics of empathy “attempts to reconstruct the original experience in its own terms” (p. 36). On the other hand, hermeneutics of suspicion “uses theoretical perspectives from outside . . . to shed light on the phenomenon” (p. 36). Rejecting the idea of utilizing an outside theory in analysis, IPA proponents (Smith, 2004; Larkin et al., 2006) promoted pairing the hermeneutics of empathy with a hermeneutics of questioning. Empathy encourages the researcher to strive
for an understanding of the participant’s experience as closely as possible. Questioning, however, takes the analysis beyond the participant’s view by posing queries, doing detective work, and looking at the data from a different angle than that of the participant.

Smith et al. (2009):

[T]he simple word “understanding” captures this neatly. We are attempting to understand, both in the sense of “trying to see what it is like for someone” and in the sense of “analysing, illuminating and making sense of something”. (p. 36)

Todorova (2011) summed up IPA’s ability to be practical while remaining true to its philosophical roots:

IPA strikes important balances: between developing its (complex) philosophical and theoretical foundations while presenting them in a way which is accessible to incoming researchers; between developing clear guidelines and steps for conducting the research, while insisting on flexibility and innovation; between clear procedures for analysis and sophisticated interpretative work. (p. 35)

It may be this skillful balancing act achieved by the developers of IPA that led to the methodology being misconstrued as simple or easy (Hefferon & Gil-Rodriguez, 2011), when in fact its sophistication allows for deeply meaningful results—when conducted thoroughly and appropriately.

**IPA as the Appropriate Methodology for This Study**

The three key underpinnings and areas of focus of IPA—phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography—allowed for a respectful and thorough exploration of the data gathered from the gender nonbinary participants. The interview sessions afforded the opportunity for rich phenomenological descriptions of their lived experiences. The
participants were allowed to define *gender nonbinary* in the way in which it resonated for them rather than an imposed definition from me. This aligned with IPA’s phenomenological goal of allowing participants to share their experience on their own terms. (See Chapter 2 for sample descriptions of *gender nonbinary*, a discussion of the lack of one agreed-upon definition, and competing terms such as *genderqueer* and *gender diverse*.)

The hermeneutical approach provided for making sense of both the participants’ individual experience as well as an analysis of the convergences and divergences within each dataset and across participants. The hermeneutic circle provided a framework that reminded me as researcher to continually do the back and forth between parts and whole, as neither can be understood without the other. This included continually returning to the raw data, the words of the participants, when developing themes and clusters for individuals and later the group. The double hermeneutic concept of the researcher making sense of the participants making sense (interpreting) their experience rang especially true for this project and the phenomenon under study.

The third theoretical underpinning is idiography. The very individual approach and commitment to detail seems especially appropriate for persons who identify as gender nonbinary. The representatives of this population have few public examples and are without the defined role expectations of the hegemonic binary. The definition of gender nonbinary might be imagined as a *nondefinition*; the category is without rules other than to not adhere to hegemonic traditional gender binary categories. Through my analysis and interpretation, I came to the conclusion that being gender nonbinary means to be free to express gender in whatever way fits you. How it relates to another person
who is gender nonbinary is unimportant. This certainly qualifies as an idiographic status.

Smith and Osborn (2008) discussed the appropriateness of IPA when the goal of the study is to discover how participants are making sense of their personal and social world. Smith and Osborn (2015) noted that “IPA is especially valuable when examining topics which are complex, ambiguous and emotionally laden” (p. 41). These are descriptors fitting for the gender nonbinary phenomenon. Gender nonbinary persons are acutely aware of their immersion in a world that must at times seem quite alien—or leave them feeling so. Society and culture appear ill prepared for the needed expansion of the concept of gender. This complex issue, in part due to its ambiguity or lack of comprehension, is certainly emotionally laden. Writing about the use of IPA for a study on infertility, Todorova’s (2011) comments apply equally to the selection of IPA for the study of gender nonbinary persons:

We are drawn to qualitative research precisely because it allows a valuing of agentic individual subjectivities and voices otherwise ignored or silenced. We are drawn specifically to IPA because it urges us to listen and understand these voices for what they are, collaboratively with researcher and participant. It urges us to “trust” the responses of our participant (through interpretation), rather than deconstructing their language or relegating them to the performative. (p. 37)

I believe that IPA is particularly appropriate for research performed by persons in the counseling field and related educational arenas. As an instructor for the basic skills course for counselors in training, I have been struck over and over by the similarities between what counselors are taught and the IPA approach to interviewing including consideration of the interview responses and content. Counseling can easily consider the
same underpinnings of phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography. Counselors look to learn of the life experience and meaning making of their clients. Hermeneutics or interpretation of what clients share with counselors is important; continually tying that interpretation back to the specific words of the client and avoiding outside interpretations is critical. The hermeneutics of empathy and questioning also relate. Empathy is perhaps the most important attitude of a counselor; the ability to put oneself in the place of another and have understanding of their experience. Questioning what is said by clients is important as well, whether it is an internal questioning of the meaning of the client’s words or a direct compassionate challenging of the client to help them gain a better perspective or experience growth. The concept of fore-conceptions in hermeneutics is crucial for counselors and is a large aspect of training. Just as in IPA, counselors recognize that they have preconceptions and biases; the goal is to gain awareness and address the fore-conceptions in such a way as to not negatively affect clients. The dynamic nature of fore-conceptions, including how statements by an interviewee may uncover unexpected fore-conceptions held by the interviewer or even substantially modify those fore-conceptions fits both research and counseling settings. Idiography or the consideration of the particular and the individual as well as a recognition and appreciation for the uniqueness of each person—including their specific context—serves both counselor and researcher well.

Likewise, basic interviewing skills are shared between research and counseling. Open-ended questions that allow and encourage broad responses and even new unexpected directions fit in either context. Follow-up probes as simple as facial expressions or single words or more expanded in the form of questions are appropriate in
encouraging more input from the interviewee. In both cases, the desire is to develop rapport so the interviewee feels a sense of safety in sharing as deeply as possible.

On the other hand, there are differences that researchers who are also counselors must keep in mind. A researcher is not a mental health clinician—or at least is not in that role when in the research setting. For some researchers this could be a problematic differentiation to keep in mind and maintain (Giorgi, 2010). While both the researcher and the counselor may have interpretative thoughts during the interview, in the researcher role, those should be kept to themselves to apply during the analysis stage of working with the data. The counselor, on the other hand, will likely propose their interpretative responses to the client at the appropriate time and in a tentative manner for the client’s consideration. Counselor and client may use such observations to work toward their therapeutic goals in a way inappropriate for a research interviewer. Just as with developing the skills for handling fore-conceptions in each endeavor, researchers and counselors—or those who perform in each of the roles—must display skills in demonstrating the proper approach according to the setting.

**Target Phenomenon and Participants**

**Phenomenon**

The phenomenon of this study is the experience of living as a person who identifies as gender nonbinary. I examined the phenomenon by exploring how my participants, who identify as gender nonbinary, understand, interpret, or make sense of their experience. As described from the literature reviewed (see Chapter 2), gender nonbinary persons do not identify with the strict gender binary as traditionally defined and overwhelmingly accepted throughout American society.
Participants

The primary inclusion criterion for participants is that they self-identify as gender nonbinary by their definition (in addition to the discussion above, see Chapter 2 for sample descriptions of gender nonbinary). I did not impose a definition but rather allowed potential participants to respond to the request for “gender nonbinary” in the recruitment flier; participants then spoke to their understanding of gender nonbinary and, if applicable, provided other terms they use.

Other inclusion criteria for participants: (a) 22 to 32 years of age inclusively; (b) self-identified as Hispanic or Latinx (again by their definition); and (c) currently residing in New Mexico. Judged by their response to the recruitment flier and my initial interaction with them: (a) willingness and openness, to express aspects of their gender-related experience (Smith et al., 2009); (b) English language skills sufficient for meaningful communication with me as an English-only researcher and to avoid the need for translation with its inherent issues; (c) apparent cognitive functioning sufficient for full and meaningful participation in the study; and (d) willingness and availability to fulfill the commitments asked of the study participants (i.e., participation in an online video interview). The primary exclusionary criterion was prior interaction with the researcher (me) or the IRB-required primary investigator, my dissertation committee chair. This precluded current or former counseling clients, students, colleagues, acquaintances, or friends of either the chair or me. I have no awareness if any of the participants knew each other; no comments on the part of any participant would indicate they had awareness of another participant.

IPA guidelines (Smith et al., 2009) strongly recommend “reasonably”
homogeneous study participants. The hope is for the phenomenon being explored to be clearly seen on its own with divergence between participants indicating a range of experiences or expressions of the phenomenon rather than due to unrelated participant attributes.

Age was a criterion for selection of participants, with the request that participants fall within the range of 22 to 32 years. The ages of the four study participants were 31, 27, 32, and 28 (Participants One, Two, Three, and Four, respectively), which reduced the age range and increased the homogeneity of the sample. This also resulted in the participants all falling within the so-called millennial generation; during 2020, millennials ranged in age from 24 to 39 per the Pew Research Center (Dimock, 2019).

The recruitment flier requested participants be New Mexico residents. The four participants reported residing in the Albuquerque metropolitan area for a minimum of eight years. Two participants (P-Two and P-Three) had lived their entire lives in Albuquerque; the other two had lived the majority of their lives in New Mexico. The fully Hispanic/Latinx group allowed the study’s results to respond to the identified need for knowledge about the intersection of gender nonbinary and Persons of Color identities. The shared Albuquerque metro residency furthered the homogeneity of the group as urban New Mexico residents.

I did not request that my participants share with me their gender assigned at birth as I feared it could damage the needed rapport between researcher and interviewee by appearing inappropriately focused on a specific past assumption based on physical attributes. As noted in Chapter 2, one of the eight participants of Taylor et al.’s study (2019) objected to being asked their gender assigned at birth. Also reported in Chapter 2,
30% of the teens to age 29 group of the Yeadon-Lee (2016) sample did not reveal gender assigned at birth. Rimes et al. (2019) did find substantial differences between those who were female assigned at birth as opposed to those who were male assigned at birth. Such a comparison was not a goal for my study. Each of my four participants did reveal their assigned gender as an aspect of describing their experience.

IPA guidelines suggest a small number of purposively selected participants (e.g., Smith & Osborn, 2008; Smith et al., 2009). Smith et al. (2009) noted, “In effect, it is more problematic to try to meet IPA’s commitments with a sample which is ‘too large’, than with one that is ‘too small’” (p. 51). Also,

It is important not to see the higher numbers as being indicative of “better” work, however. Successful analysis requires time, reflection and dialogue [between researcher and data], and larger datasets tend to inhibit all of these things, especially amongst less experienced qualitative researchers. (Smith et al., 2009, p. 52)

Reid et al. (2011) suggested that “less is more” when there is an idiographic focus. Hefferon and Gil-Rodriguez (2011) noted that “Students consistently appear to experience pressure to include too many participants, seemingly in order to placate research boards and supervisors in line with the quantitative monopoly within academic research. This necessarily deemphasises IPA’s commitment to idiography” (p. 756). The writers went on to advise, “fewer participants in the sample; fewer questions in the interview schedule, and fewer superordinate and subordinate themes in the analysis” (p. 758).

IPA guidelines (Smith & Osborn, 2008; Smith et al., 2009) discuss the objective
to present a very detailed idiographic account of each of the participants, including both the descriptive and interpretative phenomenological approaches. In both Smith et al. (2009) and Smith (2011a), differing guidelines were to be applied according to the number of participants. With small sample sizes \( n = 1–3 \), the write-up is expected to include detailed individual accounts through extracted quotes from the datasets of each participant for each theme or superordinate theme presented in the write-up (Smith, 2011a). When the number of participants increases \( n = 4–8 \), the style and inclusiveness of the write-up are to change; not every participant is noted as converging or diverging from the specific theme and examples from just three of the participants are expected. My study proposal was approved for the small sample size \( n = 1–3 \) as based on the IPA guidelines (Smith & Osborn, 2008; Smith et al., 2009).

In this study, I conducted four interviews. Recruitment resulted in seven initial responses. One did not meet criteria (was not Hispanic/Latinx). Two did not acknowledge my first reply to their responses nor a second. Four (P-One, P-Two, P-Three, P-Four) did online video interviews. P-Three had a very poor internet connection resulting in multiple interruptions. Additionally, the interview was abruptly ended when their child awakened. The time spent in the P-Three interview was about half that with other interviewees and did not allow for finishing the secondary prompts nor time for additional thoughts at the end (as was the case with the other three interviews). The data gathered from the P-Three interview, however, was rich and aligned with two of the three identified superordinate themes. There was no consideration at the proposal stage nor suggestions in the IPA guidelines literature for removing data due to being incomplete.

Considering the circumstances, the small sample size \( n = 1–3 \) expectation of
including extracted quotes from the datasets of each participant for each superordinate theme presented (Smith, 2011a) was followed, with all four participants included in two of the three superordinate themes. For the second superordinate theme, three participants (P-One, P-Two, P-Four) were included. As the topic of the second superordinate theme did not arise during the shorter P-Three interview, it did not seem appropriate to suggest either convergence or divergence on behalf of P-Three for that theme. Data from P-One, P-Two, and P-Four are used for Superordinate Theme 2.

**Procedures**

**Participant Recruitment**

As outlined in IPA guidelines (Smith & Osborn, 2008; Smith et al., 2009), selection of participants is purposive toward ensuring experience with the target phenomenon. Additionally, IPA guidelines call for a reasonably homogeneous sample (Smith et al., 2009). The group of participants for this study exceeded the homogeneity expected from the stated criteria of the flier (see Appendix A) in both age and residency. Participants would have been accepted in the 22 to 32 age range; in fact, the participants range in age from 27 to 32. Criteria called for residency within New Mexico; in fact, the participants all reported Albuquerque metro residency, the least number of years being eight.

The study took place during 2020, a year of historic social disruption due to the global COVID-19 pandemic. The initial plan approved by the University of New Mexico IRB was focused on recruitment using physical posting of the flier on campus as well as requesting the assistance of various resource centers in publicizing the study by sharing the digital flier through their social media. Due to the pandemic and restrictions in place
by the university as well as the state (closing the campus), the IRB application was modified in relation to disseminating the recruitment flier. Under the new plan, the flier was distributed through the master’s and PhD student listservs of the university’s counselor education program, of which I am a student. Recipients, which included program faculty, were asked to share the flier as broadly as possible via social media or other means. Students reported having shared the flier on personal social media, and I am aware that the flier was posted on the social media of resource centers. Participants were not asked to report how or where they became aware of the study.

**Participant Selection**

The flier (see Appendix A) included an email address and phone number (for voice or text) to be used by potential participants to make confidential contact with me. Seven potential participants made contact; three via text message and four via email. After an initial exchange via text, one of the potential participants switched to email to allow me to provide the informed consent form (see Appendix B). The other two potential participants who made contact via text message did not become participants. Upon my confirmation of criteria, one stated that they were not Hispanic/Latinx. I sent two replies to the other potential participant who made text contact and received no response; I did not attempt further contact. Three of the four potential participants who made initial contact through email became participants. The fourth did not respond to the two replies I sent.

The four participants were chosen based on reported adherence to the four study criteria: identifying as gender nonbinary (by their definition), identifying as Hispanic or Latinx (by their definition), residing in New Mexico, and fitting within the specified age
range. They further agreed to an online interview and the other aspects of the provided informed consent form and were enrolled for the study. No potential participant who met the criteria was excluded from the study. There was no attrition among the participants; all took part in an interview with no requests to drop out. As noted previously, the interview with P-Three was cut short and abruptly ended.

Data Gathering

Individual semistructured interview is the primary data-gathering method recommended for IPA (Smith & Osborn, 2008; Smith et al., 2009) and was my chosen method for this study. The recruitment flier and the informed consent requested an interview of up to 90 minutes. Three interviews made use of most of the requested time. One interview (P-Three) was approximately half the length of the other interviews due to technical difficulties and an interruption on the participant’s side. Rich and meaningful data was nevertheless gathered during the briefer interview and is part of the study.

Smith et al. (2009) suggested that interviews take place in a setting comfortable for the participant, including the possibility of their home. The authors also noted, however, the need for the setting to provide privacy, quiet, and lack of interruptions. Due to the pandemic, interviews took place online using the HIPAA-compliant doxy.me platform. I was able to ensure privacy, quiet, and lack of interruptions at my end by conducting the interviews from my home where no one else resides. I requested that participants choose a time and setting that provided the same situation. Three interviews took place without interruption except for various technical difficulties. The fourth interview (P-Three), experienced extensive technical difficulties in maintaining connection as well as a young child at the participant’s home awakening earlier than
expected abruptly ending the interview.

Each interview began with my asking whether the participant had read and understood the provided informed consent form. No participant had any questions, but I nevertheless reviewed aspects of the form including that no names or signatures were being requested (as per IRB approval). As stated in the informed consent form (see Appendix B), by continuing with the interview, the participant was providing consent. At that point, the audio recording devices were turned on. With the interview being recorded, I reiterated and emphasized that participants could redirect the conversation or end it at any time.

I next asked for information regarding their New Mexico residency, which is included in the results chapter. I requested their pronouns as well as terms they use for their gender identity instead of or in addition to gender nonbinary. I explained to each participant that I was not requesting any further demographic information but offered them the opportunity to provide me other information they felt was important. No participant added anything at that time.

At that point in each interview, I read the primary prompt: “In whatever way you’d like, please tell me about your experience as someone who is gender nonbinary.” The interviews differed in the degree to which or when I interjected additional prompts as either follow up or to ensure inclusion of the prompt topics (see Appendix C for IRB-approved primary and secondary prompts). I attempted to use prompts to encourage the participants to continue describing their experience in their own words and terms. As per the guidance of Smith et al. (2009), the prompts or interview schedule was the result of contemplation and preparation as well as review (see below for description of committee
members who served as reviewers) to be prepared for raising challenging or sensitive topics. Smith et al. (2009) also encouraged in-the-moment modification of the interview schedule, which was described as a “loose agenda,” to best fit the particular participant. For the most part, during the interviews in this study, I adjusted the order of the prompts so as to follow the topics raised by the participants. Due to the shortened interview time with P-Three, that one interview did not directly touch on all prompt topics. This is further discussed in the results section.

My dissertation committee members, through their expertise and experience, provided the review and approval of my data gathering plan and the content of my interview schedule (subsequently approved by IRB as well). Adjustments were made through multiple interactions with the various members. Acknowledging and respecting each other’s areas of knowledge, they did not recommend that I seek further review.

My chair and two other committee members brought not only decades of counselor education experience but decades of clinical work as well. My chair provided her extensive experience as a counselor educator and chair of multiple dissertations with her training as a counseling psychologist and researcher. She held me to the strictest research procedures and ethical guidelines while also encouraging creativity and supporting my study goals. She likewise guided and supported my navigation of IRB approval including the revised application due to pandemic adjustments. Another committee member has extensively published research related to LGBTQ and other topics. He has wide experience in national counseling organizations related to LGBTQ as well as counselor education and supervision. His expertise and experience were invaluable preparing this study. Another member’s vast clinical experience includes a
strong representation of clients exploring their gender identities and related concerns. She heads a group practice with multiple colleagues and supervisees also working with gender-related issues. Her own research includes LGBTQ topics. My methodology-focused committee member brought extensive academic experience and expertise with qualitative research both in her own agenda and in years of teaching various qualitative methodologies, including IPA. She in particular emphasized and supported the careful planning of the interviews, thoroughly contemplating the content of interview questions and prompts. Her years serving on the university’s IRB added to her valuable participation. The fifth committee member provided a point of view from outside the college of education from the university’s clinical psychology department and its decidedly quantitative research approach. This alternative perspective challenged me to be as clear as possible in describing my methodology and to offer support for my findings. I have been extremely fortunate to have the support and guidance of each committee member throughout this process.

Although completely deidentified from the outset with no names gathered or recorded, all digital data (audio files and subsequent transcript files) have been stored in encrypted folders on password protected devices for two levels of protection. No paper material has been gathered from the participants or otherwise produced. IRB-approved consent allows for the deidentified information to be used in future research or to be shared with other researchers without additional consent. If after a minimum of five years, no further use of or need for the data is foreseen, electronic files may be deleted.

**Data Analysis**

The developers of IPA have not prescribed procedures but rather provided useful
guidelines for data analysis and interpretation (Smith & Osborn, 2008; Smith et al., 2009). That said, Smith et al. (2009) do provide a step-by-step format that researchers may follow, although the guidelines are intended to be used in an iterative “back and forth” approach as discussed earlier in this chapter. I have followed the format for this study, including the iterative aspect, and found it to be very productive.

While the IPA guidelines do not specify that the researcher produces the transcripts, I chose to do so. This served as the first rounds of carefully and repeatedly listening to the recordings and immersing myself in the data in the personal process described by Smith and Osborn (2008). I prepared the transcripts using the oTranscribe website then transferred the text to Microsoft Word for formatting with wide left and right margins. Transcription was at the “semantic level,” including all spoken words along with such aspects as pauses and laughter (Smith & Osborn, 2008; Smith et al., 2009).

Deidentification of data began with the interviews. I did not use any participant’s name during the recorded sessions. Three participants, however, discussed their nicknames or alternate names and were recorded doing so. Their surnames were not mentioned. I named all recording files with participant numbers and in the transcripts, I replaced the nicknames or alternate names with “name” or “XXX.”

Following transcription, I continued to adhere to the steps delineated by Smith et al. (2009): (1) reading and rereading, (2) initial noting, (3) developing themes, (4) searching for connections across themes, (5) moving to the next participant, and (6) comparing cases. Each participant’s dataset was thoroughly processed before moving on to the next of the four participants (Smith et al., 2009).
I resaved the Microsoft Word files of the transcripts as PDF files for use in the GoodNotes app on an iPad. GoodNotes allowed for easy use of multiple colors for both notations and highlighting. Working line by line, I used the large left margin to note any thoughts I had about the content during my reading and rereading. Following the inductive approach, I brought no prepared list of themes to the first or subsequent transcripts. Smith et al. (2009): “This initial level of analysis is the most detailed and time consuming. This step examines semantic content and language use on a very exploratory level. The analyst maintains an open mind and notes anything of interest within the transcript” (p. 83).

Following IPA guidelines for initial passes of the transcripts, I set aside any concern about working with units of text or attempting to identify themes (Smith et al., 2009). Smith et al. (2009) suggested these early comments should comprise these categories: descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual. The first category speaks to the descriptive phenomenological aspect of IPA and consists of basic face-value notations. Linguistic comments attend to the use of language as well as the way in which speech is presented. Finally, the conceptual comments most closely relate to the interpretative aspects of IPA. These may be questions posed regarding suspected deeper meanings of passages of the transcript. Such comments are representative of the suggested dialog between researcher and data (Smith et al., 2009). I found that I included all three types of comments as a natural outcome of the multiple readings of the transcripts.

Continued work with the transcripts of each participant included passes looking specifically for potential quotes to be used in the write-up, which I bracketed in a specific color. During another pass, I used a distinct highlight color to identify words or phrases
used by participants to be explored during analysis. IPA encourages examining language in a more practical sense as compared to discourse analysis.

After completing these multiple readings, I reviewed the initial left-column comments for emerging themes (Smith et al., 2009); IPA guidelines seldom use the term coding. Thoughts regarding themes were placed in the wide right margin. IPA’s iterative and inductive character plays out during these stages; the process is not linear (Smith et al., 2009). Therefore, my reviewing the initial notations (left column) included looking at both the notations and the corresponding raw text from line to line and page to page. Smith et al. (2009) discussed the hermeneutic circle. This is the cycling through the data focusing on the parts (words, phrases, sentences) and then the whole (the entirety of the participant’s dataset and later all of the participants’ data), only to again return to the parts, allowing parts to inform whole and whole to inform parts.

In reality, analysis is an iterative process of fluid description and engagement with the transcript. It involves flexible thinking, processes of reduction, expansion, revision, creativity and innovation. Overall, the analytic process is multi-directional; there is a constant shift between different analytic processes. As such, analysis is open to change and it is only ‘fixed’ through the act of writing up. (Smith et al., 2009, p. 81)

The hermeneutic circle process occurred more naturally than one might imagine, as the number of times listening to the recordings as well as the multiple careful passes through the transcript resulted in an immersion into the data, one participant at a time. This allowed me to at once recall particular words or phrases, while also developing an increasing sense of the full dataset.
I further developed themes by assigning titles to the themes when typing them in chronological order in a new Microsoft Word file for each transcript (Smith et al., 2009). I duplicated the list within the file and used Word to sort the chronological list to group theme occurrences. Again, using GoodNotes on the iPad and a PDF of the theme list for each participant, theme groups or *clusters* began to appear. The use of Microsoft Word and GoodNotes allowed the entire process to remain digital, with no paper to be tracked or stored.

The most prominent clusters of themes became *superordinate themes* (Smith et al., 2009) within the dataset of each participant. I rechecked the superordinate themes against the transcript for accuracy in the IPA iterative manner and hermeneutic circle. IPA guidelines (Smith & Osborn, 2008; Smith et al., 2009) emphasized that inclusion of themes should not be based solely on frequency but may relate to their richness. A single instance of a concept may hold such strength of emotion or in some other manner be striking and will remain as a theme for the participant. Smith (2011b; 2017) referred to such “singular utterances” as *gems*. Additionally, themes that do not appear to be of sufficient importance to survive the clustering may be viewed differently once the themes from the other participants have been identified.

Upon completion of the first participant’s data analysis, including identifying themes and superordinate themes, I began work on that of the second. As recommended by Smith and Osborn (2008), I did not carry over themes but tried to look at the new dataset with fresh eyes. This required an additional level of bracketing of fore-conceptions, as new fore-conceptions were created by the interviews with participants and the corresponding data analysis (Smith et al., 2009). Concentrating on and immersing
myself into each subsequent dataset through repetition as outlined above, allowed me to identify the new themes emerging from each transcript.

The iterative nature of IPA applied again once I had completed the data analyses for all four participants, looking back over each participant’s raw data to consider it anew in light of themes or superordinate themes that emerged from later participants’ transcripts (Smith et al., 2009). This was the first aspect of the cross-participant analysis identifying overall superordinate themes and convergence and divergence across the group. The hermeneutic circle took on a new level of meaning as the whole now included all four participants while still concerned with the parts in the form of individual participants’ specific words, phrases, and full dataset. Smith et al. (2009) wrote of the importance of deep interpretative analysis at this stage and cautioned against being “too descriptive” at the cost of IPA-appropriate interpretation. Hefferon and Gil-Rodriguez (2011) wrote of the developing popularity of IPA studies but went on to dispute the value of many, being especially critical of studies that purport to be IPA but are primarily descriptive.

Many qualitative research methodologies include some form of member checking. Within IPA guidelines (e.g., Smith & Osborn, 2008; Smith et al., 2009; as well as the many other articles by Smith and other IPA proponents), data checking with participants was not mentioned. Smith et al. (2009) is regarded as the handbook of IPA research and provided detailed steps, as previously discussed. Based on this careful review of IPA guidelines, my contact with the four participants was limited to the single interview session. I did not ask my participants to review transcripts or the results of my analysis and interpretation. McConnell-Henry, Chapman, and Francis (2011) addressed the
question of member checking in the broader field of Heideggerian phenomenology, of which IPA is representative. Their conclusion was that member checking is redundant and should not be used to evaluate the rigor present in interpretative research.

McConnell-Henry et al. (2011) pointed to Taylor’s (1995) discussion of Heideggerian hermeneutics in which the researcher is an integral part of the research. Additionally, Heideggerian research can only consider the participants’ experience of the phenomenon being researched through their articulation (Taylor, 1995). McConnell-Henry et al. (2011) discussed Heidegger’s focus on context, including time and space. As there is no one truth in matters of experience and especially meaning making, there is no need to prove the correctness of the data gathered. Member checking would reposition the context from the interview to the context in which the participant reviewed the data, including a time postinterview during which the participant was affected by the interview and the intervening contemplation that may have occurred. I especially appreciate McConnell-Henry et al.’s (2011) stating that “It is not the participant’s role to interpret the experiences” (p. 33). This recalls IPA’s concept of the double hermeneutic in which the participant has in fact already applied their interpretative skills to their experiences; the researcher then interprets the participants’ interpretations. A return to the participant would be without merit and likely have a negative impact.

I followed the idea of the double hermeneutic as described in the guidelines for IPA (Smith and Osborn, 2008; Smith et al., 2009): participants were making meaning of and interpreting their experiences—for this study, experiences of identifying as gender nonbinary—which I have then made meaning of and interpreted. In fact, Smith et al. (2009) identified a third hermeneutic level: the eventual reader. That anticipated
consumer of the study’s report will apply yet another level of meaning making and
interpretation: making meaning of my making meaning of the participants’ making
meaning of their experience as identifying as gender nonbinary. This write-up of the
study will be evaluated by readers, who will decide whether I have presented a
sufficiently clear and transparent statement of the data collected and the interpretations at
which I have arrived. Each reader will then conclude whether the write-up provides
content useful to their circumstances.

**Study Report**

It is clearly noted in IPA guidelines (e.g., Smith & Osborn, 2008; Smith et al.,
2009) to separate data gathering from analysis, but that the writing stage is an opportunity
to continue analysis. This certainly was the case for me. IPA guidelines call for the write-
up to be in narrative form, “illustrated and nuanced . . . [and] interspersed with verbatim
extracts from the transcripts” (Smith & Osborn, 2008, p. 76). The distinction between
data and interpretation must be readily apparent to the report reader. I have tried to
achieve this with a generous inclusion of direct quotes from the rich data gathered,
clearly distinguished from my own reflective and interpretative statements.

Smith et al. (2009) described two potential presentations of themes and supporting
data in the write-up. *Case within theme* consists of taking each major theme in turn and
providing data examples from each participant. *Theme within case* instead looks at each
participant in turn, presenting the themes pertinent to the participant. The data and
identified superordinate themes that emerged from this study lent themselves best to a
case within theme approach. The three superordinate themes are presented with data
examples from the participants. As previously noted, all four participants’ data are
presented for the first and third superordinate themes; there is no P-Three data for the second superordinate theme.

Within subsections under the first superordinate theme, which is related to the path toward realization of gender identity, each participant’s life and journey of realization is described in detail. This approach is true to both IPA’s phenomenology and idiography and provides the reader with knowledge and understanding of each participant. The subsequent sections exploring the second and third superordinate themes interweave clearly identified evidence from the participants rather than separating the participants’ data into subsections.

I have followed the structure of results chapter and subsequent discussion chapter as suggested by Smith and Osborn (2008). This allowed me to give full attention to the superordinate themes with illustrative quotes and interpretative analysis in the results chapter separate from the discussion chapter, which examines an even broader interpretation through comparison with related literature. Smith et al. (2009) suggested,

This engagement with the literature should be selective not exhaustive. There will be a large number of literatures, and then texts within each literature, that you could connect your work to. You need to select some of that which is particularly resonant. (p. 113)

In the discussion section, I also present my evaluation of the study including the value of the knowledge gained; how that knowledge might inform practice; identified delimitations, strengths, and limitations; and implications for future research. Smith (2011a) provided a clearly delineated quality evaluation guide for assessing IPA research reports noting an IPA paper should present a clear focus, strong data, evidence of rigor,
each theme in sufficient detail, clear interpretation and not simply description, and convergence and divergence within the data of each participant and across participants. Additionally, the report is to be carefully written to engage the reader. These guidelines informed my planning, design, implementation, and evaluation of this study culminating in this report.

Finally, in line with Smith et al.’s (2009) third hermeneutic level—the eventual reader—my chair and other committee members take on the role of first readers. The committee members will evaluate the report and determine whether I have presented a clear and transparent statement of the data collected and the interpretations I put forward.

**Means of Data Gathering**

**Role of Researcher**

With any qualitative methodology, the researcher is seen as the primary instrument of data gathering (Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Turato, 2005; Brodsky, 2012). Pezalla, Pettigrew, and Miller-Day (2012) explored the particular influence that interviewers might bring to research situations finding that an interviewer’s style or characteristics might affect the data gathered. Even more so, it would seem, within IPA’s interpretative approach, the individuality and the positionality of the researcher takes on greater importance. The person of the researcher is embraced in IPA. What is critical, however, is that IPA researchers possess self-awareness concerning their theoretical stance and positionality.

**Researcher’s Theoretical Stance**

My approach to this project—as well as my worldview—could best be described as “both/neither,” a term used by metamodernism and transgender theory writers...
(Yousef, 2017; Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2010). There are multiple areas in which I cannot fully embrace one dominant approach or the other. Therefore, both/neither. This is seeing the value in both (or several) approaches while fully endorsing neither. It proved particularly helpful in the topic of this research.

The both/neither approach, I believe, promotes the idea of freedom. I came to the realization that self-describing as queer included a sense of freedom to be me as opposed to embracing a particular term that brings with it many preconceptions or even limitations. Likewise, I see queer as freeing me to not need to follow anyone’s definitions. This sense of freedom showed up in various publications and responses to the idea of gender nonbinary. As I suggest in more than one discussion within this dissertation, identifying as gender nonbinary removes the rules or expectations of the hegemonic gender roles so ubiquitous and demanding. Several reviewed publications spoke of freedom as related to being gender nonbinary (e.g., Rider et al., 2019; Bradford et al., 2019).

This is not to suggest a rudderless approach to this research. I was gratified to become more familiar with metamodernism as well as transgender theory. As described below, these approaches allow for the both/neither or between approach that feels appropriate for me as well as for this research.

Metamodernism is not only the chronological successor to modernism and postmodernism but combines aspects of the two (Baciu et al., 2015; Abramson, 2017; Kadagishvili, 2013). According to Yousef (2017), metamodernism encompasses a “both-neither” dynamic of modernism and postmodernism. While accepting the constructed individual reality of postmodernism, the shared reality of a powerful and prejudicial
society fits more into modernism (Baciu et al., 2015). The hopeful aspect of
metamodernism does not adopt the extreme positivity of modernism nor the pessimism
and limitations of postmodernism; instead, metamodernism allows for a more affirming
approach (Yousef, 2017). Metamodernism moves from the dialecticism of
postmodernism to a dialogical interaction appropriate for participant-researcher
interactions as well as IPA’s interpretative stage of the data analysis (Abramson, 2017;
Abramson, 2014). Likewise, and fitting of IPA’s idiographic approach, metamodernism
looks at each situation anew (Gardner, 2016), with “a kind of informed naivety, a
pragmatic idealism” (Vermeulen & van den Akker, 2010, para. 17).

Nagoshi and Brzuzy (2010) laid out a description of transgender theory that
included contrasts to both feminist theory and queer theory. The authors described
transgender theory as a means to understand the lived experiences of trans individuals.
Transgender theory came out of feminist and queer theories, and Nagoshi and Brzuzy
suggested it offers reconciliation for the two older theories. They stated that feminist
theory maintains an essentialist approach that includes the fixed binary concept of
gender, which impedes looking at intersecting issues. While praising queer theory’s
contribution to the understanding of nonheteronormative gender identity, Nagoshi and
Brzuzy suggested queer theory’s constructivism as rebelling against essentialism and
therefore feminist theory, even as queer theory came out of feminist theory and
deconstructivism.

Nagoshi and Brzuzy (2010) proposed that transgender theory moves beyond
essentialism and constructivism and therefore challenges both of the older theories.
Nagoshi and Brzuzy referenced Roen’s (2001) concept of transgenderism moving
beyond “either/or” to “both/neither” and likewise beyond the male/female concept of
gender. Additionally, transgender theory brings the embodiment aspect that addresses
social expectations and lived experiences as well as challenging the mind-body dualism
of Western societies while still allowing for constructivist aspects. Nagaoshi and Brzuzy
suggested three sources for a person’s identity: (1) the embodied self, (2) the self-
constructed aspect of self, and (3) the socially constructed aspect of self. The autonomous
self must integrate these three sources. Elliot (2010) likewise looked at the conflicts and
interactions of feminist theory, queer theory, and transgender theory in their multichapter
book. Elliot maintained that transgender theory does not require leaving behind all
aspects of feminist theory or queer theory, but that the diversity of trans persons may
inform both feminist and queer theories to bring them to a more inclusive level.

Further exploring the both/neither sense of my approach, epistemologically, I
inductively sought both descriptive knowledge—of four gender nonbinary individuals—
as well as made use of the collective knowledge gained to seek a deeper understanding of
the phenomenon through interpretation. Ontologically, I did not seek a cause or
explanation of how a person identifies regarding gender but instead accepted the diversity
of identifications between and including the traditional concepts of male and female. At
the same time, a more materialistic ontology was adopted that recognizes the power and
politics that so strongly affect the life experiences of the participants, including the
traditional views frequently held within New Mexico and experienced by the participants.

In my estimation, my theoretical stance corresponds well to the philosophical
underpinnings of IPA. IPA’s combining of phenomenology, hermeneutics, and
idiography fit with metamodernism and transgender theory as well as my epistemological
and ontological approaches. I see myself as having gathered information about my participants’ meaning making but also acknowledge that at the same time, I acted as cocreator of the data by the questions I asked, the reactions I gave, and my very presence in the interview. Contextual factors, both personally for each participant (and myself) and society-wide concerning gender issues, were raised by participants and considered by me throughout the study. They affected what the participants chose to share—and how—as well as how I heard and processed the responses. Further, as interpretation is an extremely important aspect of the study, I take responsibility as author of the conclusions drawn from the raw data for each individual as well as combined across participants. I have provided as much transparency and evidence as possible to back my assertions.

**Researcher’s Positionality Related to the Study**

I identify as a professional counselor, college instructor, doctoral candidate, and queer researcher. As a counselor, I embrace an empathic and curious role—desiring to learn about another individual from a caring inclination. This is in line with IPA’s double hermeneutic of empathy and questioning. The awareness that I can never completely know my client, but that I can be empathic, nonjudgmental, and curious about that individual’s life experience is how I approach my clinical work as well as what I teach counselors-in-training. Likewise, as a counselor, I must have awareness of who I am and what I bring to the encounter. I seek to prevent my values, experiences, beliefs, and emotions from overly influencing the client. At the same time I acknowledge I can never totally disconnect from those aspects of myself nor may I choose to, especially as I strive to be an authentic other with whom clients may interact.

A counselor brings more to the therapeutic relationship than simply listening or
gathering information. My counseling theoretical approach is guided by Michael Mahoney’s particular take on constructivism (Mahoney, 2000; Mahoney & Granvold, 2005), in which the clinician is performing a role similar to that of IPA interpretation: to guide the work and take the meaning to a deeper level. Quite often, this interpretative work with a counseling client contributes to the individual’s self-understanding in a way not previously considered or realized. This is how I see the IPA researcher’s interpretative role. The point of view and perspective of a person separate from the experience may well bring insight beyond that of the individual within the situation. At the same time, all findings must link back to raw data (words and phrases) provided by the participants.

Regarding my queer identity, my affinity for the term is in part due to the way in which I see **queer** as synonymous to **unique** or **true to yourself** regardless of what others may think. There is freedom and a celebratory aspect to the term related to an attitude that what others consider **right or wrong** need not be of concern. I long for a day that everyone celebrates their own **queerness** because in so doing each person will have achieved a comfort and acceptance of their uniqueness.

My presentation is that of a cisgender male. It was at least in part learned due to mistreatment for appearing and behaving in a less than masculine manner at a young age. Early on I realized that I needed to hide my play with toys designated for girls to avoid ridicule and rejection. I cannot discern the degree to which my current presentation is due to policing my behavior to gain acceptance. Is feeling that my presentation is natural for me accurate or simply the result of lifelong roleplaying that is now second nature? And can there be a difference at this point?
Regardless, my gender issues have been about the strictness of the hypermasculine expectations for male-identified individuals as opposed to feeling a need to change my presentation to better fit my identity. I have never had the experience my participants described of coming to the realization that the gender identity that was assumed appropriate at birth was incorrect or at least not complete. I did not need to become aware of a nonbinary identity or construct it for myself. I did not have to achieve an internal understanding of not identifying with the gender binary nor then to need to share that information with others. Additionally, I do not share the age bracket or generation of my participants nor their ethnic identity. I relied on my openness, curiosity, cultural humility, and respect for others to allow meaningful interactions with my participants just as I do with my clients and my students.

I have, throughout my life, experienced the somewhat paradoxical situation of presenting as a White cisgender male—categories of extreme privilege—while also identifying with the oppressed category of queer and perhaps to some degree a sense of being an imposter regarding the masculine expectations of American males. I also have experienced negative preconceptions regarding my experience with depression, an eating disorder, and age. I have experienced rejection and an outsider status in some contexts, as well as the need to learn how to navigate an unaccepting world—especially regarding the continued and omnipresent heteronormative dominant culture. I acknowledge that the nonprivileged identities I hold do not experience the same level of abusive response of many other minority statuses related to gender, race, ethnicity, income status, or place of birth—to name a few. Certainly, my privileged identities have afforded me many protections—likely beyond my comprehension. I hope and believe my experiences have
increased my empathy for others, especially those dealing with mistreatment due to their identities. I strive to use the privilege I receive to advocate for anyone dealing with systemic oppression.

An aspect of my positionality is my strong desire to see societal change from the strictly defined gender binary toward the goal of every individual experiencing acceptance and understanding for however they may identify regarding gender and regardless of assumptions made at their birth. I believe such an eventual situation could free the majority of people of all ages from wasting energy and resources in trying to meet societal gender expectations that do not come naturally. By having done this study, my hope is to at least make the findings available to mental health professionals and counselors-in-training to better prepare them for supporting persons who do not identify with the gender binary and the challenges they face. Perhaps the cisgender and privileged aspects of my gender identity have been advantageous in interpreting and communicating the findings of the study to a predominantly cisgender population of mental health professionals.

**Ethical Considerations**

Beginning with the flier promoting the study and seen by each participant, I strived to carefully and thoroughly lay out what was requested of participants. While the time involved was easily delineated (the interview session), the informed consent form (see Appendix B) described possible feelings or concerns participation might raise. I reiterated such precautions at the beginning and end of the interview and inquired regarding support systems and persons to whom they could reach out. Each assured me of having such persons in their life.
The concerns or even triggers that might arise from participation in an in-depth discussion of gender experience was seen as the primary risk identified prior to conducting the study. In fact, and speaking from the position of a professional counselor, there was no indication of any negative response related to participation. In fact, participants ended their interviews expressing their appreciation for the opportunity and for the study being performed.

As anticipated, each participant held their gender identity private in some contexts. Therefore, the procedures in place to deidentify data and to keep all files securely stored were appropriate, as was relating such procedures to the participants.
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

In this chapter, I present the results of the study on persons who identify as gender nonbinary as well as Hispanic/Latinx and are residents of the Albuquerque, New Mexico, metropolitan area. These findings come from gathering data through interviews according to IPA guidelines. Analysis of the data followed IPA guidelines as well, as outlined in Chapter 3. The goal within this section is to report findings that reflect both the descriptive aspects of IPA as well as the interpretative analysis fundamental to IPA (Smith et al., 2009). The chapter includes verbatim data extracts to support the descriptive aspects as well as the interpretative results presented (Smith & Osborn, 2008; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009; Smith, 2011a).

My analysis of the data from the four interviews resulted in three superordinate themes:

1. Superordinate Theme 1: Realization required a journey
2. Superordinate Theme 2: Allowances are made for mothers
3. Superordinate Theme 3: Out or not out is not simple

Each theme is explored in turn in separate sections below. Within the section for the first superordinate theme, each of the four participants is the focus of a subsection, providing an introduction as well as close look at the particular individual. For the second and third superordinate theme, the participants are combined in a single narrative.

Superordinate Theme 1: Realization Required a Journey

This superordinate theme looks at the ways in which the participants came to awareness of their gender nonbinary identity. The participants converged in that their stories were important to them, and they all appeared to strongly desire the opportunity to
tell this aspect of their experience. They diverged in the particulars of their individual paths, the timing of their realization, and how gender nonbinary is expressed by each.

**P-One’s Journey Toward Identifying as Gender Nonbinary**

> I like to be very clear that, hi, yes, I am nonbinary, I am male presenting, was assigned male at birth, and I’m Hispanic—I’m a Person of Color. All three [sic] of these things are part of my identity.

Participant One (P-One) told of having lived in Albuquerque, New Mexico, since 2007, with the majority of their life spent in New Mexico. Their gender term was nonbinary, and their pronouns were stated as they/them and he/him. P-One reported being 31 years of age at the time of the interview.

> I guess the, my journey, I’ll call it, started, I want to say, about four/five years ago, when I started dating someone who was in—was part of a group of people that I mostly knew about for like Dungeons and Dragons. But a lot of them were [pause], for a lack of, a lack of a more descriptive term, queer in a number of different identities.

P-One went on to say that this was their first exposure to persons with queer gender identities as opposed to queer sexual orientations. Some time later, the person P-One was dating came to the realization that they were not cisgender. P-One attributed this in part to their dating partner’s commitment along with the partner’s anchor partner to continually challenge presuppositions regarding their gender and sexual identities.

About this time, P-One, also polyamorous, began dating another person who identified as nonbinary.

> One of the things that kind of crept up here and there during our time
together was the [very long pause] the kind of teasing suggestion that hey, you might not be cis. And I always kind of brushed—yeah that’s probably something I should think about but didn’t really—didn’t really give it much thought. And then suddenly one day, it was just like, oh, oh, you’re right. I’m not!

When I asked P-One what that realization was like, they answered “illuminating.”

_I suddenly had, like, I guess I had a [pause] a better sense of who I was. A better idea of myself. And after thinking about it for a while—this was over a couple weeks—I sat thinking about it after the initial click, I guess that a lot of the stuff, that a lot of my experiences in my life suddenly started to make sense._

P-One talked about their realization that even when they thought of themself as male, they had often taken on “traditionally feminine roles” such as “caring around the house . . . cooking, cleaning, that kind of thing.”

Soon after their illumination, P-One became involved in a performative art that included “outside just being male.” Recalling a particular act with another artist in which they portrayed characters who were androgynous, P-One stated,

_I think that was one of the things that really cemented the idea for me, because I put a lot of—put a lot of myself into developing that act, and it really kind of laid a foundation for my identity as a performer. And then from there, it kind of spread further into my self-identity._

P-One recalled being “fascinated by the idea of androgyne” and how it “dovetailed” with their “discovery” of being bisexual. P-One spoke of being “fascinated”
as well with David Bowie. P-One laughingly commented on that being “pretty indicative.”

When I prompted the topic of gender-affirming medical treatment and whether they had or would consider anything related, P-One responded,

*Lately I have actually been giving it some thought, because my partner was recently put on testosterone for [nongender reasons]. . . . Since then, yeah, I’ve kind of had the floating thought—not sure that’s the word I want to use but that’s the word I’m using—here and there, would I want to have some kind of hormone therapy or—surgery probably not. . . . I like the idea of looking more androgynous. I feel like for myself it’s a little bit of a hopeless cause because my hair is very dark and very thick, grows quickly, so I get a five-o’clock shadow before five o’clock [laughing], so I have—I have to shave really frequently so I—that—that’s the part of the thing I’d—kind of keeps me from looking—getting that—getting that androgynous look I’d like to have. . . . My chin is [pause] is pretty solidly there [laughing], and it—I would—would like if it were a little bit smaller, narrower. I’ve also been for a while, I’ve been playing around with makeup a lot, and I’ve been able to accomplish similar looks just with some contouring. So it’s an idea that I’ve played around with.*

P-One talked of a friend who had transitioned and during the process chose a different name. P-One told of being at work one day and “for whatever reason, I decided to research the history of my legal name.” P-One discovered a nickname for their legal name that had been popular during the early 1900s. It is a nickname used for both a
traditional female name as well as a (different) traditional male name. P-One reported having started with asking their partner to use the name, expanding to “a couple of my very closest friends,” and on to the point of using the name even at work or when meeting new people. P-One noted that their family still uses their legal name. They did not state whether they had asked their family to use the nickname.

P-One talked of moving from another part of the state to Albuquerque in 2007 to attend college. They spoke extensively of being “lucky to discover [being gender nonbinary] living in Albuquerque” because of “how much more diverse it seems here.” P-One used the terms melting pot and patchwork in describing Albuquerque.

“Albuquerque has definitely fostered my personal development.”

I don’t think I ever really felt like I was confined or like I was afraid to explore my identity. [Inaudible] something that never occurred to me until I met this group of people and, oh, hey, there’s this new aspect of being human I never really considered before and look at all these neat people that I enjoy being around and being friends with that happen to—that just happen to be, you know, part of this spectrum that I discovered.

P-One described the combination of being gender nonbinary and being assigned male at birth as a rather unique situation in their experience. They talked of how they “command a special kind of attention.”

The sort of popular presentation is made up of people assigned female; nonbinary—the kind of image that is formed is someone assigned female or presents slightly feminine or something like that and so there’s—if here and there I see conversations pop up about the sort of erasure or
exclusion of people who were assigned male that identify as nonbinary and also in addition to that being a Person of Color, like, hey, yes, we exist too, by the way.

Other aspects of P-One’s experience as a gender nonbinary person will be explored related to Superordinate Themes 2 and 3.

**P-Two’s Journey Toward Identifying as Gender Nonbinary**

_I know that I’m Latinx and queer and a boy and a girl so—it’s a lot of ands—just because I’m Mexican, and Mexican is very binary when it comes to tradition, like traditional Mexican views, I’m willing to break out of that and still be Mexican._

Participant Two (P-Two) reported having lived in the Albuquerque metro area all her/his life. P-Two spoke of “usually” using the term _genderqueer_—”because that involves my entire being”—but also using _gender nonbinary_ as well. P-Two stated pronouns to be _she/her_ and _he/him_. P-Two reported being 27 years old at the time of the interview.

P-Two was the only one of the four study participants who recalled awareness of a gender difference at a young age.

_I knew that I was genderqueer from six or seven, and I wanted to start wearing boys’ clothes. . . . I felt fine in girls’ clothes but also okay in boys clothes too. I didn’t know there was such a thing as genderqueer. . . . At the age of six, who knows that?_

P-Two’s mother inadvertently provided her/him a way to express the boy side by enrolling P-Two and her/his sister in flamenco classes.
There was not enough boys in the class, so I volunteered to dress the boy’s part and to dance the boy’s part rather than dress and dance the girl’s part. And so I can dance flamenco but in the style of the gentleman not in the style of [laughing]. . . . They asked, do you want to dress in the dress, and I was like, no, I’ll just be the boy. It’s fine.

P-Two spoke of knowing she/he “didn’t want to be all the way a boy, because I knew I liked girl things too.” At age 12 or 13,

Everyone’s coming of age, and I think I didn’t know how to deal with it, so I just ignored it until, until I knew. It wasn’t something that I like suppressed, but it wasn’t something I sought out how to like, feed into it.

P-Two experienced the lack of awareness of “gender spectrum in middle school.”

I knew I had friends who were like female attracted to female and male attracted to male, and I was thinking maybe me too, um, I knew that for sure. And I knew that I thought girls were very, very pretty and that I thought boys were very, very pretty, and I thought that I want to be pretty like the boys, but also I want to be pretty like the girls. But I didn’t know what that meant.

P-Two went on to explain,

Definitely I knew from a young age, but I knew exactly what it was, you know, from about middle teenage.

P-Two spoke of the influence of Myspace, Tumblr, and other blogging sites for teens of the 2000s.

It was a little bit later, I’d say I was probably 15 or so . . . and the person I
was dating at the time was like, like, like coming to terms with the fact that he was trans. And so we were kind of researching it together, and I was like, I don’t think I’m that, cause I know that I do identify with female. But I think there’s something more and else. And so we did some more research and that’s what came up was genderqueer.

During the research and exploration, P-Two discovered the concept of Two Spirit within some Indigenous traditions.

I’m part—I’m like—I won’t claim indigeneity, but I do know I come from Indigenous blood, and I was like I wonder if that has anything to do with it. So that opened a whole like, a really like, a revelation I’d never—cause I thought my, my, on my dad’s side is indigenous, and we had never talked about that, like, we had never like—Two Spirit—I’d never heard that term, and I didn’t know any Indigenous people who were Two Spirit, but I’d talked about that so it was like really a cool thing to learn about. And I was like, oh, that’s also part of my identity.

During her/his later teen years, P-Two experienced parental rejection related to sexual orientation.

I felt safe coming out to [my mother] as queer sexuality-wise, and then she kicked me out, and I was not expecting that. . . . Yeah, so, I was—I had just turned 16, and I was dating someone who at the time was presenting as female and assigned female at birth. And she—my mom—my mom did not like that. And I thought she’d be okay with it, and I was like okay mom this is my partner. She’d always been like, like politically blue, and she had,
like, queer friends, and she didn’t seem—I felt—I thought that I was safe. I thought it was a safe space. That I could come out to her just based on how I was raised. Like I was never told that gay is bad or stuff like that. I assumed it was fine, and I assumed wrong [laughing]. So she, she was, she was upset. There was a physical and verbal altercation that happened. And I was forcibly removed from my parents’ house. And I was homeless—was unsheltered for probably three months and then moved back in with them. And then she forcibly removed me again when—the day I turned 18, and I was unsheltered again for almost another three months.

More of P-Two’s experiences with parents and family will be discussed as part of Superordinate Theme 2.

P-Two also talked about names. P-Two was aware of the name her/his mother would have given if P-Two had been assigned male at birth. P-Two tried in middle school and again in high school to ask others—including teachers—to use that name. P-Two stated, “Trying to go by that name did not work. High school I tried again . . . didn’t work again.” In part, according to P-Two, because “I didn’t really make it clear to people why I was trying.” P-Two reported that as an adult, she/he uses the other name at times such as for food orders, online identities, and especially within situations with other queer persons.

P-Two described how as an adult she/he finds ways in which to express both gender sides while responding to my prompt concerning gender-affirming medical treatment.

*I don’t believe that I would ever have the desire to go onto hormone*
replacement therapy. I think facial hair is super cool, but I wouldn’t want to have it. I think for my chest, I achieve that by binding, but I wouldn’t want to permanently remove, like, my breasts. I like them. They are fine [laughing]. I don’t get any body dysphoria or dysmorphia or anything like that, but it is because I know I can present in ways I want to present in nonmedical ways. But I can bind, I can wear, like, looser fitting clothes, or I can wear more revealing clothes and like makeup. Or I can bind and wear makeup. Or I can wear a hat and a binder and fake eyelashes. So I can do like all that. I think it would be kind of cool to have more of a body that I could temporarily, like, if I could, like, if I wanted to wear the button-down shirt that was open with a flat chest, I think that would be great. If I could have a beard for like one day, like, that would be fun [laughing] to grow it and shave it off, and it wouldn’t come back until I wanted it back. Like if there was such a thing that would be my ideal. But it’s not, so I just use makeup at this point and the binding.

Other aspects of P-Two’s experience as a gender nonbinary person will be explored related to Superordinate Themes 2 and 3.

**P-Three’s Journey Toward Identifying as Gender Nonbinary**

_This was a journey of not even really knowing what was allowed—not knowing how you were allowed to express your gender._

Participant Three (P-Three) reported having lived in Albuquerque their entire life. P-Three used _gender nonbinary_—“folks usually understand that”—or _genderfluid_, among trans friends. P-Three stated pronouns to be _they/their_ and _he/him_ at work.
P-Three noted being 32 years of age at the time of the interview.

P-Three was the participant whose interview time was cut short due to their child awakening. We did not have time to complete the secondary prompts nor to have the participant offer any thoughts at the close of the interview. At the same time, the data gathered from P-Three was rich and varied in ways from that of the other participants. For example, P-Three was the only participant who had undergone gender-affirming medical treatment in the form of hormone therapy. Additionally, P-Three was the only participant who was a parent.

P-Three’s telling of their realization:

*I didn’t really come out until I was 29 [three years prior to interview].

Then I medically transitioned as well. . . . I don’t have any experience being in high school or college gender nonbinary.*

P-Three continued saying that it had been 10 years of thinking about the possibility of being trans, with some various versions along the way.

*I feel like the first time I saw a gender that made me feel like maybe that’s my gender was when I was watching this really terrible documentary about the third gender in Thailand. But it was being presented as if they were drag queens. . . . I was like, oh there it is. That’s me. I’m a drag queen. And that was like my conception of my gender for a long time. But that was—I never told anyone that because it felt really offensive to gay male people. That was really strong with the community—those who were assigned female at birth should not perform drag. Oh it was like, this is a messed up spot that I have. And then even after I met more trans people,
... it felt very strongly in the binary. And I met some more nonbinary folks and that began to resonate a little bit more. And now, finally, there’s more space for the idea of being nonbinary and fem and wearing, you know, wanting to do that or even just wear women’s clothing. But I still thought, like, medically transitioning with testosterone, which was another thing. Like lots of the nonbinary people that I met didn’t medically transition and it was, it was a while before I met anyone who had. And so that was emotionally confirming too. I feel more comfortable with this voice and with these exterior characteristics, but I’m not trying to become a man.

P-Three found a situation that allowed them to expand their gender-related concepts and experiences.

I was lucky enough to find a bunch of [performative artists] who . . . were really interested in like serious drag. But it was drag that challenged gender roles so you could do drag as a gender that you were not assigned, but also not the gender role that was normally associated with that gender you were presenting. So that was really wonderful. But it was definitely frowned upon by a lot of more binary trans people. Like we were making everyone look bad and being weirdos—making it harder for everyone. Like we just sort of—like bi people were treated by homosexual or gay people for a while, just feeling like they were confused, and come back to me when you know what’s up. Otherwise stop making noise because you are watering down our movement here.

P-Three described how the trans community, mostly binary at the beginning of
their decade journey toward reaching their comfortable gender situation, has evolved.

*It’s really different now, and nonbinary is more accepted as trans. But that’s probably even just a few years ago. . . . Now I think there’s like more older people coming out as nonbinary probably. And I think, like, all the like, the community was more made of folks who were binary because they were there before nonbinary people were, because that was the accepted way of being trans. And so, and now that it’s more accepted to be nonbinary, I think it’s, yeah, like I’m kind of an older nonbinary person. And I just, like, maybe if I’d felt more strongly male, I’d have been a trans man for a while, and then realized, oh, nonbinary, oh yeah. That more within the generation realizing like, oh yeah, no that’s—that makes sense for me too. I just never had words for it.*

P-Three reflected on their genderfluid presentation and preferences:

*I still wear lots of dresses—fem is definitely my preferred clothing style. So I just didn’t have a conception of how that could fit in with being trans. . . . There were so many instances of, gosh, if I’m female, it would be so much easier being fem. . . . There would be a lot of times when I’d look in the mirror, and I’d think, I really wish I was female—that I was a woman. It would be so much easier.*

And regarding their name:

*I haven’t legally changed my name, nor do I want to. So I think of [nickname/chosen name] as just a shortening of [legal name], and so, which hasn’t really been a problem.*
P-Three spoke of their awareness of gender, noting that during the pandemic, they have spent most of their time (besides work) with queer friends, a context in which they are not focused on gender.

*I hardly really think about my gender. And it makes me realize that, like, every day, all the time in the social world before the pandemic, was being—there’s something that James Baldwin talks about like being, being yourself, then being like, also having the point of view of being yourself as others see you. Of course he was talking about being a Black person, but it’s like I, I can relate to that on some levels. Nonbinary persons, there’s constantly trying to read what other people are reading me as. So it comes up like sometimes obvious [laughing] and weird interactions. But even when I’m just walking out, there’s just an awareness of trying to gauge what other people—what gender they’re reading me as. And just like a hyperawareness of gender in general.*

Other aspects of P-Three’s experience as a gender nonbinary person will be explored related to Superordinate Theme 3.

**P-Four’s Journey Toward Identifying as Gender Nonbinary**

*I think with being gender nonconforming or nonbinary, it doesn’t mean presenting androgyny. And so, like it shouldn’t have to be like, I’ll use they because I don’t know. I’m telling you.*

Participant Four (P-Four) stated they had lived in the Albuquerque metro area for eight years and Central New Mexico prior to that. P-Four talked of using *gender nonconforming* primarily but also *gender nonbinary* as their gender terms. Pronouns for
P-Four were reported as they/them and their age at the time of the interview was 28 years. When asked about their realization of being gender nonbinary, P-Four replied,

*I think that kind of stems from my pansexual identity. . . . I had to unravel that first, and then from there, when I disclosed that, one of my roommates in 2016 . . . asked me, oh, are you—who do you identify your gender? And I said, I don’t know yet. . . . That took more thought, and it wasn’t until, I want to say, 2019—we’re 2020 now, so 2019—that I actually really had a sit down with myself.*

They went on to tie in their identity as a scientist:

*As a scientist, I certainly had to think it thru. And so it really stems from knowing the science and stuff because . . . whether we’re studying, like, human species or nonhuman . . . everything was identified as like female behavior, male behavior, and so, then I started like thinking of that in humans and myself. And just like how silly some of it sounded. And I know there’s a lot of biological sex and then gender and so that’s where my gender revelation came about, I’d say, yeah, 2019, so that’s barely last year, but feels like a long time—a long time coming.*

When I asked P-Four whether they had or would consider gender-affirming medical treatment, they spoke about their feminine presentation.

*I think, gosh, me personally, I am comfortable in my personal body other than like simple little things, . . . that aren’t necessarily gender related but vanity related. But concerning hormones and stuff like that, I took estrogen hormonal stuff, and that was purely for—I have bad hormonal*
acne, and so the estrogen helped regulate that, and I, I remember when I was really young taking that, I noticed how my face changed. It just looked so much more feminine, and I liked the way that looked, And so, I’m not currently on that now but would like to because of the [benefits]. It had a mood-altering effect so I stopped that because I did not appreciate that. . . . Any like genital surgery, no, I do not consider that. The only surgery I’ve had was like, was my breasts, and so that was like a reduction lift thing, which would be a more feminine thing. It wasn’t a top surgery, and so I’m still very much feminine appearance. But I conflict with that sometimes because of the whole nonconforming—but it’s like things aren’t necessarily nonconforming, but also in my brain, I have it rationalized different, I guess, because of what makes me comfortable in my own body. And it’s not, I’m not trying to strive for an androgynous appearance, so I still appear very feminine, but it’s how I present comfortably.

P-Four returned to an earlier discussion of sex versus gender and related it to gender-affirming treatments.

Sex and gender are very different, so this thing I’m quote-unquote altering are more sex things and, yeah, with my body there’s more sex based, but my mind is more gender based. And so, if I still believe I’m nonbinary even if it’s not presenting in a quote-unquote neutral way. . . . I think it’s different how in the mind it’s more gender based because of societal norms or what have you, but physiologically sex-based characteristics.

P-Four spoke of struggling with aspects of their gender nonbinary identity:
There’s a grant scholarship thing for women in STEM, and I’m like, can I apply or is that—am I inauthentic if I apply? Is it allowed like. And I don’t want to be untrue to myself and like code switch, so to say, to say ok, well, I’ll identify for a grant, and then hop back out. Because I think that’s unfair to the women who are applying to it too. And it’s kind of like, where’s my place?

When prompted to talk about their concept of trans, P-Four related an experience applying for a work position.

[It] was more inclusive. They had asked, do you identify as trans, and I said no, but then they said trans is an umbrella term that covers nonbinary, and it listed all the other ones. And I was like, well, personally, I don’t because I think that takes away from people who transition from the black and white. I’m more the gray area, because I very much pass. I have my privilege, and I’m not trying to be a gender other than, so I think—and I had a discussion with a friend about this too, and it seems like it takes away from people who are transitioning male to female, masculine/feminine, woman to man or man to woman, because I—not because it’s more drastic, but I think because there’s a lot more that goes into that either physically, emotionally, mentally—and I know nonbinary folks do that too, cause some of my nonbinary friends that were assigned male at birth still take estrogen, and I think it’s a different experience for everybody because I see people assigned female at birth take testosterone, but still are nonbinary. So it’s very individualized on that, but for myself, I
can speak and say that I don’t identify as trans even though it is under the umbrella. It takes like a power away—a power from folks, especially trans women, in my opinion, because I think trans women endure a lot more mental, emotional, physical transformation/trauma/change, and so, and I think with my personal experience because I’m still very feminine presenting, and I’m not undergoing any hormones or physical transformation, I don’t see that for me.

Other aspects of P-Four’s experience as a gender nonbinary person will be explored related to Superordinate Themes 2 and 3.

**Interpretative Consideration of Superordinate Theme 1**

Each of the participants discussed their path toward realization of being gender nonbinary. Realization for the four participants included coming to an understanding of their gender identity, but it also meant discovering wider possibilities than they had known, naming the identity, and finding a sense of belonging or even permission to so identify. For P-Two, awareness of her/his gender difference reached back to childhood. For the other participants, realization took place as an adult.

I explore the identified influences that contributed to realization and the apparent need for these outside stimuli in providing possibilities not previously known. Additionally, I look at the effect of sexual orientation on realization, the differences in participants’ expression of gender nonbinary, and the use or change of names.

As a cisgender person myself, for the most part, I bring an outsider view to the experiences related as well as to my interpretation. On the other hand, I identify as queer sexual orientation, which may allow me to relate on some aspects of the participants’
realizations, such as allowing oneself to consider and embrace an identity beyond the hegemonic and traditional, including beyond what may be acceptable to family and friends. My positionality likely influenced my identifying the sexual orientation relationship and my interpretation in that subsection below.

**Influences on developing their awareness.** I found it very interesting to look at the various paths and note the influences along the way. Both P-Two and P-Three spoke of media influences. All four participants talked of the influence of other individuals who identified in a non-cis manner and opened possibilities for the participants that led to their looking at their own gender.

P-Three recalled looking in a mirror and wishing they were fem; “it would be so much easier.” A “really terrible” documentary gave P-Three their first glimpse of something different that might apply to them. As described above, P-Three gradually met individuals who continued to broaden their understanding of gender and to expand their concept of “what was allowed . . . how you were allowed to express your gender.”

As a teen, P-Two helped a dating partner come to understand their trans status by researching it online. P-Two realized, “I don’t think I’m that, . . . But I think there’s something more and else.” Further searching resulted in discovering the concept of genderqueer, which fit and gave a name to her/his lifelong experience.

P-One talked of how they were affected by a group of people who were “queer in a number of different identities” and whom they found to be “neat people that I enjoy being around and being friends with.” This was P-One’s first experience with persons who expanded the concept of gender. Later, dating partners raised questions about P-One’s gender identity that were first set aside as “teasing” but resulted in
contemplation that helped P-One come to their realization. P-One’s mentioning of their being “fascinated” with androgyny as well as with David Bowie also illustrates the lack of nonbinary examples or role models in our society.

P-Four described a roommate’s asking about their gender, to which they replied, “I don’t know yet.” This led to several years of exploration. P-Four talked of their identity as a scientist influencing how they studied the situation and came to their understanding.

P-One and P-Three both discussed the power of their independent experiences with different performative arts that influenced them. In both cases, the participants took part in developing and performing characters who were androgynous (P-One) or challenged gender roles of the gender you were presenting (P-Three). P-One stated the experience “cemented the idea for” them, while P-Three told of the experience being “really wonderful” and contributed to their realization. Related, P-Two told of her/his experience as a child with flamenco, dressing and dancing the boy’s part rather than the girl’s. This provided P-Two an early opportunity to experience expressing masculine aspects of their gender identity.

In no way am I suggesting that there was any coercion by these others in the participants’ lives. Quite the contrary. Rather than the overwhelming power of society presenting hegemonic binary and accepted gender roles as the only acceptable ways to express gender, these experiences provided the participants opportunities to escape coercion and expand their concepts of possibilities. By learning about others’ lives and feeling permission to contemplate their own gender, they were freed to come to an understanding that felt real and appropriate. As P-One phrased it, they came to
understand “this new aspect of being human I never really considered before.”

The degree to which the participants sought out these individuals—consciously or unconsciously—is not known. What aspects of their personalities drew them to these people and experiences? How would their realization have come about or not come about in other ways? In an excerpt later in this report, P-Two wondered whether she/he would have known the truth about herself/himself if born and raised in a different state. When describing the change in the trans community from strictly binary to more open to nonbinary, P-Three speculated that at an earlier time, they might “have been a trans man for a while, and then realized, oh, nonbinary.”

All of this is evidence that without the concepts, without even the words or labels for a broader understanding of gender, many may not find their own truth. P-Two stated, “I didn’t know there was such a thing as genderqueer. . . . At the age of six, who knows that?” I suggest this applies to any age. As gender nonbinary status gains more awareness and media attention, the concept becomes available to more people, but many obstructions remain. These will be explored more deeply in later sections.

Sexual orientation and realization of being gender nonbinary. I have found it interesting the degree of connection that seems to have existed for the participants between their gender identity journeys and their sexual orientation. Much effort is made to educate people of the difference and supposed disconnection between gender identity and sexual orientation, as society does not appear to easily make the distinction. This may fall in line with Nagoshi and Brzuzy’s (2010) writing, “For transgenders [sic], at least two identities, those of gender and of sexuality, are always intersectional, although, as we discuss later, feminist and queer theorists have at times tried deliberately to keep these
identities separate” (p. 434).

A male is often assumed to be gay not based on the gender of those he finds attractive, but by a judgment of his behavior related to traditional gender roles. Acting in an “effeminate” manner or having interests that are thought to belong to females causes some people to assume a male is gay. A conflation of gender and sexual orientation could occur with a female-identified person who acts in a “butch” way. An assumption of sexual orientation often follows.

A person who identifies as female in traditional gender terms might self-identify as straight/heterosexual (attracted to males) or lesbian (attracted to females). A person of either female or male traditional gender identity could be attracted to both males and females and identify as bisexual for sexual orientation. Bisexuality is dependent on the binary structure, it should be noted. When gender identities are broadened beyond the binary, so may be sexual orientation to include identities such as pansexual and omnisexual, if an individual is attracted to a range of gender identities broader and more inclusive than the traditional female and male designations.

Likewise, realizations about one’s own gender affects their sexual orientation designation. In a simple example, a binary trans person who moves from being male assigned to being trans female would correspondingly move from being straight identified to being lesbian identified—if their sexual orientation is attraction to female-identified persons. There was no change in the gender of the persons they found attractive; the change was in their own gender identity. Sexual orientation designations depend on both the gender of the person to whom the term is applied as well as the gender of the person(s) to whom they are attracted.
P-Four most closely related their sexual orientation to their gender discovery journey with their statement that it “stems from my pansexual identity.” P-Four spoke of needing to “unravel” their sexual orientation prior to exploring their gender identity. Pansexuality—attraction to persons across the gender spectrum—may be seen to require recognition of broader definitions of gender. A realization of one’s pansexuality would logically open an individual to contemplation of their gender identity.

The group P-One found attractive and joined included persons of queer identities related to both sexual orientation and gender, with P-One noting it was their first experience with persons who identified as queer in gender. During that time, P-One came to identify with bisexuality as their sexual orientation. As P-One reported, their dating partners were no longer identifying as cis, so perhaps the bisexual designation could have come under question, but it is the term they used.

P-Two reported in middle school having friends who were attracted to the same sex and relating to the same feelings. It was a relationship between female-assigned P-Two and a female-assigned partner that resulted in P-Two being expelled from her/his parents’ home. P-Two told of understanding the sexual orientation aspect of her/his identity more easily than the gender identity.

Again, I refer to P-Three’s desire to be feminine and female as “it would be so much easier.” These thoughts took place prior to P-Three’s divorce from their lesbian partner. Beginning their journey of gender identity discovery held a high price for P-Three.

P-Two made references to considering queer gender identities as less acceptable than queer sexuality identities. Regarding work, P-Two stated, “I was even closeted as
queer, so to much less come out as genderqueer, I didn’t want that to put my job at risk.” Speaking of her/his family, P-Two noted, “I could face violence from my immediate family if, if I were to be out as genderqueer, like because my mom wasn’t ok with like the gay thing.” (Both of these situations will be further explored in later sections.)

As I have asserted, lack of awareness of the existence of gender identities other than binary is a huge obstacle to realizing gender nonbinary status. The four participants’ journey stories strongly support that contention. I further suggest that acknowledging queer sexual orientation status is crossing a line that could free one to be more open to other ways in which they may differ from or challenge the status quo and societal expectations. This could simply be coming out to oneself regarding sexual orientation. Another result of such a personal recognition seems often to bring the person into interaction with persons who identify as queer gender, as was the reported experience of P-One, P-Two, and P-Four.

In the section on Superordinate Theme 3, I will further discuss the difficulty and amount of work and time required for coming out as gender nonbinary. If someone comes out to others regarding sexual orientation—for example, being bisexual—it is safe to assume that the recipients of the information will know what is meant. On the other hand, if someone comes out as gender nonbinary, it may well take a good deal of explanation. P-Three: “That’s like a whole conversation that I often don’t feel like having with people.”

**Expressions of being gender nonbinary.** The four individuals who were my participants for this study happen to demonstrate divergence in expression of being gender nonbinary. This is in contrast to many of the shared aspects of their experience
explored earlier in this superordinate theme section and the sections for the other two superordinate themes. I made no effort toward this outcome; as previously reported, no-one who responded to recruitment, met all criteria, and responded to invitations to interview was excluded from the study.

The fact that there are such differences in the group members’ individual expression of gender identity can be seen to demonstrate the diversity in this aspect among those who identify as gender nonbinary. As I noted in Chapter 3, the definition of gender nonbinary could be imagined as a nondefinition; the category is without rules other than to not adhere to hegemonic traditional gender binary categories. Perhaps a better way to state this divergence in expression is as a convergence in feeling free to express gender in the way that is comfortable for the specific individual.

As illustrated in the description of their journey as well in later extracts from their interview, P-One spoke of not only their fascination with androgyny but their goal of presenting as androgynous. This extended even to the contemplation of gender-affirming hormonal treatments, though currently, they are using makeup techniques toward their goal. At the same time, P-One described being out as gender nonbinary to very few people and passing as male, which a temporary solution such as makeup would facilitate.

P-Four, on the other hand, spoke of not desiring a “neutral” presentation and eschewed the idea that use of the they pronoun should bring with it an assumption of an androgynous presentation. P-Four clearly differentiated between the more physical aspects of a person and their gender: “My body [is] more sex based, but my mind is more gender based.” P-Four described their presentation as feminine to the point of easily passing as female with no desire for any transformation. “I still appear very feminine, but
it’s how I present comfortably.”

In contrast to either P-One or P-Four, P-Two experienced her/his gender nonbinary status as both female and male. P-Two stated no desire for gender-affirming medical treatment that would take away from either their female or male presentation. The possibility of impermanent options to present more traditionally as female or male was desired, such as having “a beard for like one day, like, that would be fun.”

P-Three was the only participant who reported having “transitioned medically” using hormones to change their presentation, including their voice, to that which was more comfortable to them. They appeared to begrudgingly accept that for persons who think only in binary terms, the result is often being read as male or with a great deal of curiosity concerning their gender. While the other participants spoke of passing as gendered with ease, and P-Three also talked of passing as gendered, they also discussed their “hyperawareness of gender” and need to read how they were being perceived.

As planned prior to the study, I did not request the gender assigned at birth for any participant. This was in part due to resentment by participants in a reported study I reviewed. Likewise, it seemed to me to be focusing on a decision made by someone else that had since been discovered to be incorrect. I stated, however, that if participants revealed their assigned gender and it was pertinent to their experiences, I would include it in my study report.

All four participants did reveal their gender assigned at birth, with P-One being the only one assigned male. P-One talked extensively of their perception that being masculine presenting and male assigned positioned them in a unique way. Their assertion was that most people assume gender nonbinary persons to be “someone assigned female
or presents slightly feminine.” They further suggested later in the interview, “someone probably White, probably effeminate, probably able bodied, probably thin—you know, all these sort of things that even apart—excluding the gender thing—is sort of like your default American.”

It was a part of describing her/his lifelong journey that P-Two revealed her/his assigned gender. Beyond that, P-Two told of gender passing privilege and the lack of desire to permanently alter her/his female-appearing body. Likewise, P-Four’s assigned gender was discussed concerning others’ comments and misgendering, as well as comfortably presenting as feminine. P-Three’s assigned gender and pretransition body was made apparent through their talking of having been pregnant and giving birth to their child.

In these four randomly acquired participants, again, I find evidence of the diversity within the gender nonbinary population’s expression of their gender, even restricted to one medium-sized city with all participants sharing the same ethnicity and being within a small age range. One desiring an androgynous appearance, yet for the most part presenting as male. One desiring a feminine appearance and rejecting androgyny and female gender designation. One choosing between female and male presentations depending on the situation or how they were feeling. And one who had undergone transitioning to find their comfort in a combination of male and female physicality, including more masculine features while preferring traditionally female clothing. These four participants make the clear argument that there is no one gender nonbinary appearance or expression.

Superordinate Theme 2: Allowances Are Made for Mothers
For three of the four participants (P-One, P-Two, and P-Four), their families of origin were discussed extensively during the interviews. Comments were primarily focused on the responses of mothers to the participants’ identities. Related were statements made about New Mexico culture, being Hispanic/Latinx, and the influence of the Roman Catholic Church.

P-Three was the only participant who did not discuss their family of origin. Their relationship to this superordinate theme is further explored at the end of the section.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of the discussion of families by P-One, P-Two, and P-Four was the acceptance of their families’ responses and making allowances for them. Acceptance ran through the statements by all three. An example from P-One: “My family still uses my legal name, and I don’t really have a problem with that.” P-One’s chosen name, it may be recalled, is a nickname not gender specific (used for both a male name and unrelated female name), though would most likely be thought of as a male name.

P-Four spoke of how their family and others continue use of female pronouns:

> They know that like professionally, I have my pronouns set as such, but they still—my family and friends—most of the time, I want to say 99.9% of the time, will still say she when talking about me. But with friends and family, I’m more accepting.

Here is a lengthy quote from P-Four to illustrate their thoughts concerning family.

> With family and stuff like that, I think it’s, it’s just so different for them. So I think that’s where I’ve kind of like—not spared them from that—not at all—but it did take a lot of work to do the education portion sometimes,
and I think there’s difficulty because nicknames—it’s also that
subconscious. So it’s kind of apathetic like. The point is moot, as they say.
It’s not going to happen. So if I put a lot of energy into it, it’s just going to
be me talking in circles rather than them actually changing. So that’s with
family though, because they do not have the capacity to change—well,
everyone has the capacity to change, so I may not say it that way, but like,
but like they’re not willing to change, because they’re so set in what they,
like, think. That’s still doing an injustice to them, because they should try
harder. They should do better, but I’m—it’s more me giving up before I
start type deal. So instead of constantly reinforcing every time they do it, I
let it slide because it’s kind of like, if it doesn’t impact me emotionally in
that sense and so—aiming to family to like, I could say is—my mom has
my business card that has my pronouns on it, but she’s not going to call
me they. And so I think I’m in a place where it doesn’t impact me as much
as it does professionally with family. So I see that differently too, and so
it’s part of that code switching too, where it’s like, oh I’m fine with my
mom saying that, but like I’ll still self-identify—I am her child rather than
saying I’m her daughter. So like I do it where I can but I don’t have as
high expectations for them as I do for myself.

As previously related, P-Two came out as queer sexuality at age 16 and was
surprised when her/his mother put her/him out of the house.

Yeah, it was definitely unexpected. I didn’t expect my mom to react the
way she did at all. And it was—it hurt me for a long time. But I definitely
did a lot of healing and reconciling, and I can laugh about it now. Haha, mom, it was terrible what you did to me, haha [laughing]. Like she—just to be fair, she’s, she never apologized. She’s never acknowledged it. She’s not ever welcomed me back in her home, which is fine. I have my own house. It doesn’t matter. I’m like 27, and it’s just—it’s not [laughing]—I could not—it doesn’t—I don’t need to live with her. But I just know, like, that’s what—not where we’re going to go. We’re not going to talk about—that we’re not going to talk about who I am, and if that’s a part of me that she wants to miss out on, it’s her loss, cause it’s, it’s a big part of me, and if she doesn’t want to see it, fine, I’m not going to force her to, but she’s missing out on a lot of who her kid is.

P-Two continued to speak about the allowances afforded her/his parents:

*I don’t think that [my parents] could begin wrapping their head around like the whole gender aspect. I’d rather preserve the relationship that I have with them than have to try to be my true self and lose the relationship I have with them, which is not fair to me, but it’s sometimes how things have to be if you know your parents aren’t going to accept you. Rather just accept, accept you for who they think you are.*

Later in the interview, when responding to a secondary prompt concerning discrimination and safety, P-Two returned to family:

*I know that I could face violence from my immediate family if, if I were to be out as genderqueer. Like because my mom wasn’t ok with, like, the gay thing. I know that because of, like, the conservative—like the, the*
conservative Christian underlying, like I, I don’t know how to put that, but yeah. The underlying nature of conservative Catholic, that yeah, I think I were to be, if I were to be more out with the wrong people of, and/or more queer with the wrong people, I definitely could face that discrimination. But I fortunately do have the privilege to be able to, you know, hold that back if I need to.

P-One related how their mother had responded to gender identities of others and then their realizing the response was about themself as well.

_I remember a kind of a big thing with my, um, with my story. . . . One of the things that I have trouble with [my parents] was, and sort of still is, the idea of being nonbinary. And kind of trans identity—identities in general. Not so much with my dad. He tends to be a little more understanding. But with my mom, it’s been pretty hard. There was a [pause], uh [pause], there was, uh, a point where, around the time my partner and I got married, um, that I’d been talking to my mom about our relationship and [speaking slowly], I don’t remember quite what she said. But she essentially referred to my partner as a reptile, because I kept using they, they, and them to refer to them. And that didn’t sit well with me at all. And so I—we got into a fairly big—kind of a big fight about respecting gender identities and whatnot. And some time later, around the same time that I was—after my realization, and looking back at my life, this is why—because I’m nonbinary—that’s the reason that that upset me so much is because I’m nonbinary. That my, my—then my mom didn’t respect this identity that I_
think I had, and so later—and so her being as callous as she was, kind of like she was being dehumanizing not only of my partner but also of me.

And I kind of tried to have that discussion with her, and [pause] she, she seemed like she was trying to actually, to listen to me and understand where I was coming from, but I don’t feel like that understanding has really progressed anywhere. My dad hasn’t really said, said much one way or the other apart from him saying, you know [pause], he’ll be there if I need someone to talk to. . . . So yeah, it’s been, it’s been kind of the hardest part, I think, about coming out. And my parents [pause], and how they—again especially my mom—how they are kind of continue being.

P-One spoke of their parents being “kind of conservative. They’re Roman Catholic.”

I think a lot of that has to do with the influence of the, of the Catholic Church. And that kind of goes with New Mexico as a whole. Very, very, very, very strong religious presence in this state. And I think that navigating any sort of nontraditional identity would be a challenge because of that, you know, it’s very, it’s very likely—assuming you’re not, uh, Native American, where you’ve been brought up in a different belief system that, at least in my impression, is more accepting and recognizing of different gender or sexual identities, you know. If you’re growing up in New Mexico, you were probably growing up around Catholic influence, so you, so you probably spent a lot of your life hearing, you know, that marriage is between a man and a woman and all sorts of, you know, there
are only men and women, and all these sort of traditional ideas that kind of just go hand in hand with Catholicism in general. And understand that I’m not speaking about all people—you know a lot of, a lot of people that I know that are Catholic or Christian are very progressive, but it’s the institution of Catholicism, I think, is still pretty conservative. Even in spite of how maybe actual practice from individual to individual.

As included in the excerpt above, P-Two also connected her/his family’s behavior to the Roman Catholic Church. Continuing:

They’re fairly conservative and grew up Catholic and Latinx [laughing], so it’s really not a thing. . . . I wish that they would be a little bit more open to it, but with them having their very traditional boundaries and very traditional mindset. . . . Super gender binary Catholic, Catholicism upbringing, because, like, people of Mexican heritage are typically very Catholic, and like very, very binary. And so that’s black or white—like you know this, you’re Jesus or Satan, you’re boy or girl, but I think definitely just breaking that, not just in my gender but also like my aesthetic was a big part of that too, I know my family would not understand. They wouldn’t get it.

Both P-Two and P-Four spoke of evidence that perhaps the attitudes attributed to families might be changing. When asked where they find support in gender-related matters, P-Four responded:

I have friends within my network who have similar experiences or are very supportive. And so is my sister. She’s great. She’s great.
P-Two provided evidence that the negative attitudes could be generational:

*I’m not simply out as gender nonbinary to, like, my parents. But my sister does know. She was really supportive. And when I talked to her, she was fine with it. She switched from calling me her sister to her sibling. . . . Even with some of my family—like my, all my cousins are queer. And I think it could be like something, like to spite my—the older generation. Like, well, if you are going to be homophobic, just all your kids are gay and so [laughing] we are all definitely very out with each other and open and accepting with each other. So it’s not like I don’t have family. I’m fortunate to have that. We have this ongoing joke, if I’m the queer cousin and you’re the queer cousin, who’s going to carry on the family name [big laugh].

While acknowledging the conservative nature and influence of the Roman Catholic Church, P-One, P-Two, and P-Four talked of the progressive nature of New Mexico as well. P-Four:

*I think particularly here in New Mexico, there are strong laws protecting—so I think that’s a huge privilege thing, because this state of New Mexico on paper is very progressive. Culturally, we’re still going through a shift. But I think for the most part, people aren’t horrible about it. I think in New Mexico specifically, more than like any nonbinary or trans man, there’s a lot of masculine women. So I think that alone in our culture helps with the consciousness, because a lot of folks have exposure to seeing people different from them. . . . Having our nonprofit network,
our laws, a lot of strong protections—good to have here in New Mexico.

P-One spoke of their experience specifically in Albuquerque over the past 13 years:

Albuquerque seems to be actual progressive, even within this bubble of Christianity that sort of defines New Mexican culture. It is very much—in my perception—pretty left field, and I think a lot of that has to do with just how, how much more diverse it seems here [than parts of New Mexico where they previously lived].

P-Two speculated on what her/his life might have been if born elsewhere.

Definitely, I feel like just being raised in our state is of course—like, blue, blue, forever, and if I was in a red state, I don’t think I’d have the cojones to [laughing], the guts to be out. I wouldn’t. I would, I would be faking it, because I would be like—the southern states—I would like to hope that myself, in my own brain, if I was still my own brain, I would know that was wrong and would know, like, right from wrong and not to be that way, but because my state is so blue and so accepting—despite being Catholic and Mexican—I think it made me brave to be out and to be queer. . . . I would never want to live anywhere else ever. Me and my partner have talked about it extensively, because he works for [service industry] and I work in the [service] industry, which are two industries that you could get, you know, jobs anywhere—they’re needed everywhere. And we’ve talked about it a lot. We can’t imagine wanting to live anywhere else, because New Mexico is so blue and so accepting—well, I wouldn’t say it’s SO
accepting but more accepting than all—anywhere in the country of like queer status besides maybe California, which I don’t know that I want to live there. I do love being New Mexican, because it does allow me to be queer.

Interpretative Consideration of Superordinate Theme 2

In considering the individual interviews of P-One, P-Two, and P-Four, it stood out that their families had not been accepting of their gender identity. In the case of P-Two, queer gender identity was not even raised with her/his parents based on the reaction received to coming out as queer sexuality. All three focused primarily on their mothers’ reactions, with P-One directly stating that their father demonstrated more understanding. Data was not requested or collected on the specific make up of participants’ families of origin.

With statements about the lack of acceptance or understanding by the mothers, however, came explanations and allowances for them. In the P-Four quote presented on pages 99–100 of this report, it is fascinating how in less than two minutes, P-Four seemed to stumble and argue with themself in an attempt to explain the family’s attitudes and actions while accounting for their own reactions. Starting with noting “it’s so different for them” to it being “subconscious” to “it’s not going to happen,” and moving on to first suggesting they “do not have the capacity to change,” followed quickly by “everyone has the capacity to change,” but “they’re not willing to change,” “should try harder,” and “should do better.” For their own part, P-Four acknowledged, “it did take a lot of work to do the education portion sometimes,” then noting, “if I put a lot of energy into it, it’s just going to be me talking in circles.” P-Four continued with platitudes such as “the point is
moot,” “it’s more me giving up before I start,” and “I let it slide.” As well, they contended that the family’s attitude and behavior don’t “impact me emotionally” or at least not “as much as it does professionally.” P-Four then accused themself of “code switching too, where it’s like, oh I’m fine with my mom.”

This close look at a portion of P-Four’s interview is not to reproach them for their comments but to illustrate the apparent frustration with their family situation. The back and forth of placing responsibility on the family members and then taking it upon themself indicates the difficulty involved. I find it challenging to believe that it is not emotionally impactful for P-Four that their family does not accept or respect this awareness of gender identity P-Four has achieved.

As discussed previously, P-Two was physically removed from her/his parents’ home at age 16 and again at 18 due to revealing her/his sexual orientation. P-Two noted there has never been an apology or even acknowledgment of those events by the mother. “It hurt me for a long time. But I definitely did a lot of healing and reconciling.” This healing and reconciling was on her/his part without participation by the mother. P-Two has chosen to avoid discussing gender with her/his mother seeing that as more difficult to understand and even suggesting it could result in a violent response. Similar to P-Four, P-Two suggested that her/his parents could not “begin wrapping their head around like the whole gender aspect.” Again, I find it difficult to accept the supposed degree of healing P-Two has managed—or anyone could achieve in such a situation. Later in the interview, P-Two referenced “trauma that I know that I have from being unsheltered.”

P-One described a direct encounter focused on parental acceptance as “a fairly big—kind of a big fight about respecting gender identities.” Their mother’s comments
had been directed at their partner, but P-One came to realize they resented the mother’s comments in part because the “callous” manner and “dehumanizing” statements were also directed toward them, even if not intended that way. P-One stated that their mother “seemed like she was trying . . . to listen to me and understand . . . , but I don’t feel like that understanding has really progressed anywhere.” The pain still present for P-One was apparent if not acknowledged.

P-One and P-Two directly related their parents’ attitudes to conservative thinking they attributed to traditional New Mexican culture and the influence of the Roman Catholic Church. P-Two directly connected her/his fear of violence to “the underlying nature of conservative Catholic” beliefs and her/his parents having grown up “Catholic and Latinx.” P-Two described Catholicism as being “very, very binary.”

P-One talked not only of the effect of the church on their parents, but “New Mexico as a whole. Very, very, very, very strong religious presence in this state.” They suggested growing up in New Mexico meant hearing “marriage is between a man and a woman and . . . there are only men and women.” P-One acknowledged that there are those individuals who are Catholic or Christian who are also “progressive, but it’s the institution of Catholicism, I think, is still pretty conservative. Even in spite of how maybe actual practice from individual to individual.” While they did not speak directly about the Roman Catholic Church, P-Four suggested that New Mexico, “culturally, we’re still going through a shift.”

Perhaps that shift is generational. P-Two and P-Four both spoke of the support and acceptance they enjoyed from their respective sisters. P-Two also talked of their cousins: “We are all definitely very out with each other and open and accepting with each
other. So it’s not like I don’t have family.” P-One, P-Two, and P-Four themselves can all be seen as representing the change in attitudes of a younger Hispanic/Latinx generation, which, perhaps for reasons not explored, are stepping away from the traditional beliefs so influenced, according to these participants, by the Catholic Church.

Even as they noted the conservativism and lack of acceptance, each of these participants celebrated “progressive” aspects of New Mexico. P-Four stated, “I think particularly here in New Mexico, there are strong laws protecting—so I think that’s a huge privilege thing, because this state of New Mexico on paper is very progressive.” P-One focused in particular on the metropolitan area. “Albuquerque seems to be actual progressive, even within this bubble of Christianity that sort of defines New Mexican culture.” P-Two suggested, “My state is so blue and so accepting—despite being Catholic and Mexican—I think it made me brave to be out and to be queer.” Again, these participants may represent a new Hispanic/Latinx generation in New Mexico that will bring with it a greater acceptance of diversity—gender and otherwise.

Looking at the three participants’ situations, P-Four was likely more disappointed in their parents and family than disclosed, P-One acknowledged that “it’s been kind of the hardest part” (parents’ lack of understanding), and P-Two was attempting to overlook traumatic past experiences caused by her/his mother. Yet none of the three indicated any desire to break off the relationships. On the contrary, it seemed they were determined to keep their families in their lives. As researcher and a member of a different ethnic group, I find this to be remarkable.

Even as each of these three participants differentiated themselves from a generation that had more conservative views—including toward gender identities—each
still, however, proudly identified as Hispanic/Latinx. I suggest that other aspects of that culture and heritage may remain strong with them, including the importance of family. While this was not stated directly by the participants, each spent a good amount of time on their families of origin (unprompted) and the relationships there. In the process, they provided evidence of what they had endured but were willing to continue to endure. As P-Two said, “I’d rather preserve the relationship that I have with them than have to try to be my true self and lose the relationship I have with them, which is not fair to me, but it’s sometimes how things have to be if you know your parents aren’t going to accept you.” “Not fair to me” being a very telling statement along with “I’d rather preserve the relationship.”

Again, I acknowledge my outsider point of view as a non-native New Mexican and non-Hispanic/Latinx researcher. In this case, I suggest that it is my outsider positionality that allowed me to take note so clearly of the striking situation of the participants acceptance and allowance of the opinions and treatment by their parents. None of the participants talked of incongruity or of their situations being unusual. I believe that someone of the culture may have taken for granted these individuals responses as the norm and unnoteworthy.

I also draw from my experience of having lived in the Albuquerque area for almost 14 years and having experienced close personal friendships as well as professional interactions with many New Mexican Hispanic/Latinx families and individuals. My observation of and familiarity with these families support my contention that the ties within New Mexican Hispanic/Latinx families are very close, even through periods of estrangement and conflict. This is very different from the individualistic cultural norms
of my family of origin and those of many other non-Hispanic families I have known or
with whom I have worked.

I remain curious regarding the fact that these three participants’ reported negative
interactions regarding their identities were primarily with their mothers. Does it just
happen to be a coincidence for these three? Do mothers have more difficulty with
reconceived gender than do fathers? It crosses assigned gender in that P-One was
assigned male, while P-Two and P-Four were assigned female. Is there a Hispanic/Latinx
cultural factor of which I am unaware? Unfortunately, I do not find data provided within
these interviews to address these questions.

A short discussion concerning P-Three, the participant not included in this
superordinate theme. As stated, P-Three was the only participant who did not discuss
their family of origin. Theirs was the interview cut short prior to completing the
secondary prompts and follow up. Family relationships, however, was not a topic of any
prompt; it was brought up by the other participants without being asked. Without having
the full time for the interview to develop as it might have, I do not feel it appropriate to
identify P-Three as diverging from this superordinate theme.

In a way, P-Three converged with the other participants in talking about family—but
in a different generational direction. P-Three was the only one of the four who was a
parent. Their interview did focus to a large extent on their child and related matters such
as the child’s friends, happenings at school, and even a discussion of a nongender
parent’s day similar to Mother’s Day and Father’s Day. Without overstatement, I speculate
that P-Three had a focal shift from their family of origin to their current family of their
child and coparent; a shift that could well have occurred upon becoming a parent. This
still leaves me without any information concerning P-Three’s relationship with their own parents or family and unable to do more than speculate on convergence or divergence from the other participants.

**Superordinate Theme 3: Out or Not Out Is Not Simple**

All four participants converged in that none expressed any doubt as to their gender nonbinary status. As described in the section detailing Superordinate Theme 1, each participant’s journey to their gender awareness was unique. At the time of their interviews, however, their gender nonbinary status was not in question. Each spoke eloquently and in a strong manner regarding their identity. All four gave examples of ways and situations in which they had been proudly open regarding their gender.

P-One told of opportunities to represent their intersecting identities and support others who might have similar identities:

> I’ve especially taken it on myself whenever there’s discussion about nonbinary people or bisexual people or Hispanic people, I make sure I am participating. . . . I feel like I’m in a [pause] a sense of privilege position as a Hispanic nonbinary person who is assigned male. I think that gives me kind of like a responsibility to participate in these conversations. I kind of command a special kind of attention because of [my identities]. . . . I feel like when I do [participate in such discussions], I sort of am creating a space, I guess, for anyone who might be an audience of this discussion, that you are—if you also identify as any or any or all of these things—that, hey, you aren’t alone. You know, there are more of us out there. There are other people like me.
P-Two talked of being thankful for the local queer community as well as her/his partner. She/he told of feeling safe to be out due in part to New Mexico’s political climate.

*I’m really, really thankful to have a partner who is—he is known in the queer community and a lot, he knows [name of well-known local advocate]. He, he knows everybody in the queer community, and everyone knows him. So it’s nice to have him as a support. . . . He has been really supportive in the queer community, not just of me, but of his community.

And I, when we first started being in a relationship, I would not be afraid to express my queerness to him, because I knew I would be supported, which was really a breath of fresh air. . . . Thankfully New Mexico is pretty blue, but that’s a big part of why we’ve really never felt unsafe, and we’ve felt [safe] enough to be out as a couple—as an openly queer couple.

A major theme of discussion for P-Four during their interview was working in a service-providing field in New Mexico. Meetings within that realm gave participants the opportunity to state their pronouns. P-Four proudly provided “they/them.”

*I got what I say spoiled for a little while, because a lot of people were still inclusive—or on the surface inclusive—of at least including [a request for pronouns]. . . . And so I was often one of the only people who identified as they in the room, or sometimes other people would say they, or their pronouns would be she or they, so they were ok using that. But oftentimes people would just default to using their she pronoun because that was just easier.*
Approaching completion of their professional degree, P-Three was completely open about being trans in their first round of applications for positions. P-Three came to the conclusion that their openness had, however, been a detriment to being selected.

*I applied for [jobs] now that I’m at the end of my [education]. I applied for [jobs], and I was completely out as trans. . . . I didn’t [get any offers], and I didn’t know. So now, I’ve taken all my trans stuff out, and that’s been really hard. Just, yeah. Feeling like erasing myself and not sure. And so, also, I’ve gone completely to using he/him pronouns.*

All participants told of ways in which they adapted to situations and did not reveal or request respect for their gender identity. For the four participants in this study, the primary means of revealing their gender status appeared to be disclosing their proper pronouns. Other choices that involved outing themselves included completing various forms that requested some version of male/female/other designation as well as the use of public restrooms.

The following subsections explore ways in which the participants reported not being out about their gender nonbinary status, including reasons for their choices. Situations discussed include quick encounters, forms they were required to complete, work interactions, and public restrooms. Discussion of the sense of safety and the use of passing as gendered weaves throughout these subsections.

**Out / Not Out: Quick Encounters**

*I know who I am, you don’t need to know who I am—when it comes to people I’ll probably never see again.* (P-Two)

P-One made the most blanket statements about not being out beyond their circle
of trusted friends within which they were assured acceptance. P-One described this group
as made up of persons who identify as queer.

Outside of close friends, I’m not really out to anyone. If I were in a
comfortable enough situation, and I was asked about it, I’d probably say
yes, I’m nonbinary, but I don’t—I don’t necessarily proclaim it outright.

. . . Apart from outside situations where I feel comfortable doing so, I’m
not out.

P-Four spoke of casual or singular interactions and the “convenience” of not
discussing pronouns or identifying having been misgendered. They also described a
situation in which they felt it would be safer to not discuss gender identity.

I think there are certain places where I won’t, like, share my pronouns
because either one, it’s not necessary—like . . . at the grocery store, and
someone refers to me as she, I’m not going to correct them, because that’s
a one-time encounter. But if there are circumstances—like with law
enforcement, I don’t want to give them more reason to heckle me, so I’ll
just play—I don’t even want to say play the woman card—no that sounds
silly. But like not make that more confusing for them. I’ll just let them
address me as ma’am or whatever they need to, to end their interaction—
for safety reasons. Going back to being in the store, where, you know, I’ve
seen this person one time in my life, and this is our small transaction, and
it’s not needed, so appeasing in that moment, where it’s just out of
convenience more so.

P-Two also talked of encounters in which she/he was “never going to see” the
person again, choosing to pass as female at those times. P-Two differentiated such situations from longer-term or ongoing situations, though none of those have yet occurred apparently.

So I do feel comfortable if I did have to speak to a primary care physician that I knew that I was going to be seeing regularly, and it was somebody I was going to build a relationship with, I would say, like, hey, this genderqueer thing. But if they’re like, I’m here to check your eyes, and I’m never going to see you again, I’d be like, yeah, female pronouns, I don’t care.

. . . But yeah, if I did have to develop a relationship with a primary care physician, I absolutely would disclose the genderqueer status that I do own, but I haven’t had to do that yet.

P-Three’s take on interacting with new people was that it could simply take too long to explain their situation. Time too often unavailable. Therefore, P-Three would also choose passing as binary. P-Three acknowledged, however, the difficulty of getting to know people without being open about their gender status and history.

It would be a constant conversation around it, so I guess in a way, I can pass, because people will just use he/him pronouns, and I’ll just roll with it. . . . It’s hard to get to know people. It’s hard to let people get to know me. Like there’s just no way to know anything about me without knowing this thing, and that’s like a whole conversation that I often don’t feel like having with people. Yeah that’s really what it comes down to. There’s just not enough time.
Out / Not Out: Forms

Some forms only having male/female, and I’m like stuck. Because it’s a lot deeper than just checking one single box. It’s like no, no, no, but, uh, yeah.

(P-Four)

P-Three, in their shortened interview, did not discuss forms specifically.

However, their comments on applying for jobs may be seen as applicable. The other three participants all brought up forms without prompting.

P-One continued their statements regarding not being out beyond their close circle of friends:

That includes doctor visits or anything related to medical care or anything with the legal system. I stick with my legal name and mark that I’m male, because, I don’t know, one, because a lot of places still don’t have that option on forms, so there’s still some ways to go on their part.

P-Two also spoke of the limitations of forms and confusion caused by them:

I did go to a doctor, and I was relieved to see on their little sign in form, it said—gave an option for male or female or other. Do I check both male and female? Do they mean sex? Do they mean gender? It didn’t say sex or gender. So I was just like, so I just [laugh]. You almost had it. . . . Even when it comes to things, of course, like credit applications and so what do I do—insurance applications and things it really shouldn’t matter—like they ask male or female. It really doesn’t matter, yeah, definitely a hard kind of thing to kind of cope with that. Ok, so I get into the whole thing. Do I put other, do I put female—like what do I do? Yeah, that’s definitely
something that I wish there was more light shed on that, but I know that there’s more pressing issues than like being able to put something other than male or female on a credit application.

P-Four talked specifically about their response to a form that provided more options:

So medical wise too, I think—or any forms really. When recently I [was] applying for other positions, and like the, what do they call it—EIO like—the doing the, like, gender and race and stuff like that. And like on a lot of forms, it’s like, male, female, and like, ok [laughing]. . . . I won’t self-disclose in certain medical facilities. Like, like the family care providers. My primary physician doesn’t know, but I went to a different clinic before—specifically Planned Parenthood. On their form, they identify multiple genders. And so I was really impressed with that, because their forms are inclusive. . . . So when given options, it feels appropriate to disclose it.

Out / Not Out: Work

From then, I felt totally unsafe even thinking about using [they pronouns]. So I’ve stayed at work completely stealth. (P-Three)

P-Two described her/his experience of nearly a decade in an industry not feeling safe to be open about gender or sexuality.

As my main profession for almost 10 years [I worked in] a female-dominated industry where you were expected to be feminine presenting, which was fine with me, but it definitely was hard just not being able to
express the masculine side of my personality, you know, at work, because I did not want to be ostracized at my work. And it’s a hard thing, and I was even closeted as queer, so to much less come out as genderqueer, I didn’t want that to put my job at risk, so I didn’t. But I did find other ways to kind of express my masculinity, like some days I’d still wear full facial make up, but I would bind, or I would wear a baseball cap and a little less makeup. Maybe they weren’t going to call me by male pronouns, but, but they—I could feel more masculine. Yeah, so, that’s how I’ve kind of navigated that.

P-Two continued, talking about their current industry, which she/he deemed too conservative to accept an openly gender nonbinary employee.

In the industry I’m in now, it’s definitely not something that I would be able to, to express. Same thing, because the industry that I’m in now is more conservative all the way around. . . . And my boss really had to tell me, tone it—not really tone it down, because I knew I had to, but to tell me to really be very conservative, as I could be so—I mean not having bonded acrylic nails. I can’t wear them. I can’t do my makeup as intense as I’m used to doing. I can’t—I definitely could not present as masculine at work. I work easily 50 hours a week, and I don’t want to have to explain to every single new client I have, hi, my name is [name], I use she/her he/him pronouns. So for me, it doesn’t matter. I probably will never talk to the person again. Just go with it. And that’s fine. Yeah, I mean, I just kind of have to, like—I know that in that moment things are not about me.
During graduate school, P-Three encountered work issues as well.

I was thinking of trying to use my they pronouns at work, but just taking from [clients] who have they pronouns—so I learned like there’s one who used they pronouns, so in my [discussion of the client with my supervisor] using their pronouns, . . . I was told they pronouns aren’t grammatically correct, and so the [supervisor] was not going to use them, and I got a whole lecture about it basically, and so this—from then I felt totally unsafe even thinking about using [they pronouns]. . . . But then it’s really hard, because I can’t really talk about things like—there was a coworker who was pregnant, and I wanted to go, oh yeah, that was—oh yeah I also had these weird cravings, but that’s like a whole conversation that would be like [laugh] so exasperating like I couldn’t just say that I’d—to be like, when I was, and then I transitioned, and then.

As quoted above, P-Three reported having tried a round of job hunting as an out trans person only to have no offers. They were trying again being “stealth” and using he/him pronouns only.

Work life was the dominant focus of P-Four’s interview. P-Four discussed the seeming hypocritical practice of asking for pronouns and then not using them. They reported various imagined responses but gave reasons for not making the imagined real.

I sometimes want to be like nasty about it, like where maybe I’ll just put my pronouns and not my name [as my Zoom identification], because like it doesn’t emotionally affect me as much as it upsets me professionally . . . like you want to be inclusive on paper, to say, oh we, we did the whole,
like, including our pronouns thing, but not actually respect them, you’re not doing the work to be an advocate or an ally. . . . We were in a scenario where we had to go into breakout rooms, and then someone was, say maybe she could talk on it because she did a really good job, and then in my head, I say thank you for saying I did a good job. My pronouns are [laughing]—so I like, play out the scene, but I never go through with it, but that is a source of stress for me. . . . If I correct them on that, it takes away the compliment they gave me, and it turns me into what they call women—a bitch. So they wouldn’t see me for myself. It would totally undo anything that they were trying to compliment me, because it’s like, oh I was wrong. . . . But if I was more male presenting, it would be like, my bad, I’m sorry bro, or something.

P-Four continued regarding feeling beaten down and how allies are sometimes not helpful.

And being misgendered, . . . for me personally, . . . it’s over time, it just like beats you down [laughing]. . . . And for me, I think it’s more I don’t feel heard, because it’s literally, you’re asking, but you’re not seeing. . . . There’s still a lot of work to educate folks. Especially folks who are open to being educated. . . . Sometimes you get the gold-star allies who say, you’re misgendering them. And they want to advocate for you. And I think they’re not taking my safety into consideration, because, like, for them, it’ll make them feel good that they stood up for me. . . . And like, I’ll say, like, thank you for doing that, but sometimes I think it’s more than I had
wanted in the moment. And I think when I self-advocate, that that builds up my strength. . . . It comes across as being rude if you correct, correct somebody, because they feel like, oh I, I was wrong, and I’m incorrect. . . .

It’s still embarrassing for them, so that stresses me out too [laughing].

In a separate work situation related to an educational setting, P-Four also related choosing not to ask for change.

They’re really nice people, and we have our bio on the website, and [for me, it] uses she. And I’m like, maybe I should send an email, and can we change my bio. But, like, it’s kind of like, I’ll let it go. I’ll let it slide. So kind of just moving along with the flow. How it is.

P-One, although having talked about not being open outside of their closest friends, described a positive situation at work.

I had—I did have—I did sort of have that come up in my workplace, when I, uh, informed a couple of my supervisors that, that I’m nonbinary. And I only felt comfortable about that because they . . . demonstrated that they were looking out [for the] . . . best interests of their employees and generally invest in their wellbeing. So I felt ok doing that, um, and, but outside of that, I don’t necessarily like wave my flag as it were.

Out / Not Out: Restrooms

I’ve never felt comfortable going into a boys’ bathroom, even though I know I’m a boy. They do not know. (P-Two)

Using a public restroom creates a particular set of challenges for anyone who is trans or nonbinary. The topic was addressed by three of the participants in some way,
although again, it was not a specific prompt.

P-Two spoke directly about the so-called “bathroom bills” of the past few years and her/his sense of safety.

*I will always choose the public restroom of the gender that I’m presenting, and most time it’s female, so that’s where that. I’ve never felt comfortable going into a boys’ bathroom, even though I know I’m a boy. They do not know [laughing]. And with everything going on with like trans healthcare bills and bathroom bills and all of that, I don’t want to—I’m not one to stir the pot when it comes to my own safety. I’m not going to put myself at risk. I’m not going to make other people uncomfortable. . . . I’m fortunate enough to have White passing privilege, and I’m fortunate enough to have cis passing privilege, which not a lot of my trans brothers and sisters can say that.*

P-Three spoke of restroom use being a concern, as there are seldom nonbinary or single-person facilities.

*There’s rarely a bathroom for nonbinary, so it’s always an issue. So, another nice thing about the pandemic is that no one pees in public, in public anymore [big laugh]. It’s like, I need to go to the bathroom, so this engagement is over [continuing to laugh]. I’ve got to go home, bye [laughing]. But yeah, I was trying, like, basically, every time I’m in a public place, based on what I’m wearing and what I think people are thinking about me is like, how I choose which bathroom I go into. So it’s stressful most of the time.*
P-Three experienced a particularly uncomfortable situation when someone made a “big scene.”

At the beginning of my transition, I was still using the women’s bathroom, and . . . a woman came in and sounded the full alarm of like, there’s a man in the women’s bathroom. Somebody get this person—like really having a big scene. And I was like basically hiding in the bathroom, like, ok, I’ll just wait until this blows over [laughing while telling]. Yeah, so, it’s like hyperawareness, and then there’s like the real world consequences to that as well in what you choose. . . . It was most scary because, because gender can be this weird thing, and especially a man in the women’s bathroom. It’s—really people freaked out.

P-Four spoke of using a public restroom as being a time to take advantage of their passing privilege. As well, in the case of single-person facilities, they talked of not wanting to use a restroom someone else might need more.

I think for me restrooms—I’m very passing, so I often go into the women’s restroom, because how I present. And, I think when there are single stalls, it’s more [laughing], how do I word this? I will still often go into the multistall restroom just because I guess other reasons—where I’m more concerned occupying a space that someone else would want to use because of my passing privilege. So I’ll not necessarily seek out a single-stall one. . . . I don’t HAVE to use the single-stall one because of how I present, and so that’s more privilege.

P-One was the only participant not to discuss public restrooms, although spoke of
their passing in other circumstances.

**Interpretative Consideration of Superordinate Theme 3**

This superordinate theme presented challenges for interpretation in looking at the data and working with it deeply enough to get beyond easy or prejudiced understandings. At my first consideration, statements by the participants appeared to be inconsistent, incongruent, or even inappropriate. Deeper consideration and analysis, with more thoughtful interpretation, revealed a more complex situation.

A further challenge lies in avoiding appearing to criticize the participants or to suggest that they should have acted in a manner other than they reported or should have responded differently emotionally. The goal here is to uncover and discuss the situation in ways not fully explored by the participants themselves, while still tying the analysis back to the original data.

**The appearance of incongruency.** First, some illustration of what could appear to be incongruent. As stated at the beginning of the section, all participants presented a clear, unquestioning sense of themselves in their gender nonbinary identity. There was no hesitancy during their interviews. As well, each talked of situations in which they were out about their gender identity.

P-One described representing their multiple identities, “commanding a special kind of attention,” and feeling “a responsibility to participate” in conversations concerning gender identity, especially as it intersected with being Hispanic and assigned male. All of this to provide others who might share one or more of P-One’s identities a sense of not being alone. It was unclear where these conversations have taken place; perhaps online or some live and presumably safe situation not described. Contrast this
with the following statements by P-One:

*Outside of close friends, I’m not really out to anyone. If I were in a comfortable enough situation, and I was asked about it, I’d probably say yes, I’m nonbinary, but I don’t—I don’t necessarily proclaim it outright.*

P-One did speak of such a “comfortable enough situation” with two supervisors at work. This appeared to be out of character, as otherwise P-One described spending most of their life passing as gendered and not revealing their actual identity. For example, regarding forms, P-One stated, “there’s still some ways to go on their part.” Note the use of “on their part”—on the part of those who created the medical or legal forms. P-One reported only using their legal name and checking male on such forms without raising any questions. P-Two had a similar reaction to forms that “almost had it.” P-Two noted it was a “hard kind of thing to cope with” and noted, “I wish there was more light shed on that.” Again, however, P-Two did not report having asked about the possibility of change.

P-Two, quoted in this section and in the section looking at Superordinate Theme 2, spoke about the political atmosphere in New Mexico, the strong local queer community, and their partner’s position as an advocate all creating a situation in which “we’ve really never felt unsafe” to be out as “an openly queer couple.” Yet P-Two also talked about being completely closeted as queer sexual orientation as well as gender at work and in brief encounters with “people I’ll probably never see again,” including medical appointments.

P-Four talked of having felt “spoiled,” at least initially, by organizations that requested pronouns. They told of multiple instances when the stated pronouns were not
respected or used and how it “beats you down.” P-Four finding it stressful in situations where allies have gone too far without regard to safety. P-Four imagined multiple scenarios to address the misgendering but had reasons not to make real the imagined. The result was that, though they talked of the power of self-advocacy, they did not pursue the advocacy opportunities even to ask that their pronouns be changed in a website bio listing.

P-Three reported attempting to be openly trans in job applications only to receive no offers. They concluded that being so open was the reason for no offers and revamped their search plan to not mention trans and to use only he/him pronouns. P-Three likened it to “erasing” themself. Regarding their current work situation, they were left feeling “totally unsafe even thinking about using” they pronouns and concluded they must remain “completely stealth” at work.

Each participant spoke of situations that needed change. It would be understandable how some might jump to conclusions and even judge the participants’ advocacy efforts as falling short. Many might assume this group of strong, intelligent, well-spoken individuals would be leading efforts for better treatment of their shared population. Encouraging, promoting, and empowering self-advocacy is often a goal of allies, including professionals such as licensed counselors and other mental health clinicians. At the same time, hopefully many realize the difficulty as well as unfairness of expecting single representatives of any minority to take on fighting systemic oppression.

It is interesting as well that none of the participants acknowledged the seeming inconsistency between awareness of the need for change and not personally advocating for change. What appears to be a large incongruency was not addressed. There was no
sense of defensiveness on any participant’s part. I did not point out or question what appeared to be an inconsistency during the interviews.

**Seeking a greater understanding of the injustices faced.** This is where I believe deeper analysis and interpretation were needed to understand the meaning of the incongruity through what the participants have experienced. My conclusion regarding the matter of advocacy is that the potential costs and dangers are too high for any reasonable person to ask of the participants or of other representatives of the gender nonbinary population. The data provide evidence of this. Although the experiences were often told with humor and even laughter, the tales were at times frightening and even traumatic. I draw upon IPA’s awareness of language and words in the following exploration.

Although P-Four felt somewhat slighted by the website bio that used female pronouns, they noted, “They’re really nice people.” Was there a fear they might not continue to be as nice if asked to make the change? P-Four expressed concern in other settings of people being embarrassed and perhaps feeling bad, and the stress such situations caused P-Four. Note the statements that followed about the website bio: “I’ll let it go. I’ll let it slide. So kind of just moving along with the flow. How it is.” Not one but four statements of accepting the status quo. Out of fear? Earlier they had stated regarding misgendering that “It just like beats you down.” It does have a cost. They also noted, regarding allies who correct others on their behalf, “They’re not taking my safety into consideration.” Safety used in regard to a professional setting is a strong word that likely has real meaning and real concern attached. Simply asking that their proper pronouns be used—even after having been initially requested by the organization—created the fear of being called “a bitch” and left P-Four labeling such a request as being “nasty” on their
part; quite a negative self-accusation for what should be a respectful reminder. P-Four believed the request would not be seen as simple but would create embarrassment and negative feelings.

P-One described their interaction with their mother as “kind of the hardest part” of their gender realization. The words recalled by P-One included *reptile*, used by their mother about P-One’s partner because P-One used *they* pronouns referencing them. P-One described their mother’s statements as *callous* and *dehumanizing*. As P-One came to understand their own gender identity more fully, they came to believe their mother’s words were applied to themself as much as to their partner. If my interpretation related to Superordinate Theme 2 is accepted regarding the importance of family for these participants and most people who identify as Hispanic/Latinx, how painful that experience must have been—and continued to be, as they noted their mother’s attitude had not changed.

P-One is the only one of the participants who was assigned male at birth. They spoke of “a sense of privilege position as a Hispanic nonbinary person who is assigned male,” suggesting that their identities are unusual as well as go against the assumptions of most people as to who nonbinary people are. They went on to state, “I kind of command a special kind of attention.” Recall, however, that P-One also refrained from sharing their gender identity in all but a very few situations, identifying as male and using their legal name. When prompted to speak regarding discrimination, P-One responded, “I can’t really think of anything in particular. I’m sure I’ve experienced something like that, uh, but I was apparently thick-enough skinned not to have let it stick around.” My follow-up prompt concerned safety. “Same answer. Nothing specific. But I, I can pretty easily
imagine what it would be like to be in such a situation.” I wonder to what degree having lived the first 25 years of their life as male and experiencing continued male privilege due to presentation and appearance might have affected both discrimination and safety experiences. At the same time, even if there was a sense of safety due to being identified as male, it was not enough to overcome the concerns that prevented P-One from being more open regarding their gender identity. Let me emphasize that this is not meant as judgment against P-One. It is rather to illustrate how deep is the justified fear of going against the accepted gender concepts, even with male privilege and a corresponding sense of safety.

There was every indication that P-Three was a valued and respected student and student employee. Nonetheless, they felt “totally unsafe even thinking about using [they pronouns]. So I’ve stayed at work completely stealth.” They endured a lecture concerning they pronouns in regard to a client. They experienced rejection in job applications that they attributed to having been out regarding their trans status. The resulting decision to hide the gender nonbinary identity resulted in “feeling like erasing myself.” Again, powerful words: totally unsafe. Not due to poor work performance, but due only to gender identity. Erasing myself and completely stealth: removing themself and becoming invisible to protect their current and future employment.

P-Three told the experience of the woman creating a “big scene” in the restroom with humor, but it sounds nothing short of harrowing. It resulted in their hiding in the restroom until they felt safe to exit. As P-Three noted, “gender can be this weird thing, and especially a man in the women’s bathroom.” This basic act of using a restroom becomes a situation that could result in violence or even arrest. That is not what most
people can imagine or relate to regarding use of a public restroom. It is no wonder that P-Three was left with a sense of hyperawareness; it seems a reasonable response. Another use of hyperawareness: “Nonbinary persons, there’s constantly trying to read what other people are reading me as. . . . There’s just an awareness of trying to gauge what other people—what gender they’re reading me as. And just like a hyperawareness of gender in general.” I imagine such hyperawareness would be extremely stressful.

P-Two also used strong words regarding her/his work life. “I did not want to be ostracized at my work.” “I didn’t want that to put my job at risk.” Ostracized and at risk—again not due to poor job performance, but due to appearance or expressing her/his gender identity. P-Two also spoke of being at risk as well as her/his safety being in question in regard to restroom use. “I’m not one to stir the pot when it comes to my own safety. I’m not going to put myself at risk. I’m not going to make other people uncomfortable.” Fear that using the restroom could stir the pot and make other people uncomfortable resulting in putting herself/himself at risk. Such reactions seem extreme, but P-Two knew that they were real possibilities.

P-Two’s experienced trauma, however, came from her/his mother when she was only 16. P-Two became homeless after being physically removed from the parents’ home because of coming out as queer sexuality. This recurred less than two years later. P-Two acknowledged that there were effects of the trauma that remained unexamined even as she/he had done “a lot of healing and reconciling.” I question whether healing and reconciling can actually take place without the participation of the other party. Possibly worse, the other party, P-Two’s mother, remains in her/his life but without having acknowledged the events. At the same time, “I’d rather preserve the relationship that I
have with them than have to try to be my true self and lose the relationship I have with them, which is not fair to me, but it’s sometimes how things have to be if you know your parents aren’t going to accept you. Rather just accept, accept you for who they think you are.” *Not fair to me* seems a great deal to accept to maintain a relationship that resulted in past trauma and pain and holds the greatest potential for future trauma. “I could face violence from my immediate family if, if I were to be out as genderqueer.”

Not to be redundant, but I believe it is worthwhile to point out examples of another specific word that came up repeatedly across participants: *hard*, as in difficult. Contrasted with this were the many moments when participants were exceptionally accepting of the difficulties they faced. Examples of acceptance will be given as well.

P-Two used the word *hard* regarding the lack of choices on forms, “definitely a hard kind of thing to kind of cope with,” as well as work situations. “It definitely was hard just not being able to express the masculine side of my personality. . . . It’s a hard thing.” P-Three used *hard* primarily concerning work situations. “It’s really hard, because I can’t really talk about things.” “It’s hard to get to know people. It’s hard to let people get to know me.” “I’ve taken all my trans stuff out [of job applications], and that’s been really hard.” P-One stated first about the situation with their mother as being “pretty hard,” but later they identified it as “the hardest part.” P-Four used related phrases such as “Over time beats you down.”

What I mean by examples of acceptance include the already noted, “I’ll let it go. I’ll let it slide. So kind of just moving along with the flow. How it is.” These were used in succession by P-Four. They also used such phrases as “it’s not needed,” “it doesn’t impact me emotionally,” and “not as hurtful.” P-Three’s examples include “didn’t bother
me” and “I’ll just roll with it.” P-Two used “just go with,” “not going to stir the pot,” “doesn’t matter,” “more pressing issues,” and multiple uses of “it’s fine.”

During P-Four’s interview, they made several mentions of appeasing. Examples:

I think it may be deeper—like my personal personality of always just appeasing. . . . It’s more like appeasing, like, either one, like, avoiding that scene. . . . It’s like going back to being in the store, where, you know, I’ve seen this person one time in my life, and this is our small transaction, and it’s not needed, so appeasing in that moment, where it’s just out of convenience more so.

I followed up about the word appeasing, noting that little girls may be taught to appease much more than little boys are. This was more directive and specific than I had been with the three previous interviewees. I hesitated interjecting to this extent but did do so. I stopped short of relating it to being Hispanic/Latinx as well—the kind of appeasement Persons of Color might teach their children to keep them safe in certain settings. The initial interview prompt used with each participant was as open as it could be while still focused on being gender nonbinary. The secondary prompts drew the focus to particular topics such as living in New Mexico. In this moment of P-Four’s interview, this prompt felt too focused, and as I look back on it, it was out of character for my interactions with the interviewees. It was, however, a part of the interview. P-Four’s response:

Thank you for pulling that out further, because, yeah, I do that. That dwells from my upbringing as being more feminized and stuff like that, because it’s kind of the expectation, if you will, and um, think, yeah, you
said it perfectly, girls are more taught to do that, . . . and that’s kind of like when I said when there’s a meeting and someone says like she did a great job, um, dadida, so if I correct them on that, it takes away the compliment they gave me and it turns me into what they call women—a bitch.

Unexplored aspects of being New Mexican Hispanic/Latinx. The participants in this study represented persons who are New Mexican Hispanic/Latinx as well as gender nonbinary. Data was gathered and has been explored here mostly regarding how cultural factors affect acceptance and understanding within families—including allowances for family members’ failing to embrace or support gender nonbinary identities in Superordinate Theme 2. Secondary prompts, which were provided to all participants except P-Three, did include asking about the intersection of gender nonbinary with being Hispanic/Latinx as well as with residing in New Mexico. P-One discussed their gender identity being inseparable from their Hispanic identity, which I suspect is a statement all of the participants would endorse. Their Hispanic/Latinx identity, along with their New Mexico residence, permeated all of the data gathered. I suggest the fact that the specific prompts led back to family and to the unique mix of conservative and progressive found in New Mexico, as well as the influence of the Roman Catholic Church, is exactly what is appropriate for New Mexican participants. The minority majority status of New Mexico may also be a factor affecting the data gathered.

More direct mentions related to possible oppression of Hispanic/Latinx people in New Mexico included just three moments. One was P-Two’s mentioning, “I’m fortunate
enough to have White passing privilege.” A second was P-Four’s brief discussion of not wanting to confuse law enforcement with gender. “I’ll just let them address me as ma’am or whatever they need to, to end their interaction—for safety reasons.” P-Four may not have been intending a connection to being Hispanic/Latinx; it may have been a personal concern regarding safety and law enforcement interactions. The third, and most direct, was at the end of the interview with P-One, when I asked if they had any thoughts related to the COVID-19 pandemic. P-One stated that they were “trying to keep myself from going on a rant.” I responded by inviting them to rant.

*I worry about the instances in more marginalized populations, especially ethnicity or race. If you are a Person of Color, more likely to be in a lower economic. Makes those communities more vulnerable or susceptible. . . . Not sure how it impacts people of different gender identities, but it absolutely affects Hispanic people and People of Color.*

Whether the study would have been better served by a prompt more directly addressing the topic of oppression among Hispanic/Latinx people or Persons of Color generally in New Mexico, I cannot say. New Mexico is such a unique setting, again, with the minority majority population as well as the situation of White people being those who came to the area rather than as in many parts of the United States where Hispanic/Latinx persons are immigrants or children of those who moved to the area from out of the country. More exploration of that topic will be left to other studies. The open prompts that I used are in line with IPA guidelines. Hopefully, participants did not hold back on this topic but instead had other points upon which they wished to focus.

**Unique challenges of being gender nonbinary.** The participants gave clear
examples of the extremely negative experiences they have faced that illustrate the risks gender nonbinary individuals may confront when they are open about their identity. Add to this the lack of support from the major social institutions such as family, religious organizations, educational settings, and government, all of which have been included in the participants’ interviews. These are institutions most people look to for support and protection rather than harassment or oppression. Work, which is a major portion of most people’s lives, has been explored and the dangers involved reported. The grocery store, the doctor’s office, law enforcement encounters, and even public restrooms—consider the potential for negative interactions along with the amount of time experienced in these settings. In P-Three’s words, there can be “real world consequences.” Suggesting that these participants or any person who identifies as gender nonbinary should face such costs and dangers to affect the greater good seems extremely insensitive to the courage they are already demonstrating living their lives.

An aspect of gender nonbinary identity and coming out, which I briefly referenced earlier, is pertinent to self-advocacy. It is how unknown, misimagined, and misunderstood the identity remains. As suggested, if someone comes out as queer sexuality, people today are likely to understand gay, lesbian, bisexual; they will possibly have an idea about pansexual, omnisexual, or even asexual. I do not believe these coming out experiences are easy or without danger. P-Two’s traumatic teenage experience with homelessness was due to coming out as queer sexuality when she/he believed it would be safe to do so. There is, at least, an understanding of what these terms or identities mean, which is completely separate from acceptance.

Society teaches us all that nature made male and female—only—in humans and
every other species. Of course, that is not true for every other species any more than it is for humans. The teachings, however, are absolute. Note as well that such teachings are backed by religious institutions of many kinds, not just Roman Catholic, as well as many in various scientific fields. That is both an unusual and very powerful combination.

Most people never question whether they fit within the two choices, although many do not fit well. Many who accept female or male identities still struggle with aspects of the hegemonic gender roles, at least in some cases likely expending vast amounts of physical and emotional energy to fit in. Likely they believe the issue is with them and not with the societal requirement. As P-One, P-Two, and P-Four referenced in their interviews, it is believed that many Indigenous Peoples had very different—and more accepting—concepts of gender and sexuality prior to European influence only to be lost for the most part as an effect of colonization.

Even for binary trans persons, it would appear that society has at least an understanding of the basic concepts. They are still within the ubiquitous binary concept of gender—the either/or. P-Three’s discussion of trans binary and nonbinary includes the idea that they themself might have been a trans man for a period if they had not come to realize gender nonbinary status exists. In my experience, binary trans people are some of the bravest and most courageous people anyone may ever know. The adversity they have faced and too often continue to face simply to live their authentic lives is greater than that with which many others will ever contend. As P-Three described, even binary trans people often fail to understand the concept of gender nonbinary.

The situation as described by the participants is one of not only coming out, an emotional and at times even dangerous proposition in itself, but reeducating toward
changing concepts that many believe to be fundamentally true—they have certainly been taught that they are immutable. As P-Four noted regarding their family, “It did take a lot of work to do the education portion sometimes. . . . So if I put a lot of energy into it, it’s just going to be me talking in circles rather than them actually changing.” P-One, on attempting to help their mother to understand, “I kind of tried to have that discussion with her, and [pause] she, she seemed like she was trying to actually, to listen to me and understand where I was coming from, but I don’t feel like that understanding has really progressed anywhere.” That was for someone with quite a vested interest in understanding her own child. P-Three: “That’s like a whole conversation that I often don’t feel like having with people. . . . A whole conversation that would be like [laugh] so exasperating.”

Rather than judge the participants for not advocating more, I suggest they be congratulated for their own journeys and their own realizations. They surmounted that lack of understanding about gender within themselves, which is a remarkable achievement. They also support others on similar journeys. They represent themselves and their particular combination of identities. If they believe they need to be under the radar in much of their lives, that must be respected as well. It is reminiscent of the situation gay men and lesbians found themselves in for much of the last century when it was safest to stay known mostly just to each other within accepting communities. It is sad to think that is necessary today for gender nonbinary individuals, but the participants related plenty of evidence that stealth may be safer and smarter.

**An interpretation across the themes.** I offer a last interpretation that incorporates the three superordinate themes. It may be at once the deepest and yet
simplest. The journeys to realization of being gender nonbinary shared in the first superordinate theme brought the participants to self-understanding and resonance in this aspect of their lives. There was a great deal of joy and excitement in those journeys as well as sad and even traumatic moments—certainly many challenges. On the other hand, in the second and third superordinate themes, experiences of differences with family members, issues at work, and restrictions on openness in public arenas were discussed. Participants appeared to lament these situations but to willingly compromise. As explored, it is certainly understandable for individuals to make adjustments for personal safety and the continued opportunity to make a living. Even deeper, perhaps agreeing to the costs of maintaining family relationships and passing as gendered when at work or in public allows a continuation of many aspects of life and a means to stave off loss. Otherwise, the price of gender identity awareness could be too great. As suggested, this may be all the more true for Hispanic/Latinx individuals who place such a high value on family and who realize that, even in New Mexico, they may face oppression and limitations on opportunities. Each participant spoke of the importance of their queer friends and the communities they have found where acceptance is provided. Perhaps belonging to multiple communities provides the possibility of embracing their gender identity while not losing other important aspects of their lives.

**Appreciation of and for the participants.** I appreciate the courage each participant showed in taking part in this study. The interviews took place via video, which was not recorded, but it took trust on participants’ parts to believe that. They also trusted my promises of not recording their names and doing all that I could to protect their privacy. I greatly appreciate the connection we made that allowed them to feel safe
I want to ensure that certain aspects of my four participants are clearly stated and not left to a reader’s assumption. I thoroughly enjoyed my time with each participant. They were each intelligent, open, willing, cordial, and truly delightful to be with. Each had a strong sense of humor that they demonstrated freely, even while describing difficult and even traumatic events in their lives. I believe this and other aspects of the interviews were evidence of remarkable resiliency. I wish my interaction with them had not been so brief. I am honored by the trust they placed in me by sharing their experiences, and I hope that my efforts honor them in return.

**A challenge to myself and others to advocate for gender nonbinary people—carefully.** As a person who identifies as queer sexuality, I was never one to be out front at demonstrations or to participate in other strong examples of advocacy. I never even participated in a study. Yet I found myself questioning the acceptance by the participants of hurtful situations. It was that incongruency in my experience that I believe led me to the deeper analysis of their situations.

While I was never on the front lines, as a counselor educator, I have included in all of my courses consciousness raising concerning members of various historically oppressed groups. I have also created continuing education workshops and offered conference presentations. I relate these ways in which I believe I have contributed not to be defensive but to illustrate that we each can find our appropriate ways to be part of change if we so desire.

As with any group for whom we try to advocate, I remind us all to be very careful in how we do so. Recall P-Four’s words: “And they want to advocate for you. And I
think they’re not taking my safety into consideration, because, like, for them, it’ll make them feel good that they stood up for me... But sometimes I think it’s more than I had wanted in the moment.” For me, that means educating people, but not creating uncomfortable situations for members of the gender nonbinary population.

P-Four also gave direction for interaction with someone you may have misgendered. This will be part of the educating I do.

*If you ever misgender somebody, and they correct you, you should thank them instead of apologize, because they’ve educated you and given you the correct information. . . . Instead of turning it into, oh, I’m so sorry I did it wrong—because that turns into their having to forgive.*

As I finalize this report on my study, I realize that I have been on a journey of my own. I started with a curiosity regarding this topic, in part due to counseling clients with whom I have had the opportunity to work, as well as a desire to gain greater knowledge. It has included my contemplating my own gender identity to a much greater degree than I had ever done. My journey feels as if it has brought me to not only a much greater knowledge and understanding of persons who identify as gender nonbinary, but awareness of a role in which I may contribute toward change by educating others regarding the experiences and potential needs of gender nonbinary individuals. This includes in particular professional counselors and other mental health workers as well as counseling students. If more advocates take part, perhaps change will come not only for those who identify as gender nonbinary, but creating space for anyone for whom the strict gender roles are not a good fit. A position with which I can very much identify.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

In this chapter, the findings of the study are more broadly interpreted through comparison with related literature. Following that, I evaluate the study with quotes from the participants in response to my requesting feedback regarding their specific interviews. For further and more in-depth appraisal of the study, I use the criteria from Smith’s (2011a) article on evaluation of IPA studies. Next, I review how the findings will impact my own work as both a professional counselor and counselor educator. I expand on this with ways in which the study may inform counselors and other mental health workers as well as educators and students. Delimitations, strengths, and limitations of the study are suggested and explored. My plans for future research are presented, and, finally, some concluding thoughts about the project.

Comparison to Literature

As Smith et al. (2009) suggested, the discussion chapter should include a look at how the results connect with a selective representation of literature with which the study resonates. The goal is to explore an interpretation broader than my group of participants through comparison of the findings with those reported in existing publications. I use the subsection titles from Chapter 2 to guide the consideration of chosen works reviewed in that chapter. I follow with a look at a limited number of articles newly added due to recent publication or connected to my analysis of the participants’ datasets. I then make an overall comparison and suggest possible explanations for how my participants converge and diverge from those of other studies.

Terminology and Language Use

The participants of my study added their support for findings that language
creates a challenge for persons who identify as gender nonbinary. According to studies (Yeadon-Lee, 2016; McNeil et al., 2017), many persons use more than one term either at the same time or as alternatives. All four of my participants endorsed the term gender nonbinary. While P-One used only that term or NP, P-Two spoke of “usually” using the term genderqueer, “because that involves my entire being.” P-Four used gender nonconforming, and P-Three used genderfluid, especially among trans friends. All of these terms appeared in the literature. Yeadon-Lee (2016) described how terms may take on an agentic role—an opportunity to self-define. Flores et al. (2018) reported study participants noting that “power” comes from individuals identifying and defining their terms. There was the sense of that with my participants and their alternate terms. As quoted, P-Two wanted her/his “entire being” incorporated as she/he felt genderqueer achieved. P-Four spoke of “not conforming to either male or female or going in and out of either of those” as how they saw gender nonconforming. P-Three, the only participant who had medically transitioned, could pass as male but preferred traditionally female clothing; therefore the genderfluid term worked for them.

As I suggested in Chapter 4, my participants saw pronoun use as critical both in situations in which they were out and as a sign of acceptance by others. P-Three felt unsafe to even attempt using they pronouns at work. As well, they were lectured by a supervisor on the grammatical incorrectness of using they as singular. Unfortunately, the supervisor was not aware of strides such as singular they being a part of the style guide of the Washington Post (Jones & Mullany, 2019). Perhaps acceptance of singular they differs by region, industry, or simply the individual’s particular awareness or reaction. Certainly my participants gave more evidence of some gender nonbinary persons using
gendered pronouns due to their common and easier use (Yeadon-Lee, 2016). For my four, the easier aspect was apparent when choosing to go stealth in public situations. That choice when at work and in some other settings was often a case of security and safety.

Bradford et al. (2019) wrote of the importance of legitimizing experience through language. The lack of commonly used terminology too often prevents persons even conceptualizing a nonbinary identity. Taylor et al. (2019) quoted a participant, “‘there was no language or model outside the binary for me to make sense of myself’” (p. 198). P-Three, as quoted earlier, spoke of “not even really knowing what was allowed.” Each of my participants told of gaining awareness of a gender nonbinary concept, often through coming in contact with individuals who were also gender diverse. Lack of language resulted in lack of concept, which was described as confusing.

**Gender Binary Under Question**

Regardless of personal experiences and understanding on the part of a growing number of people, the binary continues to be ubiquitous in use and acceptance (Yeadon-Lee, 2016). Monro (2019) pointed out the connections to patriarchy and heterosexism, both of which are institutionalized and maintain the binary system. Interestingly, one of my points of exploration was the connection between my participants exploring their sexual orientation and discovering their gender identity.

Matsuno and Budge (2017) provided a clear distinction between sex and gender, which are often conflated. Sex may be considered as a physical phenomenon, while gender, Matsuno and Budge noted, relates to traits and behaviors and is dependent on cultural constructs. Both P-Two and P-Four spoke strongly about differentiating sex and gender.
Findings From Studies Regarding Gender Nonbinary Persons

As noted in Chapter 2, findings in the reviewed literature were at times inconsistent. Direct comparisons were difficult as the researchers looked at similar but differing constructs as well as compared different or differently defined populations. I suggested that it is possible that the contradictions may be explained by the extreme heterogeneity of the population of persons who identify as gender nonbinary, diversity I believe is demonstrated through the data from my participants. I will not restate the various findings reported in Chapter 2 but will pull out a few points to look at against my results.

Lefevor et al. (2019) reported “genderqueer” participants having a higher incidence of anxiety, depression, eating concerns, alcohol use, and overall psychological distress. Likewise, higher risk of self-injury, contemplated suicide, current suicidal ideation, and suicide attempt were reported. Warren et al. (2016) explored psychological well-being and found nonbinary scores substantially lower on depression and stress and higher on self-esteem than the trans binary groups. Jones et al. (2019b) found nonbinary participants scoring significantly higher psychological functioning than binary trans participants. Regardless of conflicting evidence comparing trans binary and nonbinary, across the studies and factors explored, cisgender participants scored higher on psychological functioning. Smalley, Warren, and Barefoot (2015) looked at 28 “health risk behaviors” in gender identity and sexual orientation groups. Genderqueer/nonbinary respondents had the lowest likelihood of risk in the highest number of behaviors (10 of 28); they scored highest in no behaviors.

My participants did not report or display such severe symptoms. It is important to
note that I did not ask my participants to do any assessment instruments of the kind used in many of the studies. Likewise, my participants were not pulled from a population of people in or seeking mental health services. I will propose additional ideas in the last subsection of this discussion.

**Challenges Faced by Gender Nonbinary Persons**

Jackman et al. (2018) wrote, “Participants reported difficulty coming to an understanding of their gender identity, and they also faced lack of comprehension from other people about gender identities outside of the binary of man/woman” (p. 590). Contributing to the interpersonal, social, and structural stressors faced by gender nonbinary individuals according to the literature were factors such as discrimination, misunderstanding by the general public, self-concealment due to anticipated rejection, a sense of invisibility, and microaggressions such as wrong gender pronoun (Lefevor et al., 2019; Jackman et al., 2018; Monro, 2019; Conlin et al., 2019; Matsuno & Budge, 2017; Galupo et al., 2014). Matsuno and Budge suggested “non-binary individuals must navigate a world with little allotment for their identity” (p. 118). Bradford et al. (2019) similarly wrote, “[A]ll transgender people transgress a cisnormative master narrative, but genderqueer people further transgress normative understandings of a medicalized, binary transgender identity” (p. 155).

Many of these aspects resonate with the data collected from my participants. Their journey stories in the Superordinate Theme 1 section described their difficulties coming to a realization of their gender identity. Lack of comprehension was explored in the very personal aspect of family and parents in Superordinate Theme 2 but also later regarding work situations and simply going to the grocery store, where they self-
concealed to avoid discrimination. P-Three in particular spoke of “erasing” themself to achieve the safety of invisibility. While there was no admission of great pain created by these situations, they repeatedly spoke of how “hard” it was.

Related is the concept of passing. While binary trans individuals may look positively on passing, nonbinary persons may wish for a recognition of the legitimacy of a presentation that is outside the binary (Flores et al., 2018). Fiani and Han (2019) suggested passing as being “unattainable” for nonbinary persons. Mizock and Hopwood (2018) described passing privilege as it related to the safety a trans person may experience if regarded as nontrans. Flores et al. (2018) as well as Fiani and Han (2019) also discussed the very real aspect of safety as it relates to passing.

My participants talked extensively about their using passing as gendered and having passing privilege. The presentations they have chosen allow passing as gendered to be attainable. Even P-Three who at times was confronted by strangers who questioned their gender also described choosing to pass as male at times. Fiani and Han (2019) appear to have been writing about nonbinary persons who present differently than my participants.

Brassel and Anderson (2019) determined that cisgender heterosexual men were more transprejudice than were the female participants. Buck and Obzud (2017) found that for both men and women, prejudice against trans persons increased in segregated settings (restrooms, for example). My participants possibly diverge from these findings in that it was their mothers who had the greater challenge in accepting the gender identity of their children. As I speculated in Chapter 4, perhaps there is a cultural aspect that remains unidentified. I explored the situation with public restrooms extensively.
Kanaromi et al. (2016) compared transprejudice as expressed by evangelical Christians and nonreligious individuals. The Christian group measured significantly lower on comfort interacting with trans people and reported a much more dichotomous (nonfluid) view of gender. No conclusions are suggested nor should be assumed comparing the results from the study looking at evangelical Christians and my participants’ statements regarding the Roman Catholic Church’s attitudes and influence in New Mexico. These are very different branches of Christianity. Kanaromi et al. (2016) removed responses from those who indicated they were “Catholic” or “nonevangelical Christians” as well as those who held any other religious affiliation. A survey of the attitudes toward trans binary or nonbinary persons held by New Mexicans who identify as Roman Catholic could be an interesting study; the results might be surprising to my participants who spoke of the group.

The literature discussed trans nonbinary persons facing transnormativity: there is only one way in which to be trans—living within the gender binary (Nicolazzo, 2016). Matsuno and Budge (2017) wrote of microaggressions and macroaggressions aimed at nonbinary people, at times by binary trans individuals. This contributed to the internalized oppression experienced by so many minority individuals.

P-Three described their interactions with the local trans community over time as well as the evolution of that group from purely binary to more openness and acceptance of nonbinary persons as well as the growth in numbers of nonbinary individuals. Both P-Two and P-Four spoke with admiration about trans binary persons and noting that they saw the situations of trans binary persons as more difficult than their own. P-Two: “I’m fortunate enough to have cis passing privilege, which not a lot of my trans brothers and
sisters can say that.” P-Three: “I think trans women endure a lot more mental emotional physical transformation/trauma/change.”

**Mental and Physical Health Consequences**

Jackman et al. (2018), Morris and Galup (2019), and dickey, Reisner, & Juntunen (2015) undertook studies of nonsuicidal self-injury, and Tebbe and Moradi (2016) and Matsuno and Budge (2017) looked at suicide risk among trans individuals. In each case, the higher incidence was tied to minority stress. None of my participants included any reference to self-injury or suicidal ideation. In fact, they spoke of no use of negative coping strategies.

Information is not widely available regarding nonbinary individuals seeking gender-affirming medical treatment, and what is reported differs from one source to another. Matsuno and Budge (2017) stated that “fewer nonbinary” persons request interventions, but that it is “fairly common.” Clark et al. (2018) reported that, among their participants, the number of nonbinary individuals seeking hormone therapy was much lower than for binary trans. Puckett et al. (2018) stated that 28.6% of genderqueer participants and 33.3% of nonbinary had received hormone treatment; much lower than their reports for trans men (76.8%) or trans women (80.3%). Taylor et al. (2019) reported an increasing number of nonbinary individuals coming to U.K. gender identity clinics for treatment. Puckett et al. (2018) described nonbinary patients feeling mistreated by providers.

Among my participants, only P-Three had chosen gender-affirming treatment in the form of hormone therapy. Asked about whether they had considered or could imagine desiring any type of gender-affirming medical treatment, only P-One stated that they had
considered it recently. P-Four appreciated the feminizing side effect of having been on acne-fighting hormone treatment at a younger age, but other negative side effects had ended the treatment. None of the three imagined ever desiring surgical treatment. For this group, it was not a matter of being unaware concerning what was available as far as gender-affirming medical treatment but not desiring or only beginning to consider a change of that degree.

Legal and Financial Concerns

Nonbinary identity has attained greater support in the United Kingdom, yet a survey of nonbinary individuals reported 76% chose to hide their identity out of fear of retribution (Monro, 2019). U.S. governmental policy has failed to benefit trans persons (Byne et al., 2018; van Anders et al., 2017). Mizock and Hopwood (2018) wrote of the negative effects faced by gender nonbinary persons in legal matters, employment, and healthcare. Additionally, gender nonbinary individuals face a greater likelihood of the effect of stigmatization and marginalization within employment or income matters, affecting in particular those of low-income backgrounds (Mizock & Hopwood, 2018).

Among my participants, P-Three felt their employment would be threatened if they did as little as request the use of they pronouns. They also feared being openly trans had affected their post-graduate hiring. P-Two as well expressed fear of being ostracized if out at work. All four fit into the majority reported who chose to hide their identity in multiple settings.

Support and Resilience

Multiple authors wrote of how support and resilience, in various forms, help to combat the effects of the daunting challenges faced by gender nonbinary individuals
Support may come from families, friends and other relationships, and society (Marshall et al., 2019). Puckett et al. (2019) wrote of social support “buffering” the toll of the challenges resulting in greater well-being. Nicolazzo (2016) suggested nonbinary individuals have differing levels of resilience, based in part on whether they have a sense of belonging. Warren et al. (2016) also wrote of the importance of community belongingness as well as social support. Religious organizations, where many individuals find support, may not be available as opportunities for community for trans persons (Kanamori et al., 2016).

My participants all spoke of the importance of their queer groups of friends with whom they could be open and enjoy acceptance. Even within families, P-Two and P-Four enjoyed close relationships with their respective sisters, plus P-Two with cousins. As P-Two said, “So it’s not like I don’t have family.” None of the participants spoke about any current religious affiliation. Their feelings about the conservative influence of the Roman Catholic Church perhaps precluded participating in other religious organizations, even those known to be more accepting. The sense of belonging that the literature points to as so important could be a factor in my participants allowing the situations with their families. As suggested, perhaps my participants feel connection is more important than acceptance.

Newly Selected Literature

At the completion of the analysis of the participants datasets, I performed additional literature searches. These searches were conducted for three reasons: (1) to find pertinent articles published since the searches performed in late 2019 for the review of literature in Chapter 2, (2) to discover publications related to the findings of this study,
and (3) to correspond with the Hispanic/Latinx identity of my participants. As originally
designed, the study did not include the Hispanic/Latinx recruitment criterion but rather
was open to any ethnic identity. When the pandemic shut down the campus and state,
four aspects of the original proposal approved by IRB were revised: (1) interviews were
changed from in-person to online video; (2) the distribution of the recruitment flier was
changed from on campus to social media via student listservs of the Counselor Education
Program; (3) the age range criterion was changed from 20–24 to 22–32; and (4) the
Hispanic/Latinx criterion for ethnicity was added. IRB approved the revisions in the
follow-up submission. The ethnicity change was made to better address one of the
research needs identified in the extant literature for studies focused on Persons of Color.
As well, it took advantage of the minority-majority status of New Mexico and other
unique aspects of the state. All of the revisions made proved to be fortuitous.

Where the original database searches focused on “gender” + “nonbinary” and
“gender dysphoria,” the new searches focused on “gender nonbinary” and “gender
nonbinary Hispanic.” The new searches were conducted using Google Scholar to
potentially change or broaden the results. Hundreds of article synopses were surveyed
online with 37 articles downloaded for closer review based on apparent subject matter,
dates of publication, and the inclusion of “Hispanic.”

**Representation of Hispanic/Latinx individuals in gender nonbinary–related
studies.** I found it surprising and disheartening how many of the articles that were
included in the “gender nonbinary Hispanic” search appeared because of the phrase “non-
Hispanic.” In fact, the number that included Hispanic or Latinx participants was
extremely small. The extent to which Hispanic/Latinx participants were included in many
of the studies appeared to be less than would be expected to be appropriately representative, especially for studies that took place in the United States. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health (Office of Minority Health, n.d.), Hispanics represent 18.1% of the U.S. population according to the 2017 Census Bureau estimate.

As an example of low representation, in the report by Paz Galupo, Pulice-Farrow, and Pehl (2020) on a study looking at nonbinary individuals and gender dysphoria, the authors acknowledged the limited racial/ethnic diversity with 78.3% of the participants identifying as White. The international sample drew from Reddit, Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr for 87% of its sample that included participants from 18 countries as well as 35 U.S. states plus Washington, DC. Only 10 of the 205 participants, however, identified as Hispanic/Latinx, and just three of the 76 chosen for thematic analysis. Authors dickey et al. (2016) questioned whether the use of the Internet for finding participants resulted in a diverse sample.

Among studies closely reviewed for this additional sampling of literature, Dray, Smith, Kostecki, Sabat, and Thomson (2019), one of three studies discussed below that considered nonbinary persons in the workplace, included only 6% Hispanic respondents as compared to almost 71% White. Another article concerning workplace, Davidson (2016), at once stated that the sample used for the survey from which they took data may have “underrepresented” racial and ethnic minorities while also claiming “substantial variation” in race. Unfortunately, no numbers or percentages were included for readers to draw their own conclusions. McCarthy, Ballog, Carranza, and Lee (2020) included four participants in their study. No racial or ethnic information was provided for them.
The Losty and O’Connor (2018) study took place in Ireland with an all-white group of six participants. Vijlbrief, Saharso, and Ghorashi (2020) looked at young adults in Amsterdam. While none of their participants were Hispanic/Latino, the study did include five out of 11 participants who identified as Persons of Color. On the other hand, Valente et al. (2020) stratified their sample including for race/ethnicity and included 18.5% Latinx. Harry-Hernandez et al. (2020) broke down their 40 participants as 45% White, 20% Black or African American, and 30% Hispanic/Latinx.

**Workplace-related findings for gender nonbinary persons.** Dray et al. (2019) presented a vignette to 249 Amazon Mechanical Turk participants to determine their perceptions regarding assigned sex and gender identity. They concluded that nonbinary and trans binary individuals experience workplace prejudice and discrimination. In their study, nonbinary persons who were assigned male at birth were the least liked group.

Davidson (2016) used data from the National Transgender Discrimination Survey to explore the experiences of gender nonbinary persons in work situations. Davidson proposed that nonbinary individuals were hired but denied promotions or other advancement. The researcher further differentiated between those who were assigned female at birth and those assigned male, with those assigned female receiving even fewer opportunities. Persons of Color, especially Blacks or African Americans, were treated in the most discriminatory manner, which led Davidson to conclude that trans issues should be examined with consideration of other identities. No data was provided for Hispanic/Latinx participants.

McCarthy et al. (2020) described reports from their participants regarding feeling unsafe in binary environments including the workplace. Not unlike my participants, theirs
felt pressured to conform to gender norms to preserve their employment. My participants were not alone in choosing to go stealth at work.

**Other findings related to my participants’ experiences.** Lampe et al. (2020) was a study that included strong Hispanic/Latinx representation. It looked at New York City neighborhoods. Among the coping strategies described were avoidance of discriminatory spaces, vigilance and awareness, attention to attire and presentation, and spending time as much as possible in places known to be safe. These align with much of what my participants described.

Likewise, Vijlbrief et al. (2020) identified five main themes in their study of gender nonbinary individuals in Amsterdam that seemed familiar. Regarding their first theme of “gender as a spectrum,” as I think about my participants, this seemed to be a given at the outset of the interview. The theme of “discovering and defining oneself” fits very easily with my first superordinate theme. Vijlbrief et al. include a discussion of language as well. Finally, their “places of visibility” or safety resonates with various aspects of my discussion of participants’ experiences.

During my additional literature searches, I rediscovered Bradford et al. (2019). While disappointing in Hispanic/Latinx inclusion (two of 25 participants pulled from five U.S. cities), themes were described similar to my study. All of my participants demonstrated the individual experiences of gender nonbinary persons, with P-Four speaking directly about it. Bradford et al. Also described the difficulties when faced with people possessing too little knowledge regarding the gender nonbinary. The researchers also included language, presentation dependent on situation, and being gender nonbinary as a form of freedom.
Rider et al. (2019) described a framework created for mental health professionals to guide work with gender nonbinary clients. As a nonstudy article, there are no participants. However, in their presentation of a clinical case vignette, they chose to describe a Hispanic client. It is unclear whether the vignette is based on a real case or created for the article. The character presented some striking similarities to my participants. When they enter therapy, they are somewhat distanced from their Puerto Rican parents and family out of fear of their gender identity being discovered and resulting in their being disowned. A culturally related concern for reflecting negatively on the family, concern about coming out at work, and creation of a “chosen family” within the queer community are all familiar topics from my participants including fear of rejection or “erasure.”

McCarthy et al. (2020) also wrote of participants finding comfort in their friend groups as well as in virtual environments. My participants also described the importance of their queer friends and communities. Being at greater ease in virtual situations makes me wonder if conducting my interviews online may have been an unforeseen and unplanned advantage; one of the rare positives resulting from the pandemic.

Losty and O’Connor (2018) looked at an all-white group of six in Ireland. Again, their first major theme focused on “a developing gender identity” including a “realisation” and discovery of the nonbinary concept. In contrast to my participants, all of Losty and O’Connor’s desired some physical transition. Only one of my four had undergone medical transitioning and just one other had contemplated the idea of some minor changes via hormone therapy. Language was again a primary theme, including the importance of pronouns, being misgendered, and use of a selected name, all of which
were discussed by my participants. Not unlike my participants, those of Losty and O’Connor chose to avoid some situations deemed as unsafe or otherwise problematic, although my participants spoke of usually passing in such settings. Losty and O’Connor wrote

This marrying of liberation (i.e. liberation of gender boundaries) and restriction was observed within all of the participants’ narratives to varying degrees and perhaps contributed to a sort of tension within the minds of the participants. (p.51)

While not as extensively explored as my third superordinate theme focused on my participants choices regarding where they were out, I believe it addressed the same concept. Likewise, Losty and O’Connor discussed the reflections of their participants regarding their family’s response to their gender identity. One participant stated they “didn’t mind” their family’s response—very similar to how P-Four in particular spoke—while another of their participants expressed anger and others had chosen to keep their families unaware. Five of the six moved away from their families to “live as their true selves.” I find it noteworthy that my three participants who discussed family-of-origin issues all chose to stay with their families and provided allowance to their parents rather than leave the family. This again raises the question of a cultural aspect to their choices.

Valente et al. (2020) was a study that included a stratified sample to achieve an 18.5% Latinx proportion. While “family support” was a factor included in the study, the researchers did not define “family.” Their finding of family support reducing psychological distress cannot be compared to my participants’ discussion of family as some participants may have been using a concept often described as “chosen” family, usually made up of others who identify as queer.
Broad Interpretative Look at Literature

I reviewed in the previous subsections many ways in which my participants appeared to be in line with the findings of published research. The importance of language and pronouns—as well as challenges in conceiving of an identity for which you have no words—fit precisely with my participants journey stories. Likewise, the lack of comprehension among others was true for my participants, and, as explored in Superordinate Theme 2, hit close to home with family and especially parents. Dissimilar to other findings regarding straight men being more transprejudiced, it was the mothers of three of my participants with whom the greatest issues of acceptance were experienced. This may have a particularly cultural connection related to the responsibilities taken on by mothers related to passing on traditions including accepted gender roles. It would be interesting to have a greater understanding of any similarity between evangelical Christians’ lack of acceptance or comfort with trans persons and how my participants experienced the conservative and negative attitudes of the Roman Catholic Church in New Mexico.

Issues with work acceptance, legal situations, as well as restrooms and other general public settings were borne out by my participants, although with a different response on their part. While they did speak of the difficulty of self-concealing and the pain it created, all four appeared to have accepted it as their way of life or at least the better choice than losing work opportunities or creating unsafe situations. This response was present to a greater degree in the new literature I added.

Published reports on psychological well-being and less-than-positive coping strategies were inconsistent and not supported by my findings. As I have suggested
several times, those persons who identify as gender nonbinary constitute a diverse population. I was left to wonder about the positive differences my participants seemed to portray as compared to the published studies.

An obvious difference in my study and many of the reports was my qualitative approach, which meant a deeper exploration of my participants’ lives. This study was not carried out using assessment instruments looking specifically at so-called maladaptive behaviors. My goal was not to create new statistical information. Again, at least some of the newer publications take a more in-depth approach.

With the three participants with whom I had uninterrupted time, I did prompt on topics including

- If you are comfortable saying, have you ever thought about seeing a mental health professional for any reason? [If yes] how was that experience?
- What have your experiences with medical providers been like?
- What experiences have you had that you realized were discriminatory?
- Have you had situations in which you felt unsafe related to your gender?
- How would you describe the stress you’ve experienced related to your gender identity?

While these prompts brought out important data, they did not produce any sense of concern on my part as a licensed professional counselor regarding psychological well-being. If anything, the responses led me to believe in the participants’ resiliency and extremely positive attitudes. At the same time, my interviews were not structured as psychosocial assessments; the focus and intent were elsewhere. I acknowledge that some readers might question whether my participants’ concealing their gender identities is
positive or negative. Various aspects of their choosing to not be out were explored in the section on Superordinate Theme 3. My conclusion was that their choices made sense for them at this time. Certainly I feel no right to suggest they should make other choices.

Another difference between my participants and the participants of many of the published studies was that my four were not recruited from a population of individuals seeking or receiving mental health services. Instead, my recruitment was done through social media originating from graduate counseling students that reached various groups and organizations as well as many levels of personal social media. Simply the fact that they were individuals who would become aware of the recruitment flier and choose to respond to it, let alone participate in an online interview concerning such deeply personal experiences, certainly sets them apart from perhaps the majority of the general population—and perhaps even from the population they represented. My participants appeared to be familiar with academic research, with one even asking additional questions about my work. They all seemed excited to be a part of the study and have their voices heard. I make no claims that my data generalizes to other gender nonbinary individuals, even ones who would meet the criteria of age, ethnicity, and local residency.

I purposely avoided the usual demographic instrument with my participants. I felt it put emphasis elsewhere and had the potential of disaffecting an interviewee. Using any kind of form that forced choices in other categories when it can be so problematic with gender seemed inappropriate. I explained this approach at the beginning of the interview and asked if participants had other identities they felt it important for me to know; all declined. The result is not having specific information or forced categories regarding my participants’ education levels (except as they were revealed or demonstrated within the
interviews), socioeconomic status (beyond what could be potentially discerned by their internet connectivity and available tech equipment), and other such factors.

Until more studies take place, I am left to speculate on what other factors made my participants appear to be better adjusted psychologically and more resilient than many of the reports would suggest is the case with others who identify as gender nonbinary. My thoughts go first to the ethnicity and New Mexico residency that are unique to my participants—as compared to the studies reported.

Much was discussed in the published reports concerning minority stress. There were, no doubt, aspects of that in my interviews, but it seemed to fall short of the detrimental levels presented in other studies. The usual thinking—and often the actual situation—is that multiple minority status compounds minority stress. At the same time, being taught how to deal with minority status in one area can be applied in another, such as ethnic minority status and learning to avoid attention. The Black Lives Matter movement has more extensively made Whites and others aware of racial coping socialization where Black parents teach their children, especially their sons, how to evade unwanted and potentially dangerous attention. Perhaps some minority members are able to transfer such lessons to other minority identities. Kuper, Coleman, and Mustanski (2014) explored the experiences of LGBT youth of color regarding racial coping socialization by parents and similarities in approaches taken by the adolescents in sexual/gender-related situations. Kuper et al. noted that parents tended to teach avoidance approaches as opposed to approach (engage) coping strategies. They also wrote of LGBT youth hiding their sexual/gender minority status, not unlike my participants talked of doing. It is noteworthy that Kuper et al. reported that rejection by family was the most
common stressor among their LGBT participants. My participants may have chosen their allowance toward their mothers and their passing as gendered to escape both the stressors of loss of family acceptance and dangers of being out in public situations.

For my participants, they may have been taught how to stay under the radar as Hispanic/Latinx (P-Two spoke of passing as White) and were applying that approach to gender status. P-Four related not wanting to confuse law enforcement agents with trying to explain being gender nonbinary. “I don’t want to give them more reason to heckle me. . . . I’ll just let them address me as ma’am or whatever they need to, to end their interaction—for safety reasons.” Kuper et al. (2014) noted their participants had been socialized to use avoidance and submissive coping strategies when in contact with police.

This realization that not being “one to stir the pot” (P-Two’s phrase) could be related to my participants willingness to use passing and not insisting persons in short encounters know or accept their gender identity, which allows them to go about their day-to-day lives without negative encounters. This would be magnified when it is applied to work situations. As stated in one published report, gender nonbinary persons suffered from career underdevelopment, underemployment, low income, unemployment, poverty, and even homelessness (Tebbe et al., 2019; Mizock & Hopwood, 2018). If ethnic protective training, as it were, already gave my participants awareness of discriminatory situations and of strategies to avoid such treatment, they could even be unconsciously applying the same concept in passing.

There is no question that such appeasement, whether due to ethnicity or gender identity, is not without costs personally or on a broader scale. The hurt described by my participants during their interviews is an example. By no means am I suggesting that it is
a fair or appropriate situation for any person to need to hide an important identity to maintain a job or feel safe. Likewise, no person who is a member of any oppressed group should be expected to become a public advocate for the group. I am speculating that developing ways to work around oppressive treatment has come to be a survival strategy, sometimes with awareness and sometimes not.

In New Mexico, being Hispanic/Latinx means being part of the majority ethnic group. Obviously, this does not preclude far too many members of the group from experiencing oppression, especially in regard to poverty levels as well as economic, educational, and work opportunities. There is, however, visibility on a level that is not present in most or perhaps any other states. The current and past two New Mexico governors (beginning in 2003) have all been Hispanic/Latinx, representing both Democratic and Republican affiliations. Many other elected officials are also Hispanic/Latinx, such as the state attorney general and the local district attorney. Likewise, many in the local media, such as news anchors and reporters, are Hispanic/Latinx. There is also great pride among Hispanic/Latinx people in New Mexico. This is especially true among those Salgado (2020) referred to as Nuevomexicanos or those Hispanic persons in New Mexico whose families have been present here for generations. A large proportion of Nuevomexicanos trace their heritage back to the Spanish colonization of the region, and therefore prior to either the nation of Mexico or the nation of the United States. The prejudice often involved toward more recently arrived Hispanic/Latinx persons, usually of Mexican origin, is beyond the focus of this study. I did not ask my participants to address this aspect of their Hispanic/Latinx identity and therefore cannot speculate on any relevance.
Likewise, the relationship between the New Mexico Hispanic/Latinx population and the Native Peoples of the region is complex, as witnessed by New Mexico’s 2020 removal of statues controversy centered not on Civil War figures but on representations of conquistadors who had devastated the Native populations at the time of their arrival. P-Two spoke of an ancestral connection to Native Peoples, and P-One and P-Four talked of gender and Native Peoples. These areas of discussion did not reach a level of theme to be included in this report.

The result of all of this complex and fascinating history and current demographics creates a unique setting that undoubtedly affects residents and therefore to some extent my participants. Adding to this, is the data gathered from participants and related in Chapter 4 regarding the political atmosphere in Albuquerque and New Mexico: P-One spoke of enjoying the progressive and diverse situation in Albuquerque; P-Two discussed she/he would live nowhere else than this “blue” state; and P-Four noted the friendly and progressive state laws regarding trans persons.

Further interpretation of the data and known facts of New Mexico may offer additional possible reasons my participants differed from the reported studies’ participants. In Chapter 4, I speculated on the importance of family in Hispanic/Latinx culture, to which my participants may adhere. I suggested that it could be a reason the three included in Superordinate Theme 2 did not allow their parents’ reactions to their gender identity (or sexual orientation, in the case of P-Two) destroy or preclude their relationships. While the situation causes pain, perhaps the support in other areas of their lives contributes to their sense of community and resilience found to be so important by other researchers (e.g., Conlin et al., 2019; Marshall et al., 2019; Puckett et al., 2019;
Nicolazzo, 2016). Again, it is not without a cost in sacrificing the respect gender nonbinary individuals long for from their families and others. All participants reported support from their queer friends. As well, P-Two and P-Four each noted their respective sisters as supportive, and P-Two spoke of her/his cousins, noting that she/he did have some family close.

What appeared to be new in my findings as compared to the research in Chapter 2 found some resonance in the new studies I added. The topics addressed in Superordinate Themes 2 and 3: allowances made for mothers and the dual life of out and not out dependent on the situation found support in studies such as Lampe et al. (2020), Bradford et al. (2019), and especially Losty and O’Connor (2018) and their brief discussion of liberation and restriction. I maintain my suggestion that for my participants both superordinate themes may be influenced by their Hispanic/Latinx culture and the uniqueness of New Mexico. An additional difference with the extant literature was the role that exploring sexual orientation appeared to have in gender identity realization.

**Evaluation of the Study**

**Participant Feedback**

At the close of the interviews, I asked the participants for feedback on the interview process. I believe their responses are a meaningful aspect of evaluating the study. Because the interview with P-Three was cut short, I was unable to pose the question to them. Shortly after disconnecting, however, I received a text: “Thanks for doing this work! Hope it goes well.”

P-One’s response to prompt for feedback:

*I think all of these have been really good prompts. They, they, at least for*
me, they’ve been pretty easy to talk about. I do like you specifically had a question—although I’d already kind of answered it—about the intersectionality of identities. . . . I appreciate you having that question in there specifically.

P-Two’s reply:

I think your questions are good. I’m trying to think in terms of other nonbinary folks, and, like, what traumas they’ve had, and it seems your questions are very, very well thought out and open enough that you could give a pretty well thought out answer but still maintain a decent level of privacy and that’s not triggering for as much as it can be. The questions—I love that they weren’t the standard what made you think you’re queer [laughing] kind of thing. How’d you know you were a boy? So yeah, I do appreciate—I’ve never been asked the, like, healthcare ones. I think a lot of people haven’t because health-care workers—not to say they don’t care; I won’t say that they don’t care. I will not say that, but it’s not something that is at the forefront of their mind like, how do I assess this person’s gender or the lack thereof. . . . I really, really appreciate you bringing awareness of gender nonbinary not specifically emphasizing trans in the counseling community, because there are plenty of people who want the affirmation but not necessarily the permanence, so, yeah, I appreciate that.

P-Four had questions at the beginning of the interview regarding my academic connection to the university.
Just for clarification, are you through the department of education through UNM? [Answered as College of Education, Department of Individual, Family, and Community Education] Cool. Yeah, thank you for doing that. Seeing the criteria [on the recruitment flier] for it was somewhat specific. And I was like, wow, I fit that! But, um, that’s specific, so thanks for explaining that.

At the close of the interview, when asked for feedback, P-Four responded:

Your interview—I loved it. Thank you. This is great for me. . . . I enjoyed this process. It seemed super natural. I think the directions that you allowed me to explore got to the point of things that are very impactful for me to explore. And then hopefully help inform whatever you’re looking into.

At the very least, these comments by the participants indicate a comfort level and sense of safety in participating in the interview. I believe that speaks to the openness and honesty with which they shared their experiences, which in turn provided rich and high-quality data for analysis and interpretation.

**Evaluation of This Study According to IPA Guidelines**

As the primary means of evaluating this study, I use Smith’s (2011a) article containing a clear guide for assessing IPA research. I adapt the seven categories delineated in Table 10 as subheads below to explore each identified area in turn. As previously stated, it will be for the reader to determine the validity of this study and discern the applicability of my findings to their situations or to the specific clients with whom they are working (Smith et al., 2009; Smith, 2011a).
Clear focus. The focus of the study came from the research question: the experiences of identifying as gender nonbinary, Hispanic/Latinx, New Mexico resident, and 22 to 32 years of age. The individuals who chose to be involved made both the residency and the age range more specific: all were long-time residents of Albuquerque and fell within the 27 to 32 age range. The very open initial prompt asking participants to relate their experiences was followed by secondary prompts as needed to address areas identified from the review of literature.

In the analysis and interpretation, the three superordinate themes became apparent almost immediately. The work was to best name them and shape them in the written report. By presenting each as its own section and using subsections for the related areas, I believe the focus remained clear.

Strong data. I was extremely fortunate to have four participants who were each well-spoken and clearly stated their experiences. Participants allowed to speak to the initial prompt as long as they liked and as they saw fit. The point at which I used secondary prompts differed among them. I tried to simply stay out of their ways to allow their telling of their stories. I appreciated the feedback they each gave on their interview experiences, included above. Although an interviewee enjoying and appreciating the time does not necessarily mean the interview was successful, their comments plus the depth and richness of their data does speak to the quality of the interviews. Contributing to this, I believe, was their desire to tell their stories to someone who was seen to be very interested in listening and appreciative of their time. Those were easy achievements on my part. As anticipated, my experience as a professional counselor was very beneficial in the interview process.
Rigor. My participants spoke well and expressed their experiences in a very engaging way. Even when at times they stumbled in relating some aspect, their words were meaningful in demonstrating their struggle. For these reasons, I used very extensive extracts from the transcripts so that I could let them speak for themselves. It was in the interpretation, clearly set off from their statements, that my voice took the lead.

As I had four participants, the IPA guidelines (Smith, 2011a) indicated that extracts from and discussion of three of the four should be included for each superordinate theme. I chose to use all four for two of the themes and three for the third. In my estimation, this goes beyond requirements, but the quality of data and convergence on themes were deciding factors. I attribute the fourth participant not being included in Superordinate Theme 2 to the shortened interview, but I also did relate their data to the topic.

For all themes presented, the excerpts from transcripts and my analysis and interpretation address convergence and divergence within and between the individual participants’ datasets. Again, I chose to extensively present extracts to allow the participants’ words as evidence regarding the themes that emerged. As possible, and I believe in reality, the participants were as equally represented as possible.

Elaboration of each theme. This guideline included the direction to provide sufficient space for each theme. As this is a dissertation without strict limits on words or pages, I was able to fully explore the three superordinate themes through extracts from the datasets as well as in my analysis and interpretation. The fact that the data clearly presented the three themes as superior to others, there was no struggle to choose between themes or to determine the number to use.
Interpretative, not just descriptive. One of the primary reasons I chose to use IPA for this project was the interpretative aspect it allows. As stated earlier, I see this as a great match for researchers who are also counselors as both the interviewing skills and interpretative approach are familiar. This research question and topic were well served by IPA. While participants were eloquent in sharing their experiences, an interpretative methodology allowed me as researcher, who was separate from their experiences, to take their stories further. This was especially true when all four datasets were available.

Repeating the Smith et al. (2009) quote from earlier, interpretation may “offer meaningful insights which exceed and subsume the explicit claims of our participants. . . . [T]he interpretative analyst is able to offer a perspective on the text which the author is not” (p. 23). Smith et al. (2009) credited a “systematic and detailed analysis” for value beyond the original words, noting the benefit of a broader view (the whole of the data) as well as application of psychological theory.

My experience with the analysis and interpretation of the data exceeded what I had anticipated. By this I mean that transcribing the interviews myself and reading and rereading the texts allowed me to delve into the data in an even greater manner than I had foreseen. The richness of the data allowed greater and greater understanding. I definitely had the experience of analysis—and certainly interpretation—continuing during the writing stage as noted in IPA guidelines (e.g., Smith & Osborn, 2008; Smith et al., 2009). Even after reading and rereading the transcripts, choosing the extracts and putting them together with those of other participants naturally took the analysis deeper. Writing and then leaving it for a period allowed the analysis process to continue in my thoughts to then further explore when I returned to the writing. Submerging myself in the data was an
exhilarating experience.

**Convergence and divergence.** Identifying convergence and divergence within the themes that presented themselves seemed to naturally occur. Within Superordinate Theme 1 focused on participants’ realization journeys, the divergence was clear. Yet at the same time, all ultimately came to the same place. I personally found it enlightening to realize that being gender nonbinary is much less about how it may be expressed than it is about the freedom to express one’s gender as individually as desired or needed. In the other superordinate themes, again, both convergence in the overall theme and divergence in the particular ways it was expressed were clear in the data. As an example, in Superordinate Theme 2 regarding mothers, P-One had experienced “a big fight” with their mother; P-Two chose not to discuss gender with her/his parents based on the rejection experienced based on sexual orientation; and P-Four uncharacteristically stumbled in trying to explain their family’s response to their gender identity. Very different experiences, but all participants remained in relationship with their parents even with the lack of the desired acceptance and support.

**Carefully written.** I found the statements and language of the participants to be compelling and engaging. As for the writing of the report, I saw my role as bringing the various examples together in a way that the participants’ words would be presented for the reader to also be engaged. My goal for my own words was to clearly express my analysis and interpretation for the reader to understand the path the data led me on toward my conclusions. To best honor the trust my participants put in me, I hope that I was successful.

**Application of the Findings**
Impact of Findings on My Work

Personally, this study has had and will continue to have a great impact on me. First and foremost as a researcher having successfully completed a study I consider to have added to the knowledge concerning an underknown and growing population. I hope to build on this experience especially with IPA. As I discuss in the future research section, the possibilities of pursuing other studies on this topic seem endless.

As a counselor, my experience with gender nonbinary people and the diversity within the group has been expanded greatly by conducting this study. I hope my practice continues to include gender nonbinary clients as well as others exploring gender-related questions. As I have indicated, learning about gender nonbinary persons increases knowledge about gender expression of any kind.

As a counselor educator, with this first-hand knowledge about gender nonbinary people, I hope to have opportunities to share it with others. Beyond that, IPA guidelines offer techniques and approaches very applicable to teaching a counseling skills class. Even an exercise in the difference between interviewing and counseling could be very educational. I hope I have the chance to work with a student doing IPA or perhaps to create presentations on the methodology.

Finally, and perhaps a more important impact than I realize, this experience has given me the opportunity to consider my own gender identity and better understand my experience and expression. Greater awareness of self is always of value to a mental health professional—as well as an educator.

How Findings May Inform Others

My comments will first be directed to clinicians, whether professional counselors,
psychologists, clinical social workers, marriage and family therapists, or others. My hope is that the findings of this study will create interest and curiosity regarding gender nonbinary individuals who are too often misunderstand. Included in this is how such persons may not have the awareness or language to consider this gender possibility and come to their own realizations. Clinicians can help with this simply by helping clients who appear to be dealing with gender issues—identified or not—to understand the range of identities others endorse. Recall P-Three speaking about being “allowed.”

My hope is too that my findings will inform clinicians regarding the diversity among gender nonbinary individuals. Clinicians must constantly check ourselves for preconceptions, values, or judgments that could be harmful to clients. The best way to avoid such pitfalls is to seek knowledge and awareness regarding topics or populations about which we are unfamiliar. Being open to diversity means openness to learning and being surprised by what we had not previously imagined.

Beyond diversity, I believe my findings help to understand the impact culture and location may have on any client, but in this case, persons who are gender nonbinary. The comparison of findings from other studies from around the world supports this conclusion. Another clinician may be looking at a very different location and a different culture, but I believe that gaining an understanding of the impact for one person can inform the awareness of potential impact on another—of their own cultural background. Location includes the political makeup of the area, as expressed by my participants looking at both the conservative and progressive aspects of New Mexico. P-Two wondered if she/he would have had the same understanding of self if she/he had grown up elsewhere. As well, my participants spoke compellingly about the power of religious
institutions. These too will differ from one client to another, but our knowing the impact on a particular person is important.

Participants’ thoughts when asked about ever considering counseling provide good information. P-One told of seeing a therapist currently but not for “gender support.” They went on to say, however, that they did share their gender identity with the therapist. They described how gender had not been much of a topic, although the therapist noted that P-One seemed “happier” and “more aware of myself” since realizing their identity. This appeared to be a positive situation of the therapist being aware, supportive, encouraging, and realizing that gender identity is a fundamental aspect of one’s being but need not be the topic of every interaction.

P-Four spoke of seeing counselors and “talking about other things. [Gender identity] wasn’t integrated even though I see it as an integral part of my identity.” They went on, “whatever the topic we were talking about, like difficulty at school or something, it wasn’t the central point, but it was also not brought up.” A great reminder that we often restrict what may be discussed by not indicating an openness. Again, gender is so fundamental to who we are that it is hard to imagine it not being pertinent or related to any topic being discussed.

The findings concerning forms used such as in counseling situations are important to keep in mind. Every aspect of our encounters with clients or potential clients are important. It was surprising to learn how many medical personnel were not being told their patients’ gender status. Recall P-Four’s comment that “when given options, it feels appropriate to disclose it.” Likewise, P-One stated that “a lot of places still don’t have that option on forms, so there’s still some ways to go on their part.” P-Two wondered,
“Do I check both male and female? Do they mean sex? Do they mean gender? It didn’t say sex or gender.” P-Four’s comment is so important to remember: “It’s a lot deeper than just checking one single box.”

All of the above apply to counselor educators and students preparing to be counselors. For counselor educators, we must recall that every interaction we have in the classroom or individually with students is an opportunity to model a counseling approach. Demonstrating openness to gender diversity with students is a way to expand students’ awareness and to challenge preconceptions, fight prejudice, and prevent discrimination.

Additionally, for educators and counseling students, especially those working with or becoming doctoral students, the power of IPA as a methodology is a message I hope this report conveys. As well, the appropriateness of IPA for counselor/researchers and for the topics we address.

**Delimitations, Strengths, and Limitations**

**Delimitations**

I believe the choice of IPA as the methodology for this study proved to be positive. This placed the study firmly within the qualitative realm, which, again, was the appropriate choice for the research question. Only a qualitative approach could delve into the life experiences of persons meeting the criteria of gender nonbinary, Hispanic/Latinx, New Mexico resident, and ages 22–32. The limited number of participants available for the study further fit IPA’s methodology; a small number of participants is an integral aspect of IPA. This allowed for a deep dive into the data to produce both descriptive and interpretative findings.
Part of my IPA approach for this study was to have one contact point with each participant. This was to produce a “snapshot” of their lives as they described them at that point in time and in the context of interacting with me in an interview setting. I will comment further on this choice as a limitation.

**Strengths**

I see a major strength of this study to be the use of IPA as the methodology. As I asserted in Chapter 3, I believe IPA is a great choice for qualitative research carried out by individuals who are also counselors. The skill sets overlap in a very nice way, as long as the researcher stays true to the role being performed in at the time. IPA also fits well with topics that “are complex, ambiguous and emotionally laden,” as Smith and Osborn noted (2015, p. 41); this description applies to the gender nonbinary phenomenon.

Recruitment was successful. This was a very legitimate concern even prior to the pandemic, not knowing if potential participants would be reached and how willing they might be to join the study. Moving to online-only as the means of recruitment could have made it more difficult or less. The result, however, was just right. With committee approval for three participants, the resulting four exceeded the requirement and worked very well. Additionally, their initial responses to recruitment came very close together, allowing the interviews to be scheduled over an 11-day period.

The four individuals who became participants were a serendipitous and fortuitous aspect of the study. Each was open and forthcoming with their experiences and spoke of enjoying and appreciating the experience. They also presented meaningful and rich similarities and differences—convergence and divergence—adding to the value of the findings. I feel very fortunate to have had these particular participants, and I believe they
provided a substantial strength for the study.

My chair and committee members provided support as well as knowledge each in their own way. My chair was attentive and available throughout the process. I cannot imagine a better guide and partner in this endeavor. This support provided an undeniable strength for the study.

Finally, I believe my positionality, described earlier in this report, was a strength for the study. My awareness of the gender nonbinary topic from clients, my desire to gain further knowledge, my curiosity, my queer identity, and my own questions about gender all contributed to the energy I committed to the process. My interest and appreciation for New Mexico’s uniqueness and the Hispanic/Latinx population that welcomed me to the state helped make my positionality a strength of the study.

Limitations

The most influential effects on the study that could not have been foreseen were the occurrences of 2020, including the global pandemic and resulting shutdown of the university and the state of New Mexico. Additionally, as a result of multiple murders and persons demonstrating for change, 2020 brought greater awareness of systemic racial and ethnic inequality. As discussed in Chapter 3, the pandemic required procedural redesign and reapplying for IRB approval. The awakening of broader attention to racial issues across the country did not change procedures of the study but were mentioned directly by two participants and undoubtedly affected the statements of all, each of whom identified as Hispanic/Latinx. All of the interviews took place between August 14 and August 24, 2020, inclusively. No local or national events took place during those 11 days that were thought to possibly affect the data from one participant to another.
It is interesting to contemplate the possible effects of the shutdown of the state on the study. The original plan had been to hold interviews in one of two settings to be chosen by participants. Both were counseling rooms: one at the university’s campus training clinic, and the other at a private practice site off campus. Parking is extremely difficult on campus and may have affected participation. The off-campus site provided parking but may have been deemed uncomfortable due to being an unknown site away from campus.

It is impossible to know how potential participants may have thought about meeting with an unknown person, in an unknown setting, to discuss such a private matter. IPA recommends interviews take place in a setting comfortable for the participant that also takes privacy into consideration. Perhaps going online, especially for persons from an age range that is very familiar with using online video, allowed a comfort level to potential participants that would not have otherwise been present. Convenience was certainly increased as no transportation was needed. I was very comfortable with the video interview setting as I had spent time teaching synchronously online as well as having one-on-one client sessions and student meetings via video.

There were issues on the downside of conducting online video interviews. As most everyone is aware during 2020, technical difficulties are a challenge. P-Two’s interview was interrupted a few times with disconnections. P-Three’s connection was especially poor. This resulted in poor audio at times, with my needing to ask the participant to repeat what they had shared as well as inaudible words or phrases in the resulting audio recording of the interview. The interview was interrupted by multiple instances of frozen screen as well as disconnections. P-Four’s interview was interrupted
very near the beginning when their computer turned off due to needing to be charged. The participant determined the issue and quickly reconnected.

There is a lack of control on the part of the researcher when doing online video interviews. I spoke at the beginning of the interviews about the importance of privacy and not being interrupted. I shared that I was alone in my home that I shared with no one. We were not, however, physically in a private room for which I would have more control over interruptions. With three of the participants, there was no indication of another person being present or any issues concerning privacy. For P-Three, however, the interview was cut short due to their young child awakening from a nap. This interview provided rich data but did not allow for me to raise the secondary prompts nor give the participant the opportunity to address any other issues at the close.

I will seriously contemplate all of these issues during the design stage of future projects. If conditions allow face-to-face meetings, I will not automatically return to that plan—or at least not exclusively. How an interview proceeds in person versus video would be interesting but difficult to explore, as well as potential attrition according to interview means.

The single interview choice as described above is very easy to defend. Additional means of data collection were discussed during the design stage, such as asking participants to write during a prescribed period following the interview. The concern with this or a second interview was not only the desire for the one-time “snapshot” in the single setting, but the potential of vastly differing amounts of data from the participants—an exacerbated version of one of my interviews being cut short.

I recently discovered an article by Smith (2018) that gave an example of
researchers having participants create a drawing with provided paper and colored pencils at the beginning of their in-person interviews. The participants described what they drew and allowed the researcher to keep and reproduce the drawings. Smith indicated that this worked well as a starting point for the topic (pain). One of my committee members had made a similar suggestion during my design stage. While I found it intriguing, I chose not to go in that direction to allow me to stay as close to IPA guidelines as possible. It would have taken some inventiveness to include in the eventual online setting as well.

Additionally, as this study was my dissertation study with the usual time constraints as well as the challenges of 2020, it was determined that the most straightforward design was likely best. There will be future studies.

The reworking of the study to be focused more broadly than the university campus allowed me to adjust the age criterion. Originally set to be 20–24, when moving off campus for recruitment, the range was changed to 22–32. It is noteworthy that my group of participants ranged in age from 27 to 32. Without the change to the age criterion, none of my participants would have been involved. It allowed me to contemplate both the willingness of older participants as compared to younger as well as wondering if the data from younger participants would have been as rich.

A final limitation to consider is that this was my first full IPA study. I prepared as completely as I could by reading the many available instructional articles as well as the Smith IPA book (Smith et al., 2009). I tried to follow the guidelines as closely as possible, even as IPA provides for flexibility. I believe it was an appropriate way to proceed, especially with the support of my qualitative research instructor as a committee member and my chair asking provocative questions about my methodology that kept me
close to the guidelines. At the same time, I acknowledge I will approach my next and subsequent IPA studies with greater knowledge gained from this experience.

**Related Future Research**

My interest in the topic of persons who identify as gender nonbinary has only increased by my conducting this study. I look forward to being a part of research in this area, while hoping to see greater interest in the topic by other researchers as well. As the literature reviewed indicated, there is a great need for more knowledge and understanding of those who are gender nonbinary and their experiences.

I am grateful that this study could focus as well as persons who identify as Hispanic/Latinx and reside in New Mexico. This is a unique setting. The minority majority status of the state is forecast to be shared across much of America in coming decades, making this an important locale for research. It would be interesting to pursue other studies of gender nonbinary individuals within this state. Variations could include age—younger or older; participants from the vast rural areas of the state; and non-Hispanic/Latinx individuals. It would be especially fascinating to explore the experiences of those who identify as gender nonbinary and as Native.

Likewise, research outside of New Mexico could involve various age ranges, locations (including rural or urban), and the intersection of myriad other identities including race, ability status, socioeconomic status, immigration status, country of origin, and religious affiliations. This area of study is so new, the possibilities are almost endless. Even as more research is completed, it is a constantly expanding area as more persons of all ages become aware of the gender nonbinary possibility. Beyond that, it would be fascinating to know how persons who do not identify as gender nonbinary may
be affected by greater awareness of gender possibilities, for instance an individual who is comfortable identifying as female but might feel liberated from the preconceptions of hegemonic gender roles.

Trans binary and nonbinary as a topic was only briefly explored by my participants with the exception of P-Three, even with it being a secondary prompt. Within this small group of participants, the reactions varied. Greater exploration of the concept of trans, especially as an umbrella term, would be interesting and beneficial.

Whether my own or others’, I hope future research on this topic will explore other methodologies for their unique benefits. Research questions that are better addressed by a quantitative approach will no doubt provide increased knowledge. Other qualitative methodologies could bring value as well. While IPA seeks to go in-depth with a small group of persons, a single-case study could provide even greater detailed findings. Longitudinal studies would no doubt be fascinating as time does affect response to gender identity—both the individual’s growth and change over time as well as society’s consideration of the issue over time. Methodologies using focus groups could provide rich data concerning the interaction of persons who identify as gender nonbinary, especially if they included a variety of individual interpretations of gender nonbinary as I enjoyed for this study.

I hope to further explore and become more proficient with IPA. Use of different means of data collection such as drawings or other expressive arts to determine how they affect data and results would be fascinating. I believe the years to come will always include distance interactions via online video, telephone, and other means of interaction. Discovering ways to evaluate those means of interaction compared to face-to-face would
be helpful, as well as simply comparing the outcome of one compared to another.

**Concluding Thoughts**

This project has been as involving and as large an undertaking as I suspect a PhD dissertation should be. It has affected me throughout in ways I had not foreseen. The planning stages were the culmination of course work reaching back to my master’s studies and focused to a greater degree during my doc program. It was influenced by a number of instructors and others along the way. I am honored that the most influential five agreed to be my dissertation committee.

Exploring existing literature on persons who identify as gender nonbinary became a much more personal endeavor than I had expected. My interviews with my participants were involving and enjoyable on a level I had not anticipated. Each of the four was a delight to spend time with, and they honored me by sharing their stories so openly and in such an engaging manner. It was a pleasure to become immersed in the transcripts of the time spent with them. Doing my best to embrace IPA and its call for deep interpretation was daunting and enjoyable at the same time. I look forward to future opportunities to research this topic further and to make use of IPA.

My wish is that this project may first and foremost honor and be true to the participants who put such trust in me. I believe it was their goal to raise awareness and knowledge about persons who identify as gender nonbinary. My desire is to share their stories and my interpretation with a larger audience. Through this project and in many other ways, I hope to advocate—carefully—for all persons who are gender nonbinary and to encourage others to join me in doing so.

Gender is a fascinating, complex, and challenging topic. I consider it unexplored
by the vast majority of people on a personal level, not allowing themselves to question
the roles and expressions society promotes. I will take from this experience new
awarenesses about myself. My goal is greater personal freedom in gender expression and
the promotion of that sense for all.
APENDICES

Appendix A: IRB-Approved Recruitment Flier

Appendix B: IRB-Approved Informed Consent Form

Appendix C: IRB-Approved Interview Schedule
Appendix A: IRB-Approved Recruitment Flier

Looking for gender nonbinary persons willing to talk about your life experience.

**YOU**
- identify as gender nonbinary
- identify as Hispanic/Latinx
- reside in New Mexico
- 22–32 years of age

**ME**
- Gene Crofts
- queer researcher
- doctoral candidate
- UNM IFCE Department

Requesting an online interview lasting up to 90 minutes.

*I want to listen and learn about your experience.*

The study’s purpose is to explore how persons who identify as gender nonbinary understand and make sense of their experience in a gender binary world.

*If interested or you would like more information, please email, text, or leave voicemail.*

gene@unm.edu 505.633.8233
The Experience of Being Gender Nonbinary: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Informed Consent for Interview

Jean Keim, from the UNM IFCE Department is conducting a research project. The purpose of the research is to increase awareness and knowledge about persons who identify as gender nonbinary. You are being asked to participate because you meet the criteria of (1) identifying as gender nonbinary, (2) identifying as Hispanic/Latinx, (3) residing in New Mexico, (4) being in the 22–32 age range, as well as (5) not having had previous contact with Jean Keim or the student collaborator Gene Crofts.

Your participation will involve being interviewed online by collaborator, Gene, for an interview to talk about your experience as a person who identifies as gender nonbinary. The interview should take up to 90 minutes to complete. The interview’s primary request will be “In whatever way you’d like, please tell me about your experience as someone who is gender nonbinary,” with other possible follow-up questions for clarification. Your involvement in the research is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate. You can refuse to answer any of the questions at any time.

The interview will be conducted via the doxy.me confidential and secure telehealth video website so that you and Gene may see each other. However, ONLY AUDIO recordings will be made using a digital audio device placed next to Gene’s computer. Your name will not be requested nor will any identifying information be linked to your responses. The phone number or email address you provided when you contacted the research team will be used only to arrange the interview appointment and to provide the doxy.me link and this consent document.

There are no known risks in this research, but some participants may experience discomfort in talking about their gender-related experiences. As well, some participants may be concerned that their gender identity could become known beyond those with whom they have shared it. Your name will not be requested and, if given, will not be recorded. The provided contact information will be deleted following the interview. Because there will be no record of your name, loss of confidentiality or knowledge of your participation in this study should in no way become known due to the research team. No identifiable information (e.g., your name or any photographic record of your face) will be a part of the information collected in this project. Deidentified data in the form of a digital file of the audio-only recording of your interview will be stored in an encrypted folder on a password-protected computer with no identifying content or file names tying it to your name. The deidentified information may be used for future research or shared with other researchers without your additional informed consent.

The information regarding gender nonbinary persons gathered in this study is to be shared with mental health professionals to prepare them to better work with clients who so identify. If published, results will be presented in summary form with unidentified participant quotes to illustrate study findings.

If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints about the research, please feel free to call Jean Keim (faculty primary investigator) at 505-277-4535 or Gene Crofts (student collaborator) at 505-633-8233. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, or about what you should do in case of any harm to you, or if you want to obtain information or offer input, please contact the UNM Office of the IRB (OIRB) at (505) 277-2644 or irb.unm.edu.

By participating in the interview, you will be agreeing to participate in the above described research.
Appendix C: IRB-Approved Interview Schedule

Interview Schedule

Broad opening query:

- In whatever way you’d like, please tell me about your experience as someone who is gender nonbinary.

This prompt may be sufficient along with minimal encouragers and infrequent follow-up or clarifying questions.

Below are potential supplemental questions to be used as appropriate and depending on what participant shares on their own. They are organized by categories:

**Realizing own gender; institutionalization of gender**

- How did you come to realize you are gender nonbinary [or term they used]?
- There seems to be so little representation of nonbinary people in the media or in institutions like schools or government. How did you become aware that there are people who are gender nonbinary?
- The gender binary seems to be so strongly promoted in schools and legal matters, even sports and restrooms. What are your experiences related to that?

**Intersection of gender with other identities as well as location**

- You identify ethnically as [use term they used: Hispanic, Latinx, or related]. How do you see your gender and your ethnicity affecting each other—if at all?
- How do you believe living in New Mexico interacts with being gender nonbinary?
- I have chosen not to use the usual forced-answer demographic questionnaire—beyond confirming your gender identity, ethnicity, and age. Are there other identities that you would like me to be aware of? [If other identities endorsed, possibly ask about related intersectionalities.]

**Mental health/health care experiences; gender-affirming treatments**

- If you are comfortable saying, have you ever thought about seeing a mental health professional for any reason? [If yes] how was that experience?
- What have your experiences with medical providers been like?
- Have you considered any gender-affirming medical treatments—hormone therapy or surgeries?

**Discrimination/stress/support**

- What experiences have you had that you realized were discriminatory?
- Have you had situations in which you felt unsafe related to your gender?
- How would you describe the stress you’ve experienced related to your gender identity?
- Who in your life can you depend on for support?
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