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Lived Experiences of Parents with Transgender and Gender Expansive Children

by

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M.S. Counseling/Mental Health, Missouri State University 2013

DISSERTATION

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of Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

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Abstract

Parents of transgender and gender expansive (TGE) children can be recognized as a marginalized community often not represented or visible in the context of Westernized society. They experience significant challenges that impact their job as primary caregivers and burden their ability to raise healthy and happy TGE people. This research, guided by Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis methodology and Queer theory, aimed to discern parents of TGE children's subjective and collective experience raising a TGE child in New Mexico, understand how they experience a support group each participant has attended at least one time, and recognize the significance of these experiences for participating parents, who were all encountering similar phenomenon. Findings identified in this research included three superordinate themes: a) Impact of living in conventional society, b) Loss, and c) Advocacy and education as change agents, and recommendations from these results are offered to inform counselors, counselor educators, and future research in counseling on using inclusive practices with this community. Furthermore, there is hope the results will be utilized to create systemic change that is affirming toward parents who are supporting and affirming the TGE children.

Keywords: Parents of Transgender and Gender expansive children, Queer theory, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

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Chapter I

Introduction and Conceptual Framework

Background Information-Gender, Supports, and Westernized Society

Gender is deemed a quintessential component of being human and can be defined as a multifaceted construct encompassing one's comprehension of belonging to a specific gender classification—i.e., male or female. Various components make up this multidimensional construct, which also include an individual's perceived compatibility within gender classification, perceived pressure to conform to gender classification, and the various attitudes held regarding gender groups (Egan & Perry, 2001; Katz-Wise et al., 2018). Butler (1990) defined gender as the repetitive performance of behaving male or female and in Westernized society, these socially constructed ways of understanding a normed or conventional gender identity are cisnormative and heteronormative. The notions developed from behaviors normalizing cisgender and heterosexual or straight people while undermining those who are not make up the core belief systems that are cis- or hetero-normative (McIntyre, 2018). These systems are dominant and urge beliefs of gender as binary categories or in the concepts of being male or female (Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2010; Nealy, 2017).

Many of dominant Westernized systems view gender, as a fundamental feature of humans (Egan & Perry, 2001) and use various means—i.e., religious, legal, and cultural, to enforce such binary genders (Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2010), to degrade people who do not fit into the gender binary. Specific gender binaries are not fitting for all (Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2010) and marginalizing (Katz-Wise et al., 2018; Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2010). Nonetheless, visibility, awareness, and knowledge regarding various gender identities are creating greater acceptance of

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fluid genders (Katz-Wise et al., 2018) and combating conventional or traditional binary classifications of gender (Baum et al., 2014).

As individuals increasingly resist societally normed gender binaries (Baum et al., 2014) a shift in understanding diverse genders is becoming more and more prevalent (Motmans et al., 2019). Scholars are beginning to consider the experiences of diverse genders and the children who defy conventional ideas and understandings of gender (Katz-Wise et al., 2018) as they become increasingly more visible (Baum et al., 2014). Children, who will be identified as Transgender or Gender Expansive (TGE) moving forward in this study, are creating spaces where unconventional gender roles are being affirmed and traditional gender roles are being questioned and combated (Baum et al., 2014; Kuvalanka et al., 2014). Gender expansive is a term used to convey a flexible spectrum of gender identity and expression. It has been used in accordance with those who are Transgender or those whose internal gender, gender identity, or concept of self as female, male, combination of both or neither does not match their assigned sex at birth—i.e., “boy” or “girl” (Baum et al., 2014). Individuals who are TGE do not conform to societal norms of someone considered “boy” or “girl” (Baum et al., 2014; Krieger, 2017; Nealy, 2017) and view these conventional normed ways of understanding gender as impeding on those who aren’t willing to conform to socially constructed views of gender often associated with that of their assigned sex at birth (Baum et al., 2014; Chen et al., 2016). Conforming to these socially constructed ways of knowing one’s gender causes the perception to embody a binary gender in which one performs in conventional ways of behaving in social environments (Butler, 1990; Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2010) furthering the oppressive nature of conventional gendered identities (Hausman, 2001; Katz-Wise et al., 2018; Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2010).

Those who do not conform to gender categories continue to be faced with barriers originating from living in societies that hold Westernized heteronormative or cisnormative views

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(Farmer & Byrd, 2015). Combating conventionally normed gender identities requires TGE people and advocates to look for sources to accept and empower more fluid genders (Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2010). Cisnormative perspectives like those that are ciscentric—i.e., the idea that cisgender people or those who identify as their assigned sex at birth are societally normal and other genders are not (McIntyre, 2018) create transphobic/transprejudice—i.e., prejudice and discriminatory practices experienced by TGE people, (Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2010) policies and procedures. These cisnormative policies and procedures include systems that are oppressive toward TGE people on various levels. Such discriminatory systems, created by our current administration, Department of Justice (DOJ), and Supreme Court rulings (Weaver, 2017), devalue and ignore the separation of church and state and harm TGE people. Liberties such as obtaining housing, employment, education, healthcare, and legal documentation regarding gender markers and name changes (American Civil Liberties Union [ACLU], 2019; Equality Act, H.R.5, 2019) are violated and fail to protect TGE people (Weaver, 2017). Understanding the hetero- and cis-normative perspectives that create biases, assumptions (Nealy, 2017), and systemic barriers (ACLU, 2019) is a start to improving these oppressive systems (Nealy, 2017). Ending discriminatory policies—e.g., bathroom policies or “don’t ask don’t tell”, that create unequal protection or treatment for TGE people makes them feel safer and more respected in public (ACLU, 2019; Equality Act, H.R.5, 2019). Nonetheless, the heteronormative, ciscentric, and often transphobic/prejudice society TGE people live in is fraught with adversities toward them. This reality makes it difficult to “come out” or disclose their affirmed or authentic gender to others at any age, particularly their primary caregivers. In many cases, these adversities keep them from transitioning to their affirmed gender (Krieger, 2017; Nealy, 2017).

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Transition is a process TGE people may choose to undergo. This action includes a shift from being seen by others as their birth-assigned or -designated sex to being seen by others or presenting as their affirmed gender. This social shift includes various actions such as: (a) legally changing their name, (b) announcing affirming pronouns, and (c) altering the way one expresses to match their internal gender with clothing, hair style, mannerisms, voice training, or removing or growing out facial hair, etc. As part of their transition, some TGE people decide to engage in both social and medical transitioning to assist them with matching their internal gender to their expression. Such medical procedures can include hormone blockers, hormone replacement therapy, or surgical procedures (Krieger, 2017; Nealy, 2017). TGE people take different approaches to affirm their gender and each transition is different and carries varying meaning for each TGE person. As Nealy (2017) indicates “...their affirmed gender is a function of their knowledge of who they are, not the medical choices they make” (p.64), and TGE people should not be invalidated because they choose not to socially or medically transition (Nealy, 2017).

Policies and procedures that neglect TGE people’s ability to obtain equitable access to public accommodations continue to be disputed. Westernized society has made strides to improve practices, procedures, and laws that benefit TGE persons rights and overall well-being (ACLU, 2019), but the world is far from ready for this paradigm shift (Motmans et al., 2019). Societal deviations from conventional ideas around gender that support appropriate healthcare and socio-cultural-political movements for TGE people are pertinent to the overall well-being to TGE people. Ensuring proper access to transition-related interventions that affirm a person’s internal gender is relevant to equity, yet some systems continue to feel threatened by the advancements being made for TGE people (Baum et al., 2014; Johns et al., 2019; Motmans et al.,

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2019; Kahn, et al., 2018), creating deficits that hinder the overall well-being of those who are TGE, including those who are young.

Institutions, policies, and practices continue to fall short of meeting the needs of TGE individuals (Association of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Issues in Counseling [ALGBTIC], 2009), and prepuberal TGE children have been found to be particularly susceptible of being at risk of struggling with these systems. As children who are marginalized because of their status as minor children and TGE, they are left feeling unsafe, unseen, unheard, judged, misunderstood, less hopeful, mistreated, victimized, and marginalized (Baum et al., 2014; Kahn et al., 2018; Nealy, 2017). Studies show TGE children who have disclosed their internal gender or socially transitioned are at high risk of experiencing these rejecting behaviors at home or in community spaces such as school (Baum et al., 2014; Henry & Grubbs, 2017; Kuvalanka et al., 2014). Like families and communities, many schools lack knowledge, skills, and attitudes that support marginalized communities, such as TGE persons (Kuvalanka et al., 2014). Institutions, including schools, are deficient in policies and procedures that protect TGE children from experiencing discrimination by teachers, staff, and peers. School policies may intentionally prohibit TGE children from using their preferred names, pronouns they identify with, and bathrooms that match their internal gender or gender identity (ALGBTIC, 2009; Kahn et al., 2018). Rejecting actions and lack of affirming policies have been found to decrease feelings of safety among TGE children at home, school, and in community spaces (Baum et al., 2014; Kuvalanka et al., 2014; Kahn et al., 2018). Thus, increasing negative physical and mental health outcomes as a result of being in a hostile learning environment where they feel defenseless and unsafe, fearful of rejection, and concerned by the negative comments they hear from others, including family members (Kahn et al., 2018).

Need for Parental Support

Researchers have recognized social support and acceptance as being an indicator for positive health outcomes for TGE children (Kahn et al., 2018) and their families (Nealy, 2017). LGBT adolescents who are highly rejected by a primary caregiver are more prone to experience depressive symptoms, use illegal substances, and engage in unprotected sex (Ryan, 2010). Familial support has been recognized as being a vital factor in TGE children's overall well-being (Baum et al., 2014; Ryan, 2010; Olson et al., 2015), with primary caregivers—i.e., parents or guardians, playing an influential role in their TGE child's outcomes (Kahn et al., 2018; Katz-Wise et al., 2017; Sansfaçon et al., 2015). When an LGBT child experiences rejection by a primary caregiver or parent they are more than eight times more inclined to attempt suicide (Ryan, 2010). With support, acceptance, and resources, TGE children and their families can feel safe and experience a positive transition (Ryan, 2010; Katz-Wise et al., 2017; Nealy, 2017; Raj, 2008). Having a social support system—e.g., psychological and physical support prior to, during, or after a stressful incident, like a parent or guardian (Ryan, 2010) or peer led play support group (PLPSG; i.e., peer led support group that incorporates play) can benefit attendees, such as both primary caregivers and their children (Human Rights Campaign (HRC), 2018; Nichols & Jenkinson, 2006). For this study the use of the term “primary caregivers” will be used in accordance with “parents” at times in the manuscript since the goal of the original study was to hear the stories of any primary caregiver raising or taking care of a TGE child.

Need for Research on Parents Raising TGE Children

Contributions to research and media around TGE issues create visibility and although some TGE individuals live in communities that continue to be fraught with intolerance and lack of acceptance (Nealy, 2017), socio-cultural-political movements continue to support

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declassifying TGE identities as mental disorders, legally recognizing TGE identities, and increasing ability for affirming gender markers for TGE individuals (Johns et al., 2019). Nonetheless, transphobic actions continue to impact dually underrepresented TGE individuals (Nealy, 2017) and little continues to be known about how to help improve the overall well-being of TGE prepubertal children (Hill et al., 2010; Kuvalanka et al., 2014) being raised in a cisnet society. Since research shows TGE adolescents (over the age of 13) and adults remain at a higher risk for substance use, suicide, mental health concerns, sexual and physical abuse, and self-harm (Motmans et al., 2019) than their cisgender counterparts (Johns et al., 2019; Ryan & Rivers, 2003) it seems pertinent to begin preventative measures by understanding implications for prepubescent TGE children, who are supported as minors.

Parents of minor TGE children hold power to make decisions for them. Nonetheless, it appears relevant to hear their stories to understand the impact making decisions to either oppose and deny or support and affirm their TGE child is relevant to recognizing that both children who identify as TGE and their families may encounter external struggles when the TGE child socially or publicly transitions from birth-assigned sex to their affirming gender (Katz-Wise et al., 2017; Krieger, 2017; Nealy, 2017; Sansfaçon et al., 2015). It can be especially stressful for the child in transition, their parents, and other family members, particularly those who are struggling with recognizing rejecting behaviors they are portraying as they may see them as protecting or normal. They may all face pressure to conform or run the risk of being discriminated against (Katz-Wise et al., 2017; Sansfaçon et al., 2015), which may further influence parental power to display what may be deemed as protecting behaviors—i.e., not allowing TGE child to express or behave in ways that match their internal gender outside of the home or telling TGE child it is just a phase, which are rejecting. Nonetheless, parents who are in support of or in opposition of

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supporting and affirming their TGE child require supports such as a PLPSG and parents who combat conventional ideas and understandings of gender have needs that merit being met including being validated, supported, and understood for affirming (Kahn et al., 2018; Nealy, 2017).

Mental health providers, like professional counselors and school counselors, can be change agents by learning about these families and their experiences. They can begin to recognize their needs so they can cultivate positive interactions in the work they do with them. Professional counselors and school counselors who understand the impact of Westernized cis- and hetero-normative belief systems and the biases and assumptions created, hindering the success of TGE people, can effectively intervene when working with these parents and their children without placing judgement upon them (Nealy, 2017). This study will likely help to provide some education to professional counselors, school counselors, and counselor educators and has potential to fill the gap in counseling literature related to parent's experiences raising prepubescent TGE children (Capous-Desyllas & Barron, 2017). It is expected this study will lift these parent's voices so others can honor and respect their lived experiences and begin to recognize the importance of understanding how they are impacted by societal standards of binary gender. It is also anticipated that the counseling profession will be informed about the impact of peer led play support groups (PLPSG) on these parents and their children.

Peer led support groups include individuals experiencing a similar phenomenon, like being a primary caregiver raising a TGE child, and members of a typical peer led support group engage in mentoring and supporting one another emotionally and socially. These groups focus on providing members with practical assistance, education, and information (Bronson, 2019). One difference between a typical peer led support group and a PLPSG is that play is incorporated in

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the group to help members learn, grow, and feel supported and validated. One such way the PLPSG can benefit primary caregivers and TGE children is through “the expression of mutual caring and concern...” as it “...provides a powerful environment for reclaiming hope” (Bronson, 2019, para. 1). Research shows when individuals encounter others with a related concern, they are more likely to feel less stigmatized, isolated, and shameful (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). Support groups can play a positive role in the families of TGE children’s lives (Human Rights Campaign [HRC], 2018), and group work is one of the approved treatments identified in the World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH) *Standards of care for the health of transsexual, transgender, and gender nonconforming people* (7th Version, 2012). Finding local family support systems can assist with working through the unique concerns that come with having a TGE child (HRC, 2018), yet evidence-based literature and media regarding how they benefit continues to be limited for prepuberal children who identify as TGE, particularly with regards to those who are supported by parents, family, and community supports (Capous-Desyllas & Barron, 2017; Hill et al., 2010; Kuvalanka et al., 2014; Nealy, 2017; Olson et al., 2015).

The purpose of this study is to explore individual parents lived experiences of having and raising a TGE-identifying child to understand their perspectives. It is anticipated this study will uncover information to also understand what meaning they make of this experience.

Additionally, this investigation will also offer data related to the parents lived experiences of being a part of the PLPSG to understand if this support impacts the families and if so, how it impacts them. In doing this research, it is anticipated that the information will be used to advance the understanding of clinical issues and interventions with TGE children and families. There is also potential the data collected will be used to recognize how support systems such as PLPSG

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impact these families to help make advancements for counseling field on ways to effectively work with these families.

The primary investigator is a volunteer co-facilitator of the PLPSG sponsored by an undisclosed community-based non-profit organization assisting TGE individuals (of any age) and their families through support, community, and connection. As a volunteer co-facilitating the PLPSG, there is a commitment to this study being meaningful for and beneficial to the participants, the group, and the community-based non-profit organization. Prior to embarking on this project, several parents of this group have expressed, “not being heard” or validated outside of the group by other members of the community in various spaces. Throughout this investigation, there is an expectation to make them feel both heard and understood, while also encouraging practitioners to reflect on their practices with marginalized groups, like TGE individuals. There is potential for this study to increase awareness of the experiences that parents raising prepuberal TGE children encounter within a conventional society locally and globally. It is also anticipated there will be a greater understanding of the impact of the PLPSG on these parent’s experiences.

The objectives/aims of this study are to:

- 1) Understand parents of TGE children’s perceptions of their experiences of raising a TGE child in New Mexico and understand how they make meaning of their experiences as parents of a TGE child.
- 2) Develop a deeper understanding of parent’s perception of being a part of the PLPSG and understand how they make meaning of being a part of the PLPSG.

The overarching Research question for this study is:

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- 1) How do parents of TGE children think about having a TGE child and participating in the PLPSG supported by a local nonprofit resource center for TGE persons in New Mexico?

Two secondary research questions guide this study and will be drawn from the subjective experiences and stories of parents of TGE children. These questions include:

1. How do parents of TGE children experience having a TGE child?
2. How do parents experience the PLPSG?

Various data collection—i.e., semi-structured face-to-face interviews, structured written responses, research journal, and analysis methods guided by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009), were used to elicit rich, contextualized parent narratives from 11 participants. These are addressed in Chapter Three, Methods Section.

Primary Investigator's Positionality

The primary investigator is a White, cisgender female, whose pronouns are she, her, hers. She is an advocate and ally for TGE individuals and family members and has been working as a licensed mental health counselor for seven years. She grew up in a conservative area, in the Midwest of the United States, where being a TGE person was deemed sinful and abnormal. Even as she thinks about it now, she is certain those belief systems influenced her at one time, yet she cannot remember exactly how so or in what way because she has been normalizing diverse genders for so long. What the primary investigator does remember is working with her first transgender person in her early 30's and not thinking much of their experience being abnormal or sinful, but more respectful of them and their experience. This was particularly true the more they told her their story to her and as she gained insight into how they experienced being transgender in a cisnormative society that was not kind to them.

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She has more than eight years of experience working with TGE adults and six years of experience working with children and families in a professional capacity. She is currently a school counselor and a graduate assistant in a practicum clinic supervising master's level counseling students. For the past two and a half years she has volunteered and co-facilitated a variety of groups at the community-based non-profit organization, including the PLPSG she is recruiting participants from. During her time with the PLPSG she has developed relationships with the families that attend. She considers herself an insider and outsider. An insider as a co-facilitator of the PLPSG and an outsider because she has no TGE children of her own and is not a TGE person herself.

The primary investigator holds a positively biased view toward TGE people and sees family support as being vital to the overall well-being of TGE children, adolescents, and adults (Baum et al., 2014; Katz-Wise et al., 2017; Kuvalanka et al., 2014; Rahilly, 2015). The ontological stance of this investigator is one that is postpositivist; she believes reality is multi-constructed as an interactive process of intrapersonal, interpersonal, and social experiences within environments (Casamassa, 2014). Like Casamassa (2014), her epistemology established from her ontological viewpoint, which recognizes participants as knowers of their own reality. Thus, she plans to bracket or set aside the stories she has already heard from the parents who attend the PLPSG and what she already knows about the members of the PLPSG to complete the study without making too many assumptions. She hopes to learn alongside these parents in a shared constructive way to create systemic change and adjust the way TGE children and families are seen or viewed in a conventional society that boxes gender into two categories, male or female. She has intentionally chosen to conduct her investigation with parents of TGE children who attend the PLPSG because she respects them, the unique experiences, and challenges they

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are faced with after their child disclose and begins to socially transition in a cisnormative society. She has chosen to honor these parents as part of completing this research as a requirement for completion of their doctoral degree.

Prior to moving to New Mexico, the primary investigator lived in a conservative area in the Midwest as a practicing mental health counselor working with children and families in private practice. She began to see TGE children and their families who needed a variety of services and resources. A lack of knowledge, skills, affirming attitudes and understanding of TGE needs, concerns, and identities made it difficult for them to find effective and reliable resources. She became self-taught in this area and began working with this community out of necessity but found during this process is she appreciated the TGE children for being their selves unapologetically and I respected the parents for affirming their children. She honored their willingness to let her into their lives. They trusted her to help them during their child's and family's transition and in being present with them she became reflective about how she worked with these families. Ultimately, she learned about TGE children and the experiences of the families through their, often times painful, process.

Through this experience the primary investigator began to wonder how other practitioners were working with these families. This moved her to advance her knowledge and get my doctorate degree. She wanted to know their experiences because she cared about their experiences. She desired to understand the way they experience other mental and physical health practitioners, community supports, schools, and family members act toward them, engage with them, and treat them. She became interested in researching TGE children and family's experiences and since parents, she noticed, were conflicted with the experiences they had when

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their TGE child disclosed and began to socially transition she found it necessary to hear their story and understand where they are coming from.

The parents she worked with and continues to work with struggle with how to understand their child and support them, while dealing with their own grief, loss, and confusion about their TGE child. They deal with transphobic, cis- and hetero-normative policies and procedures in the community we live in and in their children's schools. At times they have faulted themselves for any number of things including their child being TGE. Many of them support their child regardless of whether they lost family members or not, but it has taken each of them time to understand how to support or to affirm their TGE child. These parents work to protect and stand up to the cisnormative, transphobic society that is ever-present and when the primary investigator was in private practice these parents came to me for guidance and support. The families and TGE children she has worked with and continue to work with deal with a number of issues, including bullying, harassment, lack of resources and support from family, community, or institutions. Parents she meets with may be at a loss as to how to advocate for their children and families because of conventional barriers they were being met with. These conventional barriers were ever-present in the conservative state the primary investigator lived in prior to moving to New Mexico.

When the primary investigator was in private practice she decided something needed to be done to help these children and families, so she reached out for help to begin educating various practitioners within our state so these families might have more resources. Fortunately for her she came to meet a wonderful human who became a colleague and friend. This person had been educating and providing counseling with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) persons for several years and taught the primary investigator new ideas, concepts,

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and terminology to help her grow. The two began to collaborate and work together to conduct workshops on LGBTQ+ experiences, definitions, and appropriate ways to aid, interventions, and treatment to them in professional settings as counseling practitioners or social workers. It was in these experiences the primary investigator realized the lack of knowledge and skills practitioners have to effectively work with LGBTQ+ persons, but particularly those who identify as TGE, specifically prepuberal children, which is why she finds this to be an important area to focus on in her own research.

Primary caregivers make decisions for their minor children and are typically their point of contact, it is for this reason they are in need of support systems. As a parent or guardian, there can be difficulty in knowing how to navigate situations that come up for TGE children (Krieger, 2017; Nealy, 2017). Primary caregivers who have a TGE child deal with issues or concerns related to them or their TGE child daily. These concerns include supporting and disclosing their TGE child's internal gender to family members and friends or dealing with a partner or significant other who is not in support of their TGE child (Langer & Martin, 2004; Nealy, 2017) and these situations, when experienced regularly, can become exasperating. This primary investigator has come to honor parents sharing these concerns and issues with her as she has come to understand there is a need for education on how to support primary caregiver's raising prepuberal TGE children. It is anticipated that education and information can help to end stigma against the TGE children themselves, their primary caregivers, and family members who support, accept, and affirm them. The responsibility a heteronormative, ciscentric society puts on these parents can be damaging to their overall well-being and the adverse impressions trickle down to their TGE child's overall development and comfortability to disclose and socially transition (Nealy, 2017). Having dialogue with primary caregivers of TGE children, and teens

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and adults within the TGE community, has increased this primary investigator's awareness and she now recognizes these families need support and access to resources, equal rights protections, and equitable policies and procedures that protect them and their TGE child. They are doing what they deem right for their child by affirming and accepting them as they are and in doing so they are improving their TGE child's overall well-being. It can be assumed that having a healthy and happy child is what any primary caregiver would want. Parents, TGE children, and other family members need safe spaces to share the unique concerns they experience. They can do this within the confines of the PLPSG. The parents, the TGE children, and other family members who attend the PLPSG are given space to be themselves and given a safe environment to do so with others experiencing a similar phenomenon.

Primary Investigator Stance

This primary investigator is an insider within the PLPSG, but an outsider as a cisgender person with no TGE children of her own. She is, however, someone who has been working with some attending family members for more than 2 years, which has afforded her with insight into some of the lived-experiences of members. She makes assumptions about the importance of having the PLPSG available to all members of the family with a TGE child in it because she observes this environment and sees it allows for TGE children and family members to share their stories in a safe space.

Parents seem to take advantage of dialogue around their experiences. They talk about and work through whatever concerns they have experienced recently or in the past, and work through concerns of the future, while their children get to be their authentic selves. Playing in a safe space with other children like them, they are afforded therapeutic elements of support that comes from having a sense of connection and community within the PLPSG. The primary investigator

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respects all the families do to support and affirm their children. She sees the advantages they experience with their TGE child and the adversities they face due to having a TGE child, thus she desires to honor them. She hopes to give them a voice that can educate and inform others on their knowledge and understanding with having a TGE child. Though there is more current literature focused on hearing from parents of TGE children, much of the literature on working these families come from the practitioner's perspective. For this study the primary investigator hopes to educate counseling professionals and inform the counseling profession about these parent's experiences raising a TGE child from their narrative and not her own specifically.

Lack of Evidence-based Studies

Information regarding mental health interventions and supports to help parents raising prepuberal TGE children is lacking (Sansfaçon et al., 2015). With the growing numbers of TGE children coming out—i.e., disclosing their gender, and socially transitioning—i.e., going by name and expressing in ways that match internal gender or gender identity, asking others to use pronouns that match your internal gender, etc., at younger ages (Nealy, 2017) creates pertinency to have more evidence-based literature related to ways to support the overall needs of these families, particularly because adults may be coming from a ciscentric perspective. The policy statement issued by the American Academy of Pediatrics ([AAP], 2018), American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry ([AACAP], 2019), Association for Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Issues in Counseling (2009), and the Endocrine Society (2017) recognizes the necessity of support of gender-affirming approaches toward TGE children. Therefore, it appears important to acknowledge the gap in literature regarding ways to support primary caregivers of TGE children who are prepuberal or 12 years of age and under (Hill et al., 2010; Sansfaçon et al., 2015). Most empirical research to-date relates to TGE individuals ages 13 and above (Kualanka et al., 2014),

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leaving a gap on practical information on the experiences and challenges faced by families of young TGE children (Kusalanka et al., 2014). Little evidence is available on the implications of the parent's experience affirming their TGE children who have disclosed or socially transitioned (Hill et al., 2010; Sansfaçon et al., 2015); although, many of the actions taken to socially transition, like paperwork for name or gender marker changes and medical treatment, require parental approval (Krieger, 2017).

Primary caregivers are responsible for making decisions through collaborative efforts with their TGE child around disclosure, who to come out to, when to come out, supporting coming out at school or to family, friends, legal documentation, etc. They are often on the frontlines, playing many roles with uncertainty (Sansfaçon et al., 2015). Parents are faced with unique challenges that include being an educator on TGE experiences and concerns and acting on behalf of their child and other TGE people as an activist, advocate, and ally (Hill et al., 2010; Krieger, 2017; Kusalanka et al., 2014; Nealy, 2017). The stories shared in this research will assist other parents of TGE children understand and relate to those in this study, while informing the public, practitioners working with this community, and policy makers, among others, of their experiences and how they come to understand them.

Phenomenon of Interest and Justification

All participants of this study are experiencing an identified phenomenon; they are all parents attending the PLPSG with their TGE child and families. One aim of this study is to investigate in detail if participants "...are making sense of their personal and social world," (Smith & Osborn, 2015, p.53) and understand how they are making meaning of their experiences as humanly possible from the subjectivity of the participant (Casamassa, 2014; Chan & Farmer, 2017). Few studies exist on how parent's experience having and supporting TGE children

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(Sansfaçon et al., 2015) and to-date no literature has been found specific to parent's experience with attending a monthly peer led play support group (PLPSG) made available for TGE children and their family, that incorporates the element of play. Such experiences offer universality and diversity, (Drewes, 2005), and are beneficial for parent-child bonding (Ginsburg, 2007). All potentially necessary elements to improve the work being done with families who have TGE children in them.

Philosophical Frameworks

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) will be the conceptual framework used to seek local knowledge with contextual value of a specific phenomenon, being a parent of a TGE child and how or if they make meaning of this experience (Pietkiewitz & Smith, 2014; Smith et al., 2009). Parents of TGE children's lived experiences will potentially formulate solutions for parents' everyday concerns regarding having a TGE child and inform others. These contextual values will also potentially help to understand how they experience the PLPSG and perceive their family experiencing the PLPSG.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

One main framework of IPA is idiographic and requires the primary investigator to understand the lived experiences of individual participants in a specific context, while learning if they make meaning of said phenomenon. Another focus of IPA is the hermeneutic conceptual framework or the theory of interpretation (Smith et al., 2009). The theoretical orientation around hermeneutics is doubled in IPA. This implies the use of both empathy and questioning to make meaning of the lived experiences of participants. The primary investigator engages in a two-stage hermeneutic process in IPA, assisting the participant with making meaning of their experience through reflection and empathy while the primary investigator makes meaning of participants

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making meaning of their experience, and is as such a double hermeneutic framework (Smith & Osborn, 2015; Smith et al., 2009). The primary investigator is focused on analyzing the data using the hermeneutic circle or examining the data from the part to the whole. These parts can include understanding the significance of individual words, sentences, and paragraphs and how they become the whole individual interview or written response (Smith et al., 2009).

In this process the analyst is focused on the idiographic nature of each participant; therefore, the context of one person is attended to in an effort to understand how their subjective experience unfolds. As part of the hermeneutic circle, these individual details become the whole case. This whole case is then fragmented using a circular process to develop themes, which eventually becomes another whole (Smith & Osborn, 2015). When there are multiple interviews or written responses, each individual interview or written response is the part within the whole compilation of interviews (Smith et al., 2009) and the primary investigator begins to understand the meaning making process. Once the nuances and significance of the case by case analysis is completed then the primary investigator can begin to interpret the overall experience of all participants' (Smith & Osborn, 2015; Smith et al., 2009). The end result of IPA always includes a dialogical, rigorous, and systematic interpretation of how the analyst perceives the thought process of the participants. As part of the hermeneutic circle, such a process requires the extraction of a new whole that differs from, yet intimately connects, the unabridged response offered by the participant in the interview (Smith & Osborn, 2015) writing (Farmer & Byrd, 2015). In this manner, IPA allows for the subjective results to be available to the reader ensuring quality assurance of the contextual values (Smith et al., 2009) that are identified through the use of IPA philosophical frameworks, which will be informed by the theoretical frameworks of queer theory (de Lauretis, 1991) and transgender theory (Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2010).

Queer Theory

Like IPA, queer theory relies on the lived experiences of individuals through their narratives (Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2010). Being a postmodern or critical way of understanding various forms of reality, queer theory is an approach that understands experiences are subjective, significant, and unique to each individual. Many scholars understand queer theory differently and find it difficult to define (Goodrich et al., 2016), nonetheless, queer theory is an approach that aims to deconstruct labels and categories and disrupt dominate power hierarchies (Singh et al., 2013) that are heteronormative and ciscentric. Queer theory has been deemed a useful approach to inform transgender-positive research practices (Singh et al., 2013), while falling short of truly understanding TGE experiences (Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2010; Singh et al., 2013).

Some scholars (e.g., Hines, 2006; Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2010) have recognized queer theory as lacking attention to the subjective nature of gender. These authors argue understanding gender and sexuality [or affection] as separate identities is important to understanding TGE people and the vast diversity of femininity and masculinity that can come from recognizing these facts. Furthermore, these authors recognize the importance of considering fluid, or diverse, gender identities and expressions when attending to the lived experience of TGE people.

Transgender Theory

Transgender theory, consequently, emerged as a response to concerns regarding queer theories ideologies around social identities (Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2010). While not all theorists deem this as problematic (Butler, 1990), seeing gender as socially constructed, others proclaim a socially constructed view of gender is oppressive (Hausman, 2001; Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2010). Some (Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2010) communicate TGE people are dissatisfied with queer theories socially constructed inferences regarding gender identity and argue it presumably relies on

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female versus male gendered classifications and could be deemed as oppressive. In the pursuit of scholars queering gender, Hausman (2001) contends accepting gender classifications encourages gender-role stereotyping. Nagoshi and Brzuzy (2010) note TGE people differ significantly in how they think about gender fluidity and like Hines (2006) argue queer studies cannot fully address the conventional presumptions of identity, gender, and sexuality. In fact, Hines (2006) states queer methodologies “neglect” to do so (p. 51) and thus a dilemma is presented with using solely queer theories as a supporting framework in a study regarding TGE children.

Transgender theory method is related to hearing the stories and lived experiences of TGE people particularly (Hines, 2006); therefore, it does not seem to fit completely when researching the lived experience of parents of TGE children. Nonetheless, the investigator will continue to be mindful of identifying ways to deconstruct gender identity categories and regard differences among TGE children without disregarding their “...subjective experiences that constitute difference” (Hines, 2006, p. 50), so this study will be guided by queer methodology and informed by transgender theory. Queer theory will frame the parent’s experience, considering they may have cisnormative socially construed ways of perceiving gender, while transgender theory will assist with staying true to the TGE children who may have a more fluid understanding of gender. Each theory weaves a TGE-positive approach into the IPA framework of the research.

Recruitment

Prior to obtaining IRB approval, the primary investigator completed an interest survey to gain insight about PLPSG participants interest in participating. Six parents stated interest. Once IRB approval was granted, the primary investigator sent an email to each of the six interested parents recruiting them for the study. The plan was to recruit participants during two PLPSGs,

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once in December and once in January; however, the group time was busy, leaving no time to recruit. Since the group meets once monthly and sometimes families do not attend every meeting, the primary investigator prepared a recruitment script to be utilized on the community-based non-profit organization parent social media platform on Facebook. One script was sent in late December to the community-based non-profit organization parent Facebook page. The purpose of having a variety of ways to obtain participants allowed all parents of the PLPSG to receive an invitation to participate in the study. This will be discussed further in Chapter three, the methodology section.

PLPSG and the Community-based Non-profit Organization

The PLPSG is sponsored by a community-based non-profit organization assisting Transgender and Gender Expansive (TGE) individuals (of any age) and their families through support, community, and connection. The community-based non-profit organization is located in Albuquerque, New Mexico, which is known for the rich Native American, Hispanic/Latino, and Anglo cultures. Within this large metropolitan area and across the state, the community-based non-profit organization assists TGE individuals from differing backgrounds and intersections, including those living under the poverty line and being marginalized for their cultural or ethnic identity (trgc.org, 2018).

The community-based non-profit organization offers hope and guidance to the TGE individuals who use their services and is a resource not many areas have available. By offering free public trainings to organizations, individuals, and companies in addition to various psychotherapeutic and support groups to both participants and their families in addition to a drop-in center, the community-based non-profit organization provides a safe space for TGE

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individuals to obtain medical and mental health care, advocacy, and assistance with legal aid, among other direct services.

The marginalization seen in community-based non-profit organization's drop-in center differs from work done with the PLPSG. The drop-in center is a place for all TGE individuals to get their needs met, but often times Transgender women of color struggling with racial and gender discrimination, unable to find stable housing, food, and various resources are those who walk through the doors. Many members of the PLPSG appear to come from homes with supportive parents with stable or semi-stable employment and housing, and although they may use resources and assistance from the center, they look different than the participants who utilize the drop-in center for services (tgrc.org, 2018).

The PLPSG group is an open support group for TGE children ages 12 years and younger and their families. The group meets once a month for 2 hours at a park located in Albuquerque during warmer months. As the weather begins to change and cool the group meets at the community-based non-profit organization facility or an entertainment venue such as the ice-skating rink or bowling alley. A PLPSG gives both parents and their children opportunities to experience social, psychological, and physical support prior to, during, or after a stressful incident (Nichols & Jenkinson, 2006). As the primary investigator is also a co-facilitator of the group, she has observed how the PLPSG is beneficial for the TGE children and their families who attend for many reasons. One being each person in attendance is safe to be themselves in the act of playing within a safe space. Play is a child's medium for expression (Landreth, 2012) and the primary investigator has recognized that TGE children who attend the PLPSG express themselves and connect with other TGE children in the process. Play is known to be beneficial for the child and can be incorporated to improve parent-child bonding (Ginsburg, 2007). Being

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that primary investigator is also a co-facilitator of the group, she have recognized TGE children who attend the PLPSG express themselves and connect with other TGE children in the process. I have also observed many other benefits of the PLPSG for the TGE children and their families who attend. One of them being they get to be their authentic selves in the act of playing within the safe confines of the group that challenges and opposes conventional ways of seeing gender (Sanger, 2008). .

Having the elements of play available for children, and a social support network for both the children and parents, distributes therapeutic factors including instillation of hope, universality, altruism, imitative behavior, imparting behavior, developing social skills, interpersonal learning, group cohesiveness, and catharsis to all attendees (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). Additionally, it serves to assist children with being able to explore and discover experiences in the moment, which helps them to better understand themselves, build resilience, and improve family functionality (Cheng & Ray, 2016; Hunter, 2007; Ray, 2011; Shen, 2012; Zolkoski & Bullock, 2012). Other advantages for parents who attend the PLPSG include immediate support and opportunities to voice concerns in an effort to help reduce feelings of isolation among other emotions. Having co-facilitators available helps members to identify resources other parents may not have access to or awareness of and this primary investigator/co-facilitator is a licensed mental health clinician who can assist participating members of the PLPSG when they are feeling emotionally distressed or experiencing a change in their worldview.

By attending this group parents may begin to observe a change in their perception to a more positive outlook in addition to improvement in communication skills and advocating for self, partner, and children or they may gain social networks, improved self-efficacy, and coping

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strategies. They may begin to connect with their child on a different level (Nichols & Jenkinson, 2006). In their position as volunteer, the primary investigator co-facilitates the group with other volunteers and staff of the community-based non-profit organization. She, and the other facilitators, create a safe and inviting environment to make all participants feel understood and supported. Other co-facilitators, some of which are gender nonconforming or TGE, support participants of the PLPSG in ways that are both alike and different to the primary investigator/volunteer. For example, those who are TGE have their personal experiences with gender diversity and transitioning to share with parents and children, whereas this primary investigator does not have that knowledge. This primary investigator has a background and knowledge in play therapy, working with families in a therapeutic setting, and is able to provide activities for the children to do individually or together. She also sees that there are activities the families can do with the children. She is able to provide a therapeutic relationship to participants, psychoeducation, and she and the other co-facilitators work together to connect new parents to those who have attended previously.

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Chapter II

Literature Review

This chapter will provide key elements of both empirical and conceptual literature guided by various theoretical underpinnings. This chapter will begin by providing an overview of the methodology Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and the postmodern approaches, queer theory and transgender studies. Though this study focused solely on the lived-experiences of parents raising transgender and gender expansive (TGE) children, the literature review will 1) explore the background of TGE persons and 2) modern day TGE children to inform the reader of such identities to help the reader understand the importance of parental support for TGE children. Since the American Association of Pediatrics ([AAP, 2018), American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry ([AACAP], 2019), Association for Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Issues in Counseling ([ALBTIC], 2009), and the Endocrine Society (2017) have all publicized their support for gender-affirming care for TGE children, and the research was conducted in an affirming state, the information provided in this chapter will focus on healthcare and legal rights specifically for TGE individuals living in New Mexico.

The intention of this the study is to examine how parents of TGE children experience both of the following entities: 1) raising a TGE child in Westernized culture and 2) being involved in a Peer led play support group (PLPSG). Since these parents are currently showing positive/affirming approaches to parenting TGE children, this literature review will focus on those elements as well as the benefits of play for TGE children and families in support groups created for TGE children and families. The objective to offering focal points related to play is due in part to the assumption that play played a role in these parent's experiences within the

PLPSG. The next section will offer information on the theoretical foundation of this study to give the reader a sense of why these theories were chosen to guide this study.

Theoretical Foundation: Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, Queer Theory, and Transgender Theory

Queer theory will frame the methodology of IPA for this study since it a positive approach toward TGE people (Singh et al., 2013). These two theoretical models are the core conceptual frameworks used in this research to seek local knowledge with contextual value (Pietkiewitz & Smith, 2014; Smith et al., 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2015). Transgender theory is another theoretical approach that also informs this primary investigator, guiding her to deconstruct gender identity categories to ensure the TGE children of the parents participating in this study are honored. To understand the significance of these parents' everyday concerns, while understanding how they experience the PLPSG, the researcher will follow suggested guidelines of IPA methodology as outlined by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009). By incorporating queer theory (de Lauretis, 1991; Hodges, 2008; Sanger, 2008) into this work, it is anticipated the study will advocate for a more fluid and inclusive approach to understanding gender (Sanger, 2008) and these parent's experiences raising a TGE child in a conventionally cis het, or cisgender—assigned sex at birth matches gender identity, and heteronormative—conventional practices developed through socially constructed norms that see being heterosexual and cisgender as being correct, society.

The methodological approaches of IPA—idiographic, hermeneutic, and phenomenology, align well with queer theory. Associated with the academic discipline of transgender studies (Horak, 2018), the methodology of IPA and the theoretical orientation of queer theory can be implemented to create systemic change (Hodges, 2008; Smith et al., 2009; Whiting, 2015;

Walker-Floyd, 2014) for both the parents of TGE children and the parents themselves. Each theoretical framework seemed to engage in the subjective experience of participants, focusing on local knowledge of participants (de Lauretis, 1991; Hines, 2006; Pietkiewitz & Smith, 2014; Smith et al., 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2015). As conceptual underpinnings, these approaches all place emphasis on the way individuals socially construct or understand the phenomenon (Butler, 1991; Carroll, 2001; Hines, 2006; Smith & Osborn, 2015; Walker-Floyd, 2014), in this case how parents experience raising TGE children. The theoretical foundations of queer theory and transgender theory provided in the next section, while IPA will be discussed further in Chapter three, Methodologies.

Queer Theory and Transgender Theory

Although queer theory has been deemed as falling short of capturing experiences of TGE people, the approach has also been deemed to be TGE affirming (Singh et al., 2013). All participants of this study are parents of TGE children sharing a similar phenomenon (Anderson et al., 2007; Smith et al., 2009) of raising TGE children in ciscentric or cishet society. Therefore, being both cisgender primary parents of TGE children and part of the PLPSG it seemed queer theory is an appropriate paradigm to incorporate as the critical lens of this study.

Cisgender parents, like those in this study, raising TGE children may be compelled to unlearn cishet beliefs held prior to their child's disclosure and social transition (Capous-Desyllas & Barron, 2017) to challenge hegemonic—i.e., dominant, ideas that gender is not always stagnant (Butler, 1990). As such, queer theory, unlike transgender theory—an approach focused on the lived experiences of specifically TGE people (Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2010), seemed to connect more appropriately with the influential socially constructed views of sexuality and gender that many Westernized people hold because of systems in power (Goodrich et al., 2016).

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Queer theories philosophical underpinnings inform the development of research practices and provide a “transgender-positive” approach (Singh et al., 2013, p.97). This theoretical approach also addresses heteronormative standards that are hegemonic (Butler, 1991; Singh et al., 2013). Queer theory is a qualitative framework relying on the lived experiences or narratives of group members to clarify and understand the phenomena occurring between and among the group. It is in these narratives that shared experiences become known, contradictions become clear (Singh et al., 2013), and defiance against binary gender is seen as relevant (Hodges, 2008). Queer theory focuses on hegemonic social systems that influence the way humans learn and know. Additionally, queer approaches also have potential to create systemic change (Goodrich et al., 2016) that shatters cisnormed beliefs, while resisting or defying, hegemonic ideas of binary gender (Hodges, 2008).

Both queer theory and IPA align with the researcher’s position as a pansexual counselor, each require reflexivity and meaning making of the subjective experiences of participants (Carroll, 2001; Smith et al., 2009). Queer theory guidance for this study was chosen to help with deconstructing hegemonic binary gender identities (Butler, 1990) and disrupting conventional expectations of viewing gender as binary (Singh et al., 2013) or stagnant. Such deconstruction was guided through parents of TGE children’s narratives and the interpretations made of these subjective knowledge. Since the focus of this research is on parents of TGE children’s experience, queer theory seemed to be a more suitable approach to guide this study than transgender theory. Queer theory is focused on challenging hegemonic ways of understanding gender and sexuality (Singh et al., 2013), while transgender theory focus is similar, but more specifically related to transgender people’s experiences (Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2010).

Background of Transgender and Gender Expansive Persons

Westernized views on TGE people or individuals who behave in ways deemed gender-variant are deemed abnormal (de Graaf & Carmichael, 2019; Nealy, 2017) because the socio-cultural-political deconstruction of gender has been largely based on dichotomies of male or female sex assigned at birth (de Graaf & Carmichael, 2019; Nealy, 2017). This mechanism of gender assignment has been historically pathologizing (AACAP, 2019; Nealy, 2017; Sanger, 2008; World Professional Association for Transgender Health [WPATH], 2019), and continues to be pathologized (Nealy, 2017; Krieger, 2017). Opposing these oppressive forms of language and power established the use of queer theory (Hodges, 2008) for this study and made it a foundational component of examining the experiences of cisgender parents raising TGE children. Currently more inclusive language is used when diagnosing TGE people, yet the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* ([DSM], 5th ed., American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2013) continues to pathologize being a TGE or gender-variant person. Many practitioners, TGE people, and advocates, like parents who are supportive and affirming of their TGE children, challenge these controlling systems. They oppose these practices and advocate for, and are insistent about, more inclusive affirming practices (Hodges, 2008). One such argument is whether the more inclusive ‘gender dysphoria’ (GD) diagnosis (APA, 2013) should be a mental diagnosis at all (Krieger, 2017; Nealy, 2017).

When diagnosed with GD the TGE person is identified with a psychiatric disorder that includes being in distress, or with impairment, as a result of being in conflict with the way they feel or think about their assigned sex at birth and their internal gender (APA, 2013; Krieger, 2017; Nealy, 2017). This conflict or distress comes from particular language used by those with power and privilege (Hodges, 2008). Such discriminatory and stigmatizing language can

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influence one's view or sense of self and impact the person negatively (Benestad, 2010; Hodges, 2008). As such, these interactions develop into feelings of dissonance between assigned sex at birth and internal gender (APA, 2013). Furthering the oppressive nature of nonbinary gender (Hodges, 2008), leading to feelings of shame and hurt that manifests into symptoms of GD (Benestad, 2010).

Some TGE people may express the opposite of GD, stating they feel "gender euphoria," (Benestad, 2010, p. 230) or the joy one feels when they socially transition and are accepted by others (Benestad, 2010). For instance, Benestad (2010), a trans-person who works professionally and personally with TGE people, found varying affirming treatments can lead one to gender euphoria. Yet, to medically transition to their affirming self, TGE persons are expected to assume a rigid gender identity (Hines, 2006) that fits a binary gender (Nealy, 2017), minimizing one's ability to feel euphoric about one's gender. In many cases, treatment that is designed to affirm TGE people's gender is actually marginalizing. For instance, prior to beginning medical treatment, TGE persons are required to be diagnosed with GD (Hodges, 2008). Such expectations to assume a gender identity that is socially constructed and rigid (Hines, 2006) can be viewed as oppressive (Hodges, 2008). Further stigmatizing TGE people who desire to deconstruct gender identities altogether (Hines, 2006) and live as their authentic self (Nealy, 2017). This further suggests that Westernized cishet culture attaches gender to sex assigned at birth, and in doing so do not appreciate or accept gender diversity (Hines, 2006); leaving TGE people to not function well in a conventional society or hold positive views of self as they attempt to meet traditional societal or cultural expectations of gender (Krieger, 2017) that deny TGE people living as their true authentic self.

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Some TGE people desire to live fluidly in their gender instead of conforming to a specific transgender binary identity (Hines, 2006; Sanger, 2008). They desire to deconstruct gender in a way that diversifies masculinity and femininity (Hines, 2006). Building off queer theory and transgender theory (Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2010) to argue identity politics around categorized gender (Hodges, 2008), gender-variance has become a commonly identified way of understanding gender diversity or the countless ways we understand and express gender in a nonpathological manner (AACAP, 2019; de Graaf & Carmichael, 2019; WPATH, 2019). As such gender diversity implies there is no one way or wrong way of being male or female, neither or both (Krieger, 2017; Nealy, 2017) and gender variations can be included in the way humans exist (AACAP, 2019; de Graaf & Carmichael, 2019; WPATH, 2019). Conceptualizing such variations of gender has been noted in work done by de Graaf and Carmichael (2019) and Nealy (2017). These practitioners offer the context of gender is changing and challenging the traditional way of understanding gender. They, and others (Alegría, 2018; Baum et al., 2014; Capous-Desyllas & Barron, 2017; Kuvalanka et al., 2014; Ryan, 2010) recognize the impact of family support as being a necessity for TGE children and understand such supports help to improve TGE children's overall outcomes.

Engaging in such deconstruction within a conventional society that honors a restrictive binary, gender fluid people trying to be their authentic self can be difficult (Sanger, 2008). Even so, these conventional ways of understanding gender and gender expression are being confronted as less influential elements (WPATH, 2019) and medical advancements (AACAP, 2019; AAP, 2018; Endocrine Society, 2017), political movements, media portrayals and representations, and postmodern theoretical frameworks (de Graaf & Carmichael, 2019), like queer theory (de Lauretis, 1991; Sanger, 2008) and transgender theory (Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2010), continue to

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contribute to understanding those who are TGE with a fluid gender (de Graaf & Carmichael, 2019). These understandings seemed to start with the parent advocates (Hill et al., 2010; Katz-Wise et al., 2017; Rahilly, 2015) who are also impacted negatively by similar cis het or ciscentric standards as their TGE children.

Transgender and Gender Expansive Children

Research elucidated that babies begin to differentiate between people's gender (i.e. male and female) and gender groups through voice recognition and gender presentation before they turn age two (Brill & Pepper, 2008; Martin & Ruble, 2010). They can verbally label male or female gender based on basic gender knowledge that is socially constructed (Brill & Pepper, 2008; Martin & Ruble, 2010) and culturally specific (Krieger, 2017). Socially constructed gender (Butler, 1990), a concept understood early on in life, are conventional cisnormed ways of understanding gender. They are made of binary categories and include conventional ways of knowing gender—i.e., boy or girl. These binary identities lead TGE children to become aware that their internal gender is different from what is expected, which can manifest into symptoms of GD (Krieger, 2017) as identified above.

When working through their own awareness of gender differences, some TGE children may become unhappy or clinically distressed about their physical sex appearances while others do not. These children are influenced by societal norms that are restrictive of gender binaries as a result of power, language, and authority (Sanger, 2008). Media, social interactions, and family values create fundamental stereotypes and culturally expected understandings of gender at young ages and can have major consequences on how gender is known (Brill & Pepper, 2008; Krieger, 2017; Martine & Ruble, 2010) or conceptualized (Katz-Wise et al., 2017). As children inquire about the meaning of things, they begin to understand the ways society expects them to behave

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in conventional ways or in accordance with their sex assigned at birth (Brill & Pepper, 2008; Nealy, 2017). Since toddlers begin to understand sex/gender differences associated with socially constructed ideas about gender roles, activities, physical appearance and abstract notions of gender (Brill & Pepper, 2008; Martin & Ruble, 2010) there is potential for prejudice and discriminatory ways of understanding gender (Martin & Ruble, 2010; Nealy, 2017). Even during the toddler stage (two to three years), these socially constructed and conventional views of gender can impact the way the child comprehends their own gender and how they are expected to express gender that fits with their assigned or designated sex at birth and within the binary of gender (Nealy, 2017).

Young children, regardless of their sex assigned at birth, may show fairly consistent gender nonconforming interests and behaviors (Nealy, 2017) until they learn specific gender schemes or systematic beliefs and cultural or societal expectations about gender roles specific to male or female (Brill & Pepper, 2008). Once identified, these gender roles are displayed in play—i.e., toys they choose-truck, doll, etc., expression—i.e., clothing, hair, etc. (Brill & Pepper, 2008; Martin & Ruble, 2010; Nealy, 2017), and in the use of gendered pronouns (Nealy, 2017). Little information regarding gender development among TGE children is offered in the literature, nonetheless Brill and Pepper (2008) outline age-specific milestones and the typical ages TGE children become self-aware of their own gender. The authors argue gender identity or internal gender is formed through biological and sociological factors and internal gender develops by age two or three. Gender-variant behaviors vary for each TGE child (Brill & Pepper, 2008; Nealy, 2017), each TGE child will display (or choose not to display) their gender-variant behavior in different ways and at various developmental milestones (Brill & Pepper, 2008).

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Toddlers can comprehend conventional normed gender roles through learning experiences with adults, like family members, and peers. As a result children learn to avoid or chastise individuals who navigate gender fluidity. Young TGE children may begin to verbalize their self-awareness between their assigned sex at birth and how they know their own internal gender and how it differs from conventional norms (Brill & Pepper, 2008). Some children naturally deviate from conventional gender norms or emphasize they have an internal gender that differs from their assigned sex at birth (Brill & Pepper, 2008; Nealy, 2017), while other children may be trying to understand gender constancy or the idea that gender is fixed (Martin & Ruble, 2010), more than gender expression (Nealy, 2017). Gender-variant children contemplating their own gender and their expressions of their gender in diverse ways will do so before they are corrected by others (Nealy, 2017).

Children who are assigned female or male at birth may show gender-variant behavior that include desiring a gender-variant, nongendered, or conventionally opposite sex/gender nickname preferring to dress or express themselves like the traditional idea of opposite sex (Nealy, 2017). Behaviors for children who are TGE assigned female at birth may include engaging in activities or games deemed conventionally boyish, wearing short boyish hair and clothing, and reducing or removing the presence of breasts once they become visible (Nealy, 2017). Whereas gender-variant children assigned male at birth may exhibit behaviors that are conventionally feminine. These include wearing skirts or dresses, growing out long hair, desiring to paint fingernails or toenails, and preferring to engage in traditionally girl-like activities, games, or toys (Nealy, 2017). Even when describing the approaches in which TGE people behave to be their authentic selves leads to conforming to conventional notions of gender. Forced to ascribe to societally normed ways of being, it is such complexities that impact the way TGE people are seen and see

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themselves (Singh et al., 2013). Understanding that one's internal gender is unique is a first step to understanding gender diversity or those who are TGE. Gender need not fit into a binary category but should be respected and accepted regardless of where it lies on the spectrum of femininity and masculinity or neither or both (Krieger, 2017) and differs among people (Katz-Wise et al., 2017; Krieger, 2017). When examining one's internal gender through a postmodern or subjective lens it becomes paramount for both TGE people and activists, like their parents or guardians, to be gender defiant (Hodges, 2008).

Resisting the conventional ideas of gender is a gender defiant way to oppose regulatory forms of gender binary and are fundamentally profound aspects of queer theory (Hodges, 2008). Regardless of how a TGE child is expressing their gender, acting out their gender, or vocalizing their gender, families (Krieger, 2017; Nealy, 2017), specifically parents or guardians (Kahn et al., 2018; Katz-Wise et al., 2017; Sansfaçon et al., 2015) should be prepared to take an affirming approach with the child (Kahn et al., 2018; Katz-Wise et al., 2017; Krieger, 2017; Nealy, 2017; Sansfaçon et al., 2015). Children who are limited to expressing themselves or identifying themselves as their own affirming gender can begin to show behavior issues or mental health concerns (Brill & Pepper, 2008) and since they are marginalized for being both children and TGE, an affirming approach gives them space to feel respected and accepted. This way of meeting the TGE child where they are is beneficial for both TGE children and their parents. And having supports available for parents of TGE children are one way to meet the needs of both the TGE child and their parent.

Positive/Affirming Approaches to Parenting Transgender and Gender Expansive Children

When a TGE child socially transitions this adjustment can be difficult or impactful on all family members, particularly for siblings and parents (Katz-Wise et al., 2017; Kuvalanka et al.,

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2014). This process may be difficult for all, but notably parents since they too can be confronted with systemic barriers (Alegría, 2018; Capous-Desyllas & Barron, 2017) while processing their own thoughts and emotions related to the disclosure and transition (Moller et al., 2009).

Regardless of being accepting or affirming or not, parents may struggle with feelings of fear, anxiety, anger, or surprise or they may have difficulty with changes occurring with their child—i.e., using new name, pronouns. They may experience embarrassment, insecurity, and conflict (Moller et al., 2009) as a result of living in a conventional society (Alegría, 2018; Capous-Desyllas & Barron, 2017) or they may feel guilt, grief, or loss (Alegría, 2018; Coolhart et al., 2018; Nealy, 2017). In some cases, parents experience feeling responsible for their child being TGE (Nealy, 2017). Parents hold power in this dynamic and as such may feel like they need to keep their child's gender a secret (Capous-Desyllas & Barron, 2017), fearing judgment and discrimination from others for being supportive that consequently leads to a loss of relationships (Alegría, 2018; Capous-Desyllas & Barron, 2017). Thus, parents and guardians of TGE children require emotional and physical support throughout their own process of having a child disclose and socially transition (Alegría, 2018; Capous-Desyllas & Barron, 2017; Moller et al., 2009) and when they are supported, they can support their TGE children more effectively (Alegría, 2018; Capous-Desyllas & Barron, 2017). Supporting these families can potentially improve the relationship they have with their child (Alegría, 2018; Baum et al., 2014; Capous-Desyllas & Barron, 2017; Kuvalanka et al., 2014; Ryan, 2010) and create change that interrupts ciscentric standards. Potentially developing into spaces that are inclusive for TGE people (Singh et al., 2013) and collaborative decision-making among parents and TGE children related to transitioning.

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Recent studies show TGE children who are accepted and supported by their family demonstrated improved overall well-being (Baum et al., 2014; Kuvalanka et al., 2014). Findings from these studies indicated that parents who show acceptance and support in affirming their child's gender and gender expression plays an important role in the mental health outcomes and quality of life for the TGE child (Katz-Wise et al., 2017; Kuvalanka et al., 2014; Nealy, 2017; Ryan et al., 2010; Sansfaçon et al., 2015). Recently, researchers have started to focus on understanding TGE youth's parent's experiences to understand how to support them better (Alegria, 2018; Capous-Desyllas & Barron, 2017; Hill et al., 2010; Katz-Wise et al., 2017; Rahilly, 2015).

Researchers who have engaged parents of prepubescent TGE children in data collection methods have disseminated varying reports on the impact of affirmation on psychopathology and the overall well-being of TGE children. Hill et al. (2010) assessed whether gender-variant behavior and attitude of the parent toward gender-variant behavior predicted gender identity disorder ([GID] respectively an out-of-date diagnosis). These researchers found parents participating in the study had initially reached out for support as a result of being affirming and supportive of their children's gender-variant behavior. They discovered both internal and external psychopathology could not be predicted. The diagnosis of GID was deemed to be unrelated to either the parent's attitude toward gender-variant behavior or their child's level of gender-variant behavior.

Rahilly (2015) was guided by a postmodern approach of gender identity in their research and focused on parents of TGE children who were attempting to defy gender binaries to accommodate their child's gender-variant behavior. These parents became familiar with gender-variant inclusive language, understandings, and practices and used their new knowledge to

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educate others (Rahilly, 2015). This study is seminal in understanding experiences of parents with TGE children, and though the researcher focused on working with parents of children 7 to 19 years of age, to-date little literature on prepubescent TGE is available (Brill & Pepper, 2008).

Another study regarding prepubescent TGE children done by Olson et al., (2015) found those who had socially transitioned and were affirmed and supported by parents showed similar rates of anxiety and depression as their cisgender counterparts. Like Olson and colleagues (2015), Kuvalanka et al., (2014) identified having both affirming mothers and the ability to socially transition as being indicators of improved overall well-being. Additionally, these researchers also found these factors improved their TGE children's demeanor, self-efficacy, self-esteem, and peer relationships.

Alegría (2018) investigated the ways parents of transgender youth, all of which were supportive of their child's socially transitioning, experienced and viewed their experience of raising a transgender child. Three themes, 1) transgender issues as the family's focus, 2) proactivity, and 3) self-care to support to strategies and struggles these parents experienced were identified and found to strengthen the bond they have with their child. The research illustrated various emotions these parents experienced as well as their own growth related to unlearning cisnormative or ciscentric beliefs around gender.

Like Alegría, Capous-Desyllas & Barron (2017) demonstrated the effects of religion on such preconceived ideologies impacting the ways these parents navigated supporting their transgender child. Capous-Desyllas & Barron's (2017) research was specifically related to hearing and understanding the lived experiences of families with a transgender child (male to female) in it. They interviewed four families to identify social and institutional challenges they have encountered as a result of having a transgender child and illustrated ways these families

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have navigated mezzo and macro-level systems. They offered detailed social challenges reported by these families, including those related to mental health and medical treatment as well as educational institutions. The researchers found three themes 1) family strengths and challenges, 2) societal strengths and challenges, and 3) institutional strengths and challenges as being ways these families supported their child and promoted a healthier and happier foundation for, not only the child, but the entire family system.

Altogether, it appears parents supportive and affirming actions toward social transition are relevant to TGE children's overall well-being. Having supports and resources available is applicable to helping all family members with a TGE child in it. One such support might be deemed as the PLPSG, a significant entity of this research—all parents participating in this study had attended at least one time, incorporates play into the group. Having play as an element to supporting families with TGE children in them can be particularly beneficial for all members of the family including parents, TGE children, and cis-siblings. Each person in the family system is able to engage in playful interventions that create connections and empower the family to be their true authentic selves (Coolhart et al., 2018).

Benefits of Play for Transgender and Gender Expansive Children

Play strengthens the physical, social, cognitive, and emotional well-being of children, while giving them opportunities to be creative in ways that improve brain function and development and by providing space to play children are able identify ways to problem-solve, make decisions (Ginsburg, 2007) and improve memory, motivation, and awareness of others' needs (Topham & VanFleet, 2011). Having the elements of play available for children, and a social support network for both the children and parents, distributes therapeutic factors including instillation of hope, universality, altruism, imitative behavior, imparting behavior,

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developing social skills, interpersonal learning, group cohesiveness, and catharsis to all attendees (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). Additionally, it serves to assist children with being able to explore and discover experiences in the moment, which helps them to better understand themselves, build resilience, and improve family functionality (Cheng & Ray, 2016; Hunter, 2007; Ray, 2011; Shen, 2012; Zolkoski & Bullock, 2012). Accordingly, play can be deemed as a therapeutic element to group work.

Use of Play as Being Therapeutic Within Groups

Play is necessary for children (Axline, 1964; Eberle, 2014; Landreth, 2012). It improves children's understanding of empathy and creates knowledge (Chinekesh et al., 2014; Eberle, 2014). Play helps children to understand the intention of others and when children have opportunities of playing in groups, play can be a powerful tool that "...sharpens our appreciation of the utility of fairness..." (Eberle, 2014, p. 225). In fact, several studies show the impact of group play therapy on children (Cheng & Ray, 2016; Chinekesh et al., 2014; Hunter, 2007; Jarareh et al., 2016; Robinson, 2011; Thomas, 2012).

Children are given space to deepen their understandings of self and others in play (Eberle, 2014). They begin to explore ways to discover themselves, find autonomy, make choices and take responsibility for those choices, and accept and express themselves in a safe environment (Cheng & Ray, 2016; Hunter, 2007; Landreth, 2012). Empirical research shows, early interventions are appropriate with improving intrapersonal and interpersonal skills and decision-making and play is deemed to be a developmentally appropriate intervention for children under the age of 12 (Landreth, 2012). Since play is deemed as being a child's medium (Axline, 1964; Landreth, 2012), it can be used to improve opportunities for open communication among members of a group. Using play within groups gives children opportunities to explore

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and discover ways (Cheng & Ray, 2016; Shen, 2012) to improve social (Eberle, 2014) and communication skills (Chinekesh et al., 2014). These empowering strategies occurring naturally in play carry over into play groups, where children interact with others to make sense of their relationships (Cheng & Ray, 2016; Landreth, 2012) and how to tolerate stressful environmental factors or trauma (Hunter, 2007). In a group with TGE children, this can include being able to express oneself with other children who share similar identities and who may have experienced being bullied or disregarded because of their internal gender.

Hunter (2007) argues sand tray can be used as an expressive outlet for children in group play therapy. She exclaims children who have been impacted by trauma, can show improved resiliency through the facilitation healthy relationships. Studies have identified group play therapy as being an effective method used to improve aggression (Jarareh et al., 2016), cognitive development—i.e., problem-solving skills (Chinekesh et al., 2014), and development of interpersonal relationships through group play interventions, support, and structure (Shen, 2012). When children have opportunities to creatively increase their knowledge and understanding of things in a safe and secure setting (Cheng & Ray, 2016; Kestly, 2010), like within the PLPSG, they are given ample space to demonstrate change and identify healthy coping skills to help regulate emotions (Cheng & Ray, 2016; Thomas, 2012).

Krieger (2017) has identified both safety and authenticity as being notable concerns LGBT people experience. As they toy with the notion of being out and authentic, LGBT youth are also teasing out whether it is safe to be out. Thus, having a safe space to be themselves and engage in play within a group can also give way to creating space for parents to immerse themselves completely in an activity with their children, it is in this way healthy child development occurs (Ginsburg, 2007). Plus engaging in play with their child(ren) gives primary

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parents opportunities to understand their child's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors and children who connect with their parents in play feel loved. Feeling accepted, loved, and validated builds self-efficacy, self-esteem, and resiliency (Ginsburg, 2007; Topham & VanFleet, 2011), and these various factors are observed within the PLPSG that parents of this study attend or have attended at least one time in the last six months.

Benefits of Support Groups for Parents of Transgender and Gender Expansive Children

Having a social support system has been found to improve the overall well-being of all humans (Nichols & Jenkinson, 2006). The positive relationships that originate in support systems can be important and potential protective factors for its members (Nichols & Jenkinson, 2006; Seymour, 2015). Extended social supports decrease isolation which leads to improved interactions with others. These encounters with others help to improve self-esteem (Nichols & Jenkinson, 2006), self-efficacy, and resiliency (Seymour, 2015). Support systems have also been found to reinforce opportunities to engage in balanced or positive ways of perceiving the world through new ways of knowing, coping, and conversing with those in supportive environments or groups (Nichols & Jenkinson, 2006).

Support groups for TGE children and families, like the PLPSG, can have especially profound implications that benefit TGE children (Baum et al., 2014; Ryan, 2010) and their families (HRC, 2018). These support groups can be local (i.e. PLPSG) or national (i.e. Parents and Friends of Lesbian and Gays [PFLAG], Gender spectrum; HRC, 2018) and may include interventions that increase personal awareness and development. When viewed from a group systems theoretical framework (Connors & Caple, 2005), the interventions occurring within support groups can be therapeutic for both attending members and the group dynamic.

Group Systems Theory

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Connors and Caple (2005) contend that group facilitators should be mindful of the development of the group and the multidimensional processes that occur within the group. They argue to truly understand the therapeutic roles of facilitators knowledge in group systems theory and focus on the group as a whole is pertinent to group work, particularly for practitioners who follow individualized theoretical orientations and practices, still it seems pertinent to examine characteristics that add richness and power to work with groups based on Connors and Caple (2005) review on group systems work.

Elements created for group systems theory delineated by Connors and Caple (2005) are salient within all group work. From a systems thought process, features are deemed as being applied "...at every level, from the intracellular level to the individual, to groups, communities, nations, and ultimately the universe" (p.101). Elements within group systems theory evolved to elucidate and inform practitioners on group processes and interventions used within groups. As such these terms and concepts assist with describing group conditions, cycles, and processes that transpire within groups and help to improve the overall quality of the group. Such concepts outlined by Connors and Caple (2005) include *holism, interdependence, structure, group interactions, group growth cycles and stages, and caring, warmth, and positive attention.*

Holism

When viewed from the systems theory, groups are viewed as being an exclusive phenomenon dependent upon elements such as its members, socio-historical context, and group history. The concept of holism includes the notion "good of the whole group" (Connors & Caple, 2005, p.99) while keeping in mind the goodness of the group's members and environment. Facilitators focus on the dynamics, needs, and growth of the whole group; therefore, they may process the impact of the group in the here-and-now with its members to inquire about said

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goodness and to engage members in playing a more active role in the group and its outcomes.

Each member plays a valuable role in the group and are interdependent upon one another and the group (Connors & Caple, 2005).

Interdependence

The element of interdependence assumes all group members are interdependent or mutually dependent upon the various levels of the group. Members are interdependent upon other members, the group, and systems outside of the group. All members of the group bring value to the group dynamics and the overall well-being of the group and when members are affected by something occurring outside or inside of the group other members are affected. Therefore, it is pertinent there be structure and equality within the group, a balance of participation and being complimentary of differing perspectives (Connors & Caple, 2005).

Structure

Safety and structure are necessary elements of established groups (Nichols & Jenkinson, 2006). Structure is deemed to be particularly essential within group systems theory, as it guides operations of the environment. These structural necessities provide the element of safety and can come from various levels of power and control. They include group norms, goals, and boundaries or limits that preserve the integrity of the group. Clear or unspoken choices about what is spoke about in the group or what is allowed or not allowed in the group are other structural components of a group and can come from members and facilitators. Facilitator directiveness, screening and assessing, development of rules and guidelines, preparing members for group expectations, and having a plan for group meetings or interactions are just some sources that structural concepts can be grounded in (Connors & Caple, 2005).

Group Interactions

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Systems theory assumes there are dynamic interactions within systems which are required to connect within the environment they are in. In this open exchange of energy transferred through communication, dynamic interactions develop and reciprocate to reproduce the system. The various group interactions that exist in making decisions about the group interactions include patterned interactions or stable interactions; positive or negative feedback or input from the environment of the group; and change stimulation or the process of challenging change. All of which can be beneficial to the group and its members and should be considered when examining the cycles and stages of the group (Connors & Caple, 2005).

Group Growth Cycles and Stages

Groups are viewed as being unstable in the early stages of development, as they progress they become more efficient and stable. Groups are viewed as progressing in various ways (i.e. cyclical or successive) and as they develop so does the structure and boundaries of the group. At each stage of the group it is pertinent the facilitator progress with the various stages, understand how the group is growing, and be aware of their impact on the group (Connors & Caple, 2005).

Caring, Warmth, and Positive Attention

Systems theory, specifically family systems theory, has identified care, warmth, and support as being vital to developing positive family functioning. These same elements added with positive attention have been found to be true within groups dynamics. In fact, an important predictor of group cohesion, or a caring and supportive environmental climate, is having a warm and attentive group facilitator who is willing to acknowledge and understand how change and development within groups are unified (Connors & Caple, 2005).

In knowing these group systems elements, facilitators of any group can know and be aware that in this process and within these dynamics' humans learn and grow to be more

functional (Connors & Caple, 2005). However, it should be made clear the interactions and experiences occurring within support groups like the PLPSG are distinct from psychotherapy groups. The processes in support groups can be led by peers and are not necessarily led by the facilitators (Bronson, 2019; Nichols & Jenkinson, 2006) and may be less structured at times (Nichols & Jenkinson, 2006). Essentially interventions occurring in both support and psychotherapeutic groups are unlike any experience that ensues outside of a group process, what occurs in groups is unique to the phenomena occurring in that particular environment (Connors & Caple, 2005; Nichols & Jenkinson, 2006). Within these spaces' individuals can experience *intrapersonal*, *interpersonal*, *group-as-a-whole*, or *supra-group* levels of development (Kiweewa et al., 2013).

Intrapersonal Level. Learning occurring at the intrapersonal level is deemed as being personal growth (Kiweewa et al., 2013) and as such can come with support. This type of development is at the individual's level of focus (Goodrich & Luke, 2015) and comes as a result of self-reflection (Kiweewa et al., 2013). The intrapersonal intervention includes the way the individual member thinks and feels about the group (Goodrich & Luke, 2015) and in this realization they begin to understand how their individual personality and experiences contribute to relating with others in the group. In this manner, intrapersonal growth opens space for interpersonal skill development (Kiweewa et al., 2013).

Interpersonal Level. The interpersonal level of development occurs when two members interact with each other. It is within this subsystem relationships develop (Goodrich & Luke, 2015) or honest levels of challenging occur (Kiweewa et al., 2015). In a study completed by Kiweewa and colleagues (2015) they found interpersonal skills developed as members worked

together. They recognized relationships advanced through validation and acceptance from a peer, consequently, improving cohesiveness of the group-as-a-whole.

Group-as-a-whole Level. Concerns that occur at the group-as-a-whole level pertain to ways the facilitator addresses the entire group. These concerns can include group development, group dynamics, and group norm setting (Goodrich & Luke, 2015). Within the group-as-a-whole level, some individual members have viewed sharing personal experiences as potentially improving the group as a whole and possibly creating relatedness for members of the group (Kiweewa et al., 2015). Said relatedness could come from a supra-level of intervening.

Supra-group Level. The supra-group level of intervention is not concerned with what is happening within self or group, but rather how larger systems—e.g., institutions, society, impact members of the group. These larger systems are the focus of this level as they create and implement societal norms, laws, and institutions, including those that discriminate, marginalize, or oppress LGBT+ people. Thus, the supra-level of groups works to understand how said systems impact the members of the group. This experience and knowledge about systems can inform members and non-members to advocate on behalf of social justice issues that impact marginalized groups (Goodrich & Luke, 2015). For TGE children and their families who attend the PLPSG these supra-group level concerns are related to current standards of healthcare and New Mexico legislative actions.

Healthcare

Internationally, gender diversity is changing the ways the world understands gender (de Graaf & Carmichael, 2019; Nealy, 2017). As a result of this paradigm shift, gender diversity is constructing new ways for mental (ALGBTIC, 2009; de Graaf & Carmichael, 2019) and medical interventions for TGE children (AACAP, 2019; AAP, 2018; Endocrine Society, 2017; Nealy,

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2017). With the amplified referrals of TGE children to gender clinics (de Graaf & Carmichael, 2019), there is an overwhelming demand for practitioners to be trained in providing care that values and is knowledgeable in gender diversity (AACAP, 2019; AAP, 2018; Chen et al., 2016; Endocrine Society, 2017; WPATH, 2019), TGE children and family concerns and support, and community outreach (Chen et al., 2016).

This shift is in line with the ‘World Professional Association for Transgender Health’ (WPATH) Standards of Care for the Health of Transsexual, Transgender, and Gender-Nonconforming People (2012), which offers an evidence-based approach to working with TGE persons and continues to be updated in accordance with empirical research. Recently, WPATH (2019) disseminated a statement regarding evidence-based support for TGE youth, which states gender-affirming care is appropriate and should not be deemed as deviant or abusive. In short, being accepting and affirming of one’s internal gender that does not match their assigned or designated sex at birth or gender-variant behaviors is a more appropriate way to intervene with TGE children than correcting or punishing the person for their internal gender or gender expression that defies Westernized gender norms (Nealy, 2019; WPATH, 2012; WPATH, 2019).

Affirming approaches allow TGE children to be their authentic selves and these clinical provisions are in agreement with the AACAP (2019), AAP (2018), ALGBTIC (2009), and the Endocrine Society’s (2017) statements in support of gender affirming care. Each organization approved gender affirming care and support it because it has been found to decrease negative mental health outcomes including depression, anxiety, substance use disorders, eating disorders, self-harm, and suicidal ideation (AAP, 2018). Gender affirming care is also identified as decreasing societal impacts that include academic failure, homelessness, internalized

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transphobia, self-identity confusion, and physical—i.e. STD/HIV infection, etc., health disparities (ALGBTIC, 2009).

Clinical treatment varies for gender-affirming models (WPATH, 2019) and clinical treatment in support of TGE children reinforce family resiliency (AAP, 2018). It is, therefore, pertinent that clinicians be competently trained to work with TGE people (i.e. transgender-inclusive language, understanding of human development, etc.), which may include consulting with others when needed (ALGBTIC, 2009). Additionally, challenging traditional ways of treatment for gender generates effective care for TGE people, overall (ALGBTIC, 2009; de Graaf & Carmichael, 2019) to enhance an accepting way of understanding gender diversity (de Graaf & Carmichael, 2019), which can be used to inform and improve policies and legal rights for TGE children.

Legal Rights for TGE Children in New Mexico

In line with resisting the conventional roots of Westernized gender binaries (Hodges, 2008; Sanger, 2008), New Mexico recently became the fourth state to offer residents with a gender affirming option on birth certificates and the eighth state to allow for an amendment of birth certificates through self-confirmation. Senate Bill 20 (2019), *Vital Record Sex Designation*, comes as a result of the community-based non-profit organization partnering with Equality New Mexico to ensure legal equality for TGE persons living in New Mexico. The legislative change permits individuals born in the state of New Mexico to elect changing the assigned sex on their birth certificate to a gender neutral “X” without the prerequisite of gender confirmation surgery (New Mexico Department of Health [NMDOH], 2019; New Mexico Legislature, 2019).

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This bill aligned well with the previous New Mexico, Senate Bill 121 (2017) that banned conversion therapy and protects LGBTQ+ youth. The Senate Bill 20 affirms “...contemporary healthcare standards...” (NMDOH, 2019, para 2) which has helped to make the process of updating one’s birth certificate to match that of their internal gender and gender expression practical and easily accessible. A spokesperson, and co-director of the community-based non-profit organization, spoke highly of this bill and regards New Mexico’s Governor, Michelle Lujan Grisham, as being implemental in the process by showing “...a strong commitment to the safety and access of transgender people in state...” (NMDOH, 2019, para 5). This legislative change, and others like the New Mexico Senate Bill 288 *Safe Schools for All Student’s Act*, are leading the way for equity for TGE children.

Safe Schools for All Students Act

Senate Bill (SB288, 2019), *Safe Schools for All Students Act*, is a respectful addition of the expectations already outlined by the Public Education Department (PED) in New Mexico. The SB288 code require a more effective, systematic way to report, investigate, process, and discipline individuals accused of bullying. The Act is expected to go into effect January 2020 and is being implemented to help create a positive school climate for all students, particularly those who are underrepresented, like LGBT youth (SB288, 2019).

The SB288 Act required PED to “...issue guidance for bullying prevention programs and model bullying prevention policies in accordance with the Safe Schools for All Students Act, within 120 days of the effective date of the Act” (2019, p. 2). The Act expects PED to disseminate rules to the various school districts and charter schools within New Mexico, requiring them “...to develop and implement bully prevention and policies and procedures...” (p. 2) that ultimately define and describe bullying in a developmentally and culturally

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appropriate way. The definitions to bullying, as outlined in this Act, include various types of bullying behaviors that can impede on the overall well-being of students impacted by bullying or harassment. Additionally, SB288 focuses on LGBT persons specifically, as they are at higher risk of being bullying or harassed in school (SB288, 2019).

School districts and charter schools within New Mexico will be required to update their current bullying policies and procedures to meet the requirements of the SB288 as the Act has been enacted to hold schools to a higher standard, and as such requiring them to annually report bullying outcomes to New Mexico's PED. The PED of New Mexico will be instructing school districts and charter schools to adopt higher expectations as outlined in the systematic steps above. New Mexico's PED is also expected to provide guidance to ways in which schools can decrease bullying and harassment and develop. Moreover, New Mexico's PED will implement appropriate trainings for staff and volunteers and programs that assist with preventing school violence. As a result of the SB288, New Mexico's PED is expected to address disciplinary actions for those in violation of bullying, harassment, or engaging in school violence to create a positive, affirming environment for those marginalized for their sexual/affectional orientation or gender-variant behaviors, like TGE children. Having affirmed positive environments at school for TGE children provide additional care to those who live in supportive, accepting, and affirming homes with positive relationships with their parents and school counselors can advocate for such environments (Henry & Grubbs, 2017).

Summary

Empirical and evidence-based literature that supports this study was provided in this chapter. Information included theoretical orientations framing the study. The methodology, IPA supports the research questions, sample, data collection, and data analysis, while queer theory

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and transgender theory inform the research process and guide how the principal investigator deconstructs gender binaries to work toward creating policies and practices that combat transphobia with the narratives of parents. The focus of this study is to understand how parents experience life with a TGE child and how they encounter the PLPSG they attend with their TGE child, thus a brief background and current information on TGE children was outlined as were the benefits of support groups, like the PLPSG, for both parents and TGE children.

The PLPSG is co-facilitated by the principal investigator and one desire she has for this study is to create change with her own practice as a counselor within this group; therefore, offering an information of group systems theory will help the reader make sense of how the various developmental levels of the group's system influence the parent's perceived experience within the group and how outside or supra-level factors like healthcare and legal rights for TGE children in New Mexico might impact members as well. Being that all parent's attending the PLPSG with their TGE child and family are currently implementing positive and affirming approaches to parenting their TGE child, it only seemed relevant to provide data on how and why this is a necessary element to raising a TGE child in a home where they feel respected, safe, and loved. Lastly, being the PLPSG incorporates play, an understanding of play as a concept, benefits of play, and the use of play as being therapeutic within groups were all provided in this chapter as well. The following section will outline the IPA methodology identified for use in this study.

Chapter III

Methodology

This chapter will outline the research design and methods used for this study to investigate parents of transgender and gender expansive (TGE) children perception of their experience having and raising a TGE child in New Mexico. Through face-to-face interviews or written responses framed by the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach the primary investigator desired to gain rich descriptions of participants accounts to obtain insight into the meaning they make, or how they understand or make sense of having a TGE child, and if so how. Another aspiration of this primary investigator is to obtain the parents' perception of being in attendance of the Peer Led Play Support Group (PLPSG) this primary investigator co-facilitates.

With this information this primary investigator hoped to assist with promoting knowledge, comprehension, and skills in clinical practice when working with this community. Through the participants narratives it was also anticipated that knowledge will be gained regarding how to improve this primary investigator's practice as a co-facilitator of the group. This chapter will outline the methodology IPA in addition to research questions of the study and the inclusion of participants, procedures, and data analysis.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

The level of commitment to conduct IPA successfully takes time, reflection, and dialogue to ensure richness of data and change (Smith et al., 2009) and as a qualitative inquiry, IPA is recognized as a unique approach to conduct research from. Interpretative phenomenology is known to differ from traditional phenomenology in that it is reliant on an idiographic framework and orientated around "...an in-depth analysis of single cases..." that requires "...examining

individual perspectives of study participants...before producing any general statements” of all participants accounts (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014, p. 8). In this way, the IPA researcher is not focused on universal experiences of a said group experiencing the same phenomenon, but alternatively on the particular experiences of participants experiencing the said phenomenon in a way that is detail oriented and systematic (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith et al., 2009). Being committed to understanding how a particular phenomenon, like being a parent of a TGE child, has been experienced by participants this IPA researcher desired to understand the unique experiences from each participant’s perspective (Smith et al., 2009) prior to comparing and contrasting all analysis (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014) and interpreting data (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith et al., 2009).

A primary aim of IPA is to examine how research participants make meaning or sense of experiencing a phenomenon. This approach is guided by and requires not only an idiographic framework, but also phenomenological and hermeneutic philosophical under-pinning’s (Chan & Farmer, 2017; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith et al., 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2015).

Qualitative researchers who choose this methodology recognize the way each of us experiences a phenomena will be construed differently and they understand the way those constructions are interpreted will differ as well. In IPA the researcher is expected to be an active participant, recognizing they only have access to the experiences through what participants divulge to them, understanding they influence this access, and acknowledging they must interpret said experience to truly understand the subjective world of the participant and make sense of it (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith et al., 2009).

The phenomenological framework in IPA is descriptive and encompasses examining, in detail, the lived experiences of participants (Smith & Osborn, 2015). The approach required this

primary investigator to attend "...to the way things appear to individuals in their experience" (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014, p. 8) and be concerned with bracketing her own biases to ensure the subjective experience of each participant does not denote anyone else's experience (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). An 'insider's perspective' (Smith & Osborn, 2015, p. 26) of the phenomenon from the subjective accounts of the participants was the goal of this primary investigator because such experiences are of great importance to the participants. Although these experiences are significant and matter to participants, they are always interpretive (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith et al., 2009).

Hermeneutic phenomenologists are concerned with how participants come to understand this experience and make sense of it (Smith et al., 2009), albeit recognizing all phenomenon is interpreted (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014) on various levels (Smith et al., 2009). Interpretations are influenced by the subjected experiences each human has (Smith et al., 2009) and these inevitable influences are created by the participant, researcher, auditor, and later by any reader of the research or results. They can complicate how things are said, what is meant by what is being said, and may even impact the participants desire to not say something (Smith et al., 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2015). The hermeneutics influence in IPA plays an immense role in data analysis and required this primary investigator to keep in mind all humans have been shaped by their own experiences and hold their own preconceptions and interpretation of all experiences (Smith et al., 2009).

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, a phenomenologist, theorized that knowledge humans acquire is from their own experience within the world or of how they perceive it. He indicated such an experience or perspective influences scientific knowledge (Smith et al., 2009) and according to Smith et al. (2009), Merleau-Ponty deemed humans can never completely or directly understand

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another's experience or phenomena because they are not experiencing it as the person who is. Such an experience is personal and can only hold its very own personal interpretation based on biases or preconception they hold (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith et al, 2012). This IPA researcher attempted to remain as neutral as possible to gain a clear understanding of the phenomenon (Chan & Farmer, 2017) from these parent's interpretation of their individual accounts or as Smith and colleagues (2009) consider them parts of the whole. The authors suggest following the hermeneutic circle to attend to the parts (individual cases) of the whole and the whole (connecting all cases) of the parts to develop the deeper parts of the experiences of the phenomenon.

As noted, IPA is grounded in phenomenology and attempts to understand the unique subjective circumstance or experience of its participants. Using a critical lens, like queer theory or transgender theory, with the idiographic focus of the IPA method for this study this primary investigator understood each parent's individual perspectives regarding the phenomenon being studied (Smith et al., 2009). This assisted the primary investigator with understanding the subjective nature of each individuals experience and how to challenge socially constructed ideas about gender binary labels (Chan & Farmer, 2017; Goodrich, Luke, Smith, 2016) with the data obtained in this study.

Research Questions

The overarching Research question for this study is:

- 1) How do parents of TGE children think about having a TGE child and participating in the PLPSG supported by a local nonprofit resource center for TGE persons in New Mexico?

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Two secondary research questions guide this study and will be drawn from the subjective experiences and stories of parents of TGE children. These questions include:

1. How do parents of TGE children experience having a TGE child?
2. How do parents experience the PLPSG?

Preparing for the study

It should be noted the primary investigator completed an interest survey with parents via a private Facebook page dedicated to parents of TGE children through community-based non-profit organization for a class assignment prior to getting IRB approval. The purpose of this interest survey was to identify whether parents would be interested in participating in this study and to identify if the study might be feasible to complete. Brief information was provided to them about the study prior to being directed to email the primary investigator at their Microsoft email if interested. Six biological mothers and one step-mother (N=7) emailed stating interest prior to IRB approval and recruitment of this study. No fathers responded to the primary investigator at that time for the classroom assignment.

A single case study analysis with a past attendee who moved away and was not attending the PLPSG was completed for this class assignment. This single study analysis helped to inform the current study and the participant's feedback helped to make changes to the semi-structured questions. Parents who expressed interest during the survey prior to beginning the study and those who were recruited via Facebook were identified as current attendees to the PLPSG using a "good faith" understanding that parents would be aware and acknowledge if they attended the PLPSG within the last six months; formal attendance at PLPSG is not taken.

Participants

The families that attend the PLPSG all come from a variety of cultural, ethnic, racial, and socioeconomic backgrounds and have various accessibility needs. Thus, this primary investigator hoped to have participants from a variety of identities to participate in the study so a diverse sample can be heard from regarding this phenomenon; however, all of the participants, but one was white and cisgender. As shown in the results, many of the participants were exploring their sexual/affectional orientation and gender, but most participants identified as straight and cisgender.

The IPA approach expected the primary investigator to use a purposive sample of individuals experiencing the same or similar phenomenon (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith et al., 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2007). Therefore, the inclusion criteria for participation in this study included any primary caregivers—parents (e.g., stepparent, foster, adopted) or other legal guardians of a TGE child in attendance at least one time to the PLPSG. All TGE children who attend this group are age 12 years or younger; therefore, all participating parents have or recently had a child within this age range.

Since this primary investigator is utilizing Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) recommendations for this study, a sample size in agreement with the authors' suggestions for a bolder design data collecting method will be followed. According to the authors, numbers of participants or interviews are not prescriptive— they claim no correct way to answer inquires of sample size but indicate larger numbers of participants are not always better. They maintained four and ten interviews (not participants) are an appropriate total for studies since the objective of IPA is breadth of the individual experiences of participants study not necessarily depth of all

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experiences. Again this is not prescriptive, but a bolder design according to the Smith et al. (2009) included more than one interview (or written response) across multiple participants.

The sample size for this study was eleven participants. Each participant engaged in at least two interviews or written responses; some completed a brief optional third member check as a way to obtain approval of the work that had been completed thus far (Thomas, 2017). For this study, a total of nine face-to-face interviews and 13 written responses were completed and provided to the primary investigator. The third optional response asked of all participants was only completed by three participants. This third optional response was brief and space for the participant to offer approval and validation of the idiographic themes identified for the participants who engaged (Thomas, 2017). It appeared many of the written responses offered less breadth for the study. Nonetheless, it is possible in having the written options participants experienced more depth (Farmer & Byrd, 2015). Also, although the number of interviews/written responses went over the recommended amount by Smith et al. (2009), the primary investigator was cautious to ensure commitment to analyzing and reporting the richness of the data collected in an interpretatively detailed account (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith et al., 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2007).

The participants of this study must have attended at least one PLPSG, supported by the undisclosed community-based non-profit organization, within the last 6 months. The timeframe of attending the PLPSG within six months of beginning the research study was chosen to reflect current status since there is no recognized way of tracking attendance of the PLPSG. Originally, the primary investigator desired recruiting during a PLPSG meeting time, but this method was not conducive when it came to recruiting since those in attendance during the sessions had expressed interest prior to being recruited.

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Participants were also recruited on the undisclosed community-based non-profit organization private Facebook group. In doing so this ensured all parents who had attended the PLPSG at least one time received an invitation to participate. The script used to recruit on the Facebook platform firmly stated the study is only for participants who attend the PLPSG as there are parents who are members of the Facebook page that attend other groups supported by the undisclosed nonprofit. The script for this message on Facebook was the same as the email sent out with consent forms and can be found in appendix. This recruitment message was provided on the Facebook page two times over the course of one month to ensure visibility of the study was provided to several participants of the PLPSG (Dillman et al., 2014).

Once IRB approval was granted the primary investigator emailed parents, who had expressed interest, to obtain consent. The recruitment via Facebook specified they would need to contact the primary investigator at her Microsoft email to obtain the informed consent. Having them obtain the informed consent through email may have deterred participants from asking questions at the time, which might limit the study, but it should be noted one parent verbally inquired about confidentiality at the time of the face-to-face interview when asked if they had any questions about the study.

Parents completed a demographic form as part of the data collection. This form offered write-in options to allow for a more inclusive experience for participants to self-identify their social categories as they deemed fit (Goodrich et al., 2016). The purpose of this information was to gain perspectives on the varying intersecting identities of participants in an effort to understand if these socially constructed identities interfered with their experience as a parent of a TGE child. Each parent was given a pseudonym, and to remain inclusive, all participants were asked their pronouns, which will be referred to in this investigation.

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Eleven parents, nine mothers and two fathers, participated in this study. All parents have been de-identified and will be referred to by their given pseudonyms. All participants met the criteria to participate. The sample for this study was not representative of New Mexico as it is a state made up of varying social intersecting identities, it is known to be a “minority majority state”, where non-Hispanic citizens make up less than half of the state’s population.

Additionally, New Mexico is also known to be a state with a high percentage (20.9%) of people living below the poverty rate; a rate that is larger than the national average of 15.1 percent (New Mexico Department of Workforce Solutions, 2018). Participants for this study were mostly white and identified themselves as middle-class socioeconomically.

All participating parents have one TGE child they are raising. Many of these parents were also raising at least one cisgender child. Only one parent, Rhonda, had no children other than her TGE child, whereas Pam, and Lee and Gabby (partnered couple) had three cisgender children in addition to their TGE child. Jenny and Jim were raising one TGE child and one cisgender child as were Sue, Terri, Carmen, Ali, and Laura. Table 1 details the descriptions participating parents self-identified as in the open-ended demographic questionnaire. Not all social identities are provided in the Table 1 and will be observed further in the following sections to provide a more thorough examination of socio-cultural-political influences.

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Table 1
Parent Demographics

Pseudonyms	Parent Identity	Sexual/Affectional Orientation	Spiritual/Religious	Socioeconomic status-yearly income	Age
Laura	Mother	Bisexual	None	Graduate Degree/Family Income \$155,000	39
Carmen	Mother	Heterosexual	None	Family Income \$75,000-90,000	32
Ali	Stepmother	Questioning	Atheist	Upper Middle	36
Gabby	Mom	Heterosexual	None; “Recovering Catholic”	Privileged 2 income household approx. \$100,000-Partner receives disability compensation	31
Jim	Father	Heterosexual	Christian-Non-Denominational	Middle-class	36
Jenny	Mother	Heterosexual	Christian-Non-Denominational	Middle-class	35
Sue	Mother	Heterosexual	Spiritual	Student-Poor	47
Pam	Mother	Straight	N/A	Upper Middle-class	41
Lee	Father	Bi	Atheist	Middle-class	39
Terri	Mother	Heterosexual	Ashkenazi Jew	Middle-class	49
Rhonda	Mother	Pansexual	Atheist	Finishing MS in May, single family home, \$60,000	38

Procedures

Interested participants received informed consent forms via email with a “recruitment” script and an invitation to complete and sign the informed consent. Participants had the choice of handing the informed consent in prior to completing the face-to-face interview or written response or sending via email. Many of the participants sent back the informed consent via email prior to the interview, but the primary investigator also had extra copies of informed consent available to complete if they had not done so prior to completing face-to-face interviews. Parents obtaining informed consent via email were reminded after five days to sign and return the consent. Those who had consented but had not set up a time to meet face-to-face for the interview were reminded within five days after consenting.

Although in-depth, semi-structured, one-on-one interviews are the most ideal method for data collection in IPA (Chan & Farmer, 2017; Smith et al., 2009), this primary investigator, like Farmer & Byrd (2015), gave parents of TGE children who attend the PLPSG the option to either complete face-to-face interviews or written responses. Smith et al. (2012) argue face-to-face interviews allow for dialogue where participants are provided with the opportunity “...to think, speak, and be heard” (p. 57) by the interviewer, which deemed a more appropriate procedure for IPA. The purpose of providing two choices to participants of this study was to: (a) increase opportunities for more participants to participate in the study (Dillman et al., 2014), and (b) allow participants to engage in the study in a way that is convenient (Farmer & Byrd, 2015; Ratislavová & Ratislav, 2014), empowering (Farmer & Byrd, 2015), and safe for them (Chan & Farmer, 2017).

Past research, completed by Farmer & Byrd, 2015, found marginalized participants, who were given options to participate in written or face-to-face interviews, chose to complete written

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responses. In choosing this method for the study, these participants were given sufficient time to provide, what they deemed as being, meaningful content and reflection to a sensitive issue. The participants of Farmer and Byrd's study indicated they preferred the written responses because they had the freedom to answer responses, read what they wrote, and edit their writing before submitting. In doing so these participants attempted to ensure the reader would not misinterpret their words and in doing so were empowered by being given options to participate (Farmer & Byrd, 2015).

Some individuals prefer to write, others prefer to talk, and having options parents were given a space to tell their story in a way that makes them most comfortable (Ratislavová & Ratislav, 2014), whether it be in writing or verbally. Parents who consented and desired to complete a written response to turn into the primary investigator's email were sent an email regarding expectations of completed responses and the list of questions (Farmer & Byrd, 2015). They were also offered resources to reach out to in case they experienced distress while answering the inquiry. Parents who had consented interest in completing face-to-face interviews were sent an email inquiring about scheduling the interviews at their convenience outside of the PLPSG time and offered a space to process with the primary investigator, who is also a mental health clinician, if they experienced distress while interviewing.

The first in-person interviews were face-to-face, took place at a designated location decided by the participant—e.g. home, coffee shop, diner, library, etc., were audio recorded, and ranged from 45 to 90 minutes in length. A professional transcription company contracted with the University was hired to transcribe the audio from interviews once they were completed to save time. Once the transcriptions were completed and provided to the primary investigator, they were compared with the audio of the interview by the primary investigator to ensure the words

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were transcribed correctly to ensure validity of the transcription. Once this step was completed for each audio, it was destroyed. The second round of face-to-face interviews was impacted by COVID-19 and the primary investigator was forced to use an online video platform to complete these interviews rather than doing them in person.

Participants who chose to provide written responses were provided two weeks to complete the responses and get them returned to the primary investigator via email. The purpose for giving two weeks for completion to participants who chose to complete the written responses was to ensure they had sufficient time to complete their accounts and reflect on them (Farmer & Byrd, 2015) since the primary investigator would not be present to do so with them. Once completed, participant's written responses were sent via email to the primary investigator's Microsoft Outlook email. The second round of written responses went differently. The impact of COVID-19 on these parent's lives seemed to interfere with their ability to complete the responses in two weeks. One participant, Ali, asked to do the second round in writing rather than meeting for a face-to-face interview and other participants participating in the writing option asked for an extension on their time to respond. Ali had marked consent to do both the interview and written responses on her consent form so she did not need to complete another consent. It should also be noted that due to the nature of the pandemic and the impact it had on parents who were working from home and with their children at home, their request for extension on providing a written response was granted. The primary investigator sent these respondents emails to remind them of sending their responses close to the times they asked for the extension to and all completed them within that timeframe.

For participating in the first and second interview or written response, participants were given one \$25 gift card of their choice to Target or Amazon for compensation. There was a

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maximum expectation of completing two face-to-face interviews or two written responses totaling a compensation of \$50 in gift cards to Target or Amazon unless the participant chose to opt out of the second response during the first interview or written response in which they received only one \$25 gift card to Target or Amazon. If the participant decided prior to participating in the first face-to-face interview or first written response they do not want to participate in the study no compensation was provided. Participant's involvement in the research was voluntary and they could choose not to participate in the study's entirety. Parents who were participating in the study were also informed they could refuse to answer any of the questions during the interview or within the written responses at any time.

The semi-structured interview allowed for the participant to freely speak to their experience, as suggested by Smith et al. (2009). The interview structure fit the aims of this study and the interview protocol for this study is modeled on the semi-structured interview study completed by Goodrich (2009) on white heterosexual parents of LGB persons. The same pre-developed interview protocol was utilized for those who chose to do face-to-face interviewees, but this same protocol was more structured for participants who chose to complete written responses, as they were given the outline of the semi-structured interview to respond to. The interview and written response protocol began with the statement "You are a parent or guardian of a child who identifies as transgender or gender expansive and both you and your child attend the [undisclosed community-based non-profit organization in New Mexico] peer led play support group and I am interested in hearing your story." Following this prompt, participants who are completing interviews were asked questions that encouraged expansion on their previous response, such as "Tell me more about..." or "I can't help but wonder..." or "Please speak more to this". Throughout the face-to-face interview process, open-ended questions developed prior to

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the interviews were used to navigate the conversation (Noon, 2018; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Shagoury & Power, 2012) and provide clarification, understanding, and reflection on content. This process has been known to be therapeutically beneficial for participants engaging in in-person interviews (Goodrich, 2009).

Data collection for participants completing written responses differed, yet the same interview protocol was provided as the interviewees, it was just more structured. All pre-developed open-ended questions for the semi-structured interview were asked to each of the written respondents, whereas those engaging in face-to-face interviews may not have been asked all the questions outlined in the interview protocol because the participant may have answered a question on the protocol without it being asked or they may have been asked more questions to help clarify or go deeper. The purpose of asking participants providing written responses all of the pre-developed open-ended questions was an attempt to prompt them to express themselves and elucidate, understand, or make meaning of what was indicated (Goodrich, 2009). In doing so, parents were also able to reflect on the content of what they had previously written on their own (Farmer & Byrd, 2015) since there was no interviewer with them at the time they responded to go deeper or get clarification.

Since this study is attempting to understand experiences of cis-parents of children who are marginalized because of their gender, it seemed appropriate to incorporate the philosophical framework queer theory with IPA. Encompassing queer theory was an attempt to get a sound understanding of how each of these parents experience their life raising a TGE child and being part of the PLPSG while living in a conventional society that norms binary gender. It was also anticipated that using queer theory as a philosophical framework would help to illustrate the marginalization these parents experience while validating them as citizens in a Westernized

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conventional society (Chan & Farmer, 2017; Goodrich et al., 2016) with dominant cisnormative beliefs.

To assist with this process, a research diary/journal was used throughout the entire process of data collection. This research diary captured the primary investigator's thoughts and reflections of how they experienced interviews or written responses (Smith et al., 2009). In keeping research diary, this primary investigator was giving space to bracket between each participant (Holroyd, 2001; Smith et al., 2009) and include random thoughts and ideas held. Additionally, this research diary held notes from meetings with committee members and steps taken to complete both data collection and analysis procedures.

Having the research diary available while analyzing data increased the primary investigator's stamina throughout the process. Documenting in the beginning why the research is needed was a good reminder of the passion that inspired this study and why learning about these parents' experiences is necessary; these ideas kept this primary investigator invested in completing the research so others could hear their stories. Other developments in the research diary included ensuring equity of the participants experiences of the research process—i.e., data collection and analysis, for the primary investigator (Smith et al., 2009) and analyzing ideas, words, or phrases participants offered (Holroyd, 2001). Also, having the research diary available to bracket experiences while analyzing the data (Smith et al., 2009), like seeing commonalities and differences between participants, was beneficial for this primary investigator. Recordings made in the research diary were also utilized to challenge the primary investigator's biases or assumptions when reviewing and analyzing data (Walker-Floyd, 2014) that lay the foundation for interpreting during the analysis (Smith et al., 2009). Prior to data collection the following instruments were requested of participants to complete.

Instrumentation

Informed Consent

The informed consent given to parents to review explained expectations of how they would participate in the study and stated they would have a choice of participating with written responses or face-to-face interviews. The information also provided them with expected time limits of interviews and when written responses were due. The informed consent offered some example questions for them to review and specified they would have the ability to opt out of the study at any time except after dissemination of results. Outlined in the informed consent was the discomfort they may feel participating in the study, anonymity of the study, and compensation of the participating in the study. The informed consent also gave an explanation about data being kept confidential and with the primary investigator. Also, the informed consent explained that pseudonyms could be chosen by participants or would be provided by the primary investigator, and that all identifiable information would be removed from data collected. Lastly, the informed consent provided potential participants with contact information for both the principal investigator— i.e., student's dissertation chair, and student primary investigator in addition to the New Mexico Crisis Line and a Peer Warmline in case they experience any adverse effects due to participating in the study. Informed consent forms were signed by participants and handed into primary investigator or sent to the Microsoft email of the primary investigator prior to data collection.

Both written responses and face-to-face interviews asked each participant demographic information prior to engaging in the first round of pre-developed open-ended questions used for the semi-structured protocol. Data obtained about participant demographics were to assist the primary investigator with understanding characteristics of the participants (Salkind, 2010). They

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were also expected to help determine the various identities and intersections of the sample (Chan & Farmer, 2017) to understand how various intersections experience this phenomenon.

Demographics

Participants were asked demographic questions one time prior to engaging in the first face-to-face interview or written response. Parents who chose to complete face-to-face interviews were asked to verbally answer each of the following demographic questions prior to starting the semi-structured protocol. Those participating in written responses were provided with demographic questions prior to beginning the interview protocol. Demographic questions were comprised of with the following components: (a) Parent Identity; (b) Pronouns or Gender Identity of Parent; (c) Partnered or Not; (d) Sexual/affectional orientation; (e) Race or Ethnicity of Parent and Other Family Members; (f) Number of TGE Children Family; (g) Number of Cisgender Children in Family; (h) Age Range of Parent; (i) Socioeconomic status of Parent; and (j) Spiritual or Religious Affiliation. The demographic questionnaire was open-ended, like the semi-structured interview protocol, to allow participants to self-identify openly (Goodrich et al., 2016).

Interview Processes

The type of interview technique used in IPA is reflective and offers a comprehensive description of the participants experience being investigated (Smith et al., 2009). Since IPA deems data collection from either face-to-face interviews (Smith et al., 2009) or written responses as being appropriate (Farmer & Boyd, 2015) the participants were given an option of doing either (Farmer & Byrd, 2015). To assist with giving them space to share their subjective experience, an in-depth, semi-structured interview protocol was used to leave the conversation open for them to engage in conversation with the participants. The process for face-to-face

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interviews looked different from the written response process—participants engaging in face-to-face interviews were actively listened to and validated within that space (Smith et al., 2009), while those who chose to engage in the study via written responses were emailed after the primary investigator received and read their responses, at which time they were ‘heard’ and validated by email exchange (Ratislavová & Ratislav, 2014).

First interview

Research questions for this study informed the conversation and facilitated the discussion. For the first interview, pre-developed open-ended questions appropriate for IPA methodology (Smith et al., 2009) and modeled by Goodrich (2009) are as follows: (a) How have you come to understand or make sense of your child’s disclosure and if at all, has your understanding or thoughts about it changed since your child disclosed (began to transition)?; (b) How has your child’s social transition to their affirming gender impacted your life/experience? How has it impacted your identity as a parent? How has it impacted your identity as cisgender?; (c) How do you experience the Peer led play support group? How has it impacted you, your TGE child, partner, and cisgender children?; (d) What advice or recommendations can you make regarding support systems for the whole family including those similar to the Peer led play support group or community-based non-profit organization?; (e) How do you see my role in the Peer led play support group?; (f) How can I benefit you and your family more within and outside of the group?.

Second Interview

Parents who completed a face-to-face interview were provided with a copy of the second interview clarification questions via email prior to meeting over the video conferencing platform.

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The purpose of providing them with a copy of this information preceding our meeting through video conferencing was to allow them time to read through an interpretation made by the primary investigator after analyzing the data collected from the first interview and have time to process the interpretation so they could provide feedback during our interview regarding the interpretation of their individual experience (Farmer & Byrd, 2015). This information was provided via email and prior to sending the document attached, it was reviewed to ensure the correct clarifying questions and interpretation were being sent to the appropriate participant.

Parents who completed written responses were given their individual clarification questions and their individual interpretation to complete in writing. They, like those who completed video conferencing interviews, were asked “a) Does this fit? b) Is there anything that doesn’t fit? c) Is there anything you would add?” regarding the interpretation to ensure they felt their story was heard and honored. After the second interview or response, each participant was asked an optional question related to how the participants see the data being used to inform professional questioned and was stated as such: How do you see the data from this study creating change or educating professional counselors? The primary investigator interviewed all participants the first time and analyzed individual transcripts before moving onto the second interview or response. Not all participants chose to answer this question.

Second face-to-face interviews were not conducted in person, but rather over a password protected video conferencing meeting due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Only one parent who completed the first interview face-to-face opted to complete the second in writing. There were some additional concerns related to completing the second round, some participants completed the second round of responses or set up an interview within a few days of the primary investigator reaching out, nonetheless this process took longer for others. The primary

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investigator respected that the pandemic was interfering on the lives of those participating, they are all primary parents of young children and the New Mexico Public Education Department shut down the schools during this time. Plus, some participating parents were essential workers while others were working from home and taking care of their children. Nonetheless, they were provided with the time they needed to complete responses or set up video conferencing interviews.

Before sending out the invitation to participate, participants were asked if this was good time to either set up video conferencing or send them the questions to be answered in writing. Some participants did not get back to the primary investigator for weeks after the initial contact to complete the second round and others who were completing written responses requested extended time to complete the second round of questions. For some participants, a second email inquiring about participating in the second round was necessary and because of the circumstances their requests to have more time completing the responses were granted.

Third Interview

The third optional response was not offered as a face-to-face option and participants who chose to engage in the third response were asked to review a table developed specifically for them from the information they provided in their first and second interviews. The tables also included an interpretation of how the primary investigator in addition to experiential themes and micro-themes. This table was sent via email and like with the second interview or response, the document attached was reviewed to ensure the correct table went to the appropriate participant before sending. The intention of providing participants with this information was to give them time to review the whole—hermeneutic circle (Smith et al., 2009), interpretation of both the first and second interviews or responses—parts of the hermeneutic circle (Smith et al., 2009) and

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ensure it was described or interpreted as accurately as possible. This third option was a member check of sorts (Thomas, 2017) and an opportunity to offer any feedback or clarification on the entirety of how their experience was interpreted. The third optional response asked of participants included this statement, “My goal is to honor your story. 1) Do these ideas, descriptions, interpretations fit for you? And 2) Would you add or take away anything?”

Extending on the Data Collection Procedures

The interview protocol provided opportunities for parents to share their perceptions in the first round of interviews. The primary investigator requested two follow up interviews to be conducted or two follow up written responses to be completed after the first thorough analysis of the first interview to triangulate data (Smith et al., 2009). The purpose of this was to attempt equitable interpretation, gain clarification (Farmer & Byrd, 2015), and complete a member check to obtain richer data, as a credibility measure, and gain a deeper understanding of the participant (Thomas, 2017).

When developing the second and third round of interviews and responses the analyst and primary investigator, went back to the experiential themes and micro-themes identified and inquiries documented in both research diary and word document developed for each individual participant with emerging themes for support. Writing the questions from these two data points was an attempt to engage in dialogue to truly understand their experience in a neutral manner (Smith et al., 2009) as a parent of a TGE child. The third optional response was implemented to assure the parents felt their story was interpreted in a manner they felt as genuinely honoring them, their experience, and their story.

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The first IRB was amended to add a third optional interview. The purpose of doing so was to ensure rich data was being collected to increase trustworthiness. No more than two face-to-face interviews were completed and no more than three written responses were completed by each participant. The second follow up response or interview was compensated, the third one was optional and not compensated, which was stated in the second interview and recruitment email as such:

You will have an opportunity to engage in a third interview for clarification and elaboration purposes. This response will be done in writing and does not include compensation for your time. The researcher will email each participant who completed the second round of interviews or written responses with a set of questions for third response. The time it will take you to answer the questions varies but should not take longer than 60 minutes. If you have completed a face-to-face interview this third option will require your answers in writing. The researcher wants to ensure she hears your story correctly and is interpreting your experience and the meaning you make of your experience accurately. This is one way to do so. You may choose to decline and have the option to withdraw at any time.

Once the first individual transcript was analyzed and ideas were categorized and interpreted, the primary investigator began conducting second interviews sequentially. In addition to being a member check offering clarification, the second interview was intended to be reflective for participants. This held true for one participant, Gabby, who noted on this experience for them without being prompted. She indicated completing the second set of responses for this study felt more therapeutic than the first set.

Data Analysis

IPA requires the researcher to analyze and interpret the perspectives of a multifaceted phenomenon experienced by participants. The idiographic philosophical influence necessitates the analyzer complete a detailed, thorough, and systematic individual case analysis on each transcription or written response completed. Aiming to understand each “...personally unique perspective...” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 29) before connecting themes across responses or transcriptions is imperative to maintain the equitable essence of IPA.

Research questions were developed to value the unique experiences of all participants and to understand the subjectivity of such experiences, so philosophical framework both IPA and queer theory influenced how both the questions and analysis were designed. Focused on “...demarginalizing hegemonic systems of power relations...” (Chan & Farmer, 2017, p. 295) among this community of cisgender parents of TGE children seemed to require queer theory as a guide. To emphasize the need for social justice movements (Chan & Farmer, 2017) for parents of TGE children to “...directly improve...” their lives (Singh et al. 2013, p. 101) and combat transphobia (Farmer & Byrd, 2015), queer theory was informative in understanding how these parents have been impacted by a cishet—both cisgender and heterosexual, normative society and how they came to unlearn gender binary and understand non-binary genders in addition to recognizing the difference between sexual/affectional orientation or attraction and gender.

In line with queer theory, IPA follows an idiographic underpinning which speaks to the various subjective forms in which people view realities. Queer theory and the idiographic element in IPA worked to challenge ideas around identity and binary labels, specifically toward the individualized aspects of parents own sexual and affectional orientation or attractions and gender (Chan & Farmer, 2017; Goodrich, Luke, Smith, 2016) as well as their TGE child. The

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idiographic nature of IPA values each individual story and attempts to illustrate the different lenses of each participant (Chan & Farmer, 2017) while queer theory attempts to shatter the socially constructed binaries and power imbalances present in the world (Goodrich et al., 2016). This study implemented both to do such work in accordance with IPA's inductive and integrative strategies (Farmer & Byrd, 2015; Smith et al., 2009). The first, second, and optional third round of individual interviews or responses went through each of the following steps, except number six, prior to moving onto the next. The steps are as follows:

Step 1: The audio recordings from face-to-face interviews were transcribed by a reputable third-party source. The analyst began by free coding or reviewing each individual transcription or written responses in chronological order (Smith et al., 2009) using a reflective process that allowed for making and investigating preconceptions and presumptions, while also being aware of and examining bias and emotional responses (Farmer & Byrd, 2015). This process was completed through bracketing, which included the use of a research diary (Smith et al., 2009) that helped to ensure the research is being conducted in an equitable manner and the participant's interpretation of the phenomenon is speaking for itself (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). During this first step, if the participant completed a written response a read through was completed prior to emailing participants back with a brief response including validations; content and feeling reflection; and a thank you for participating. If the participant completed a face-to-face interview the primary investigator listened to the audio while reading the individual transcription to be sure what was transcribed is accurate and to allow for the primary investigator to be reminded of how specific statements were stated to complete a more in-depth analysis (Smith et al., 2009). The participant being analyzed remained the focal point of this step

(Smith et al, 2012), whereas step two required the principal investigator to take a more interpretive stance.

Step 2: A line-by-line analysis was completed of the first interview or written response and included initial note taking. This ensured a thorough description of essential profiles and a consideration of what was said and how it is said, focusing on explicit meaning and beginning to interpret and understand how and why (Smith et al., 2009). At this stage the analyst also began to engage in reflections and observations of the experience and how personal attributes of the interviewer—i.e., gender, relationship with participant, age, etc. (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014), or sensitive material (Farmer & Byrd, 2015) may have influenced the way interview questions were answered or how the interviewee engaged in the dialogue. Descriptive comments, linguistic comments, and conceptual comments were the focus of this stage (Smith et al, 2012). While analyzing data in the first two interviews this novice IPA analyst wanted to ensure they were accurately proceeding through this step so they completed four readings and initial note taking before beginning to identify themes in the fifth read through. Being that IPA is a flexible methodology the analyst felt like this was appropriate but was concerned that maybe she was overanalyzing data. Being that they are a novice IPA researcher, the analyst desired clarification on how many read throughs and initial coding efforts were appropriate to complete before moving onto the next case so they collaborated with a committee member, who is also an experienced IPA researcher, to understand if correctly proceeding in analysis. The committee member reported that IPA data analysis becomes easier the more it is completed and stated to lessen the number of read throughs to two or three time before identifying themes. This committee member also reminded the analyst

that this is flexible process although the purpose for doing fewer read throughs and initial coding was to ensure she was not overanalyzing the data and staying true to the IPA process of analysis which includes keeping the participant at the center of analysis. Their recommendation was to not over-interpret the participants experience prior to moving to the next case, so for the final eight cases the analyst read through and made initial notes to find themes two to three times, depending on length of data in responses, before identifying themes.

Step 3: This process included one portion of the hermeneutic circle—originating from the “whole of the interview” as part of the analysis and the interview itself as a part of the whole or in this case all participants narratives (Smith et al., 2009, p.91). This step required the analyst to utilize notes taken in step two to create themes that include both the participants and analyst’s words and interpretations. With each step in the IPA process, the analyst’s job became more strenuous as they moved into a more interpretative stance and further from the participant’s interpretation, all while staying true to their lived experience (Smith et al, 2012).

Step 4: Steps 1-4 guided the analysis of each transcription. Since the interviews were sent off for transcription the analyst chose to begin by analyzing the first written response first. After this first written response was completed the first interview transcription was analyzed. Thereafter steps 1-4 were completed in chronological order of when interviews or written response were completed with subsequent cases prior to moving onto step 5 (Smith et al., 2009). Themes were developed in chronological order to identify connections between them. After the second interview went through steps 1-4 an idiographic table was developed from the first two interviews or written responses. The

table included 1) experiential and micro-themes (originally identified as superordinate and subthemes), 2) definition of themes, and 3) participant extracts. Both experiential themes and micro-themes for each participant were developed through language, words, or statements made by the participants themselves or the primary investigator's interpretations. Tables were developed for each individual participant prior to step 5 and the initial idiographic tables are provided in Appendix D.

Step 5: This step included moving to the next transcription or case to begin steps 1-4 over. It was necessary for the analyst to continue bracketing their experience and keep with the idiographic responsibility of IPA, particularly with regards to ideas identified in previous cases, in all subsequent cases (Smith et al., 2009). This primary investigator waited at least 24 hours after completing step 4 with each transcript before moving to the next transcript. After step 5 of the data analysis was completed for the first interview or written response, clarifying questions and an interpretation was developed for the second interview—each second interview was based on the subjective experience of the participant in the first interview and no two were alike. Step six was completed after the third optional response was completed for all participants who chose to complete this response.

Step 6: This step includes the primary investigator exhaustively searched for thematic indexes to create patterns between superordinate themes and subthemes emerging across all interviews or written responses (Smith et al., 2009) among the group. There are various methods to complete this step outlined in Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009), but for this study, the analyst recognized numeration as being a specific method used to identify important factors to participants. Attending to these frequent themes helped to

identify clusters or connections. In fact, for a group theme to be a superordinate theme or subtheme it needed to be a pattern seen within at least one-third of the participants.

Contextualization or attending to specific themes that include cultural, temporal, and narrative was also utilized to help recognize connections for themes. The various ways participants related to events with their TGE child and the group seemed profound on how they experienced this phenomenon. Themes not utilized included those that did not fit with the scope of the research or lacked anecdotal evidence. By clustering together conceptual similarities of referents—make meaning from the word or phrase, essential profiles, and central themes, in addition to numeration, a master table was developed and can be found in Appendix E. This master table included the interpretive superordinate themes and subthemes to describe all participant experiences (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith et al., 2009). This table was discussed with two dissertation committee members and synthesized further. The table was synthesized during several meetings with the committee members to go develop a new table with less group themes, which harmonized well with three superordinate themes, to create an even smaller table with even fewer group subthemes.

Conclusion

This chapter outlined the methodology, instrumentation, data collection, and data analysis of this study. It provided procedures taken to prepare for the study and outlined specific steps taken to engage in the process of IPA. This chapter also provided information about participants was provided to allow for an understanding of the parents participating in the study. The information offered in this chapter sets up the following chapter that illustrates the findings of this study.

Chapter IV

Findings

This chapter focuses on the findings of the study guided by Interpretative Phenomenology Analysis (IPA). This methodology was chosen for its idiographic, phenomenological, and hermeneutic frameworks which values hearing and honoring individual stories to truly appreciate the phenomenon they are experiencing and understand how participants make meaning of their subjective and collective experience. This study centered on the experiences of parent raising transgender and gender expansive (TGE) children. The data revolved around the stories they shared described the phenomenon as accurately as humanly possible (Larkin et al., 2006; Smith et al., 2009). Giving each parent a safe space to voice their experiences of raising a TGE child in a conventionally normed ciscentric/cis-normed society allowed for exploration of the many facets (Larkin et al., 2006; Pietkiewitz & Smith, 2014; Smith et al., 2009) related to being a parent of a TGE child. These encounters also contributed to creating an understanding of the parent's experiences attending the local peer led play support group (PLPSG) designated for TGE children and their families. The findings consider the responses to the following research questions, with the intent of interpreting without neglecting or overpowering their voice (Chan et al., 2017). The principal question for this study is:

- 1) How do parents of TGE children think about having a TGE child and participating in the peer led play support group (PLPSG) supported by a local nonprofit resource center for TGE persons in New Mexico?

Two secondary research questions guiding this study drew from the narratives and stories of parents of TGE children and include:

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1. How do parents of TGE children experience their child's disclosure or social transition?
2. How do parents experience the PLPSG?

The primary investigator identified private, or idiographic, experiential themes and micro-themes to fit the subjective experience for each participant (Smith & Osborn, 2015). The IPA iterative analytical process suggested by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) included a process that synthesized the emerging experiential themes and micro-themes found among each participant to create three superordinate themes, two of which held two subthemes within them, across all eleven cases. The group superordinate themes identified across cases are **1) Impact of living in a conventional society, 2) Loss, and 3) Impact of advocacy and education as change agent.**

This chapter will cover each of these superordinate themes, including subthemes in an effort to explicate these parents' experiences raising a TGE child. To maintain the idiographic nature of IPA, a detailed account of each caregiver's unique lived experience will be provided prior to moving through IPA's hermeneutic circle, or taking parts to create a whole, which includes a case analysis that links cases. After examining each individual participant vignette, group analysis, or an overview across cases, will be provided. The overview across cases will outline the three superordinate themes identified and their respective subthemes.

As intended by the idiographic framework of IPA, the following detailed examinations provide insight into the individual subjective experiences of how each caregiver experiences raising a TGE child. Each individual vignette includes the emerging themes, experiential themes, micro-themes, and relevant ideas related to what was being seen for each individual participant. These individual accounts will also offer supplemental excerpts to support themes (Smith &

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Osborn, 2015). In each individual account, definitions for those themes and supplemental excerpts from either the interview or written response, so the unique experiences each caregiver has had raising a TGE child, are also provided. These excerpts will aid in understanding each individual participating parent's perspective and will support identified case by case superordinate themes and subthemes for the group (Smith et al., 2009).

Please note, the acronyms denoting assigned or designated sex at birth, *AMAB*—assigned male at birth, and *AFAB*—assigned female at birth, will be utilized to describe TGE children at times throughout the chapter. Also, some parents identified their child as either *Non-binary*, *Transgender*, *Gender Fluid*, or *Gender Creative*. Those terms will be utilized regarding the TGE child instead of the term “TGE” if specified by the primary caregiver in the individual examinations. The excerpts where parents said or wrote their TGE birth name or preferred child's name will be substituted with [TGE child], [TGE child's], or [Transgender child]. Also, pronouns indicated by the caregiver for themselves and their TGE child will be utilized when referring to the person.

Laura

Laura is a mother of a non-binary/gender fluid child who is 6-years old. Her child began demonstrating their gender fluidity at about the age of 4-years old and uses they/them pronouns. Five experiential themes were identified for Laura, **“How Ugly the World has Always Been”**, **“Turning Point[s]”**, **Self-identified Support Systems**, **“I Do Make Meaning of my Experience as a Caregiver”**, and **Education**.

“How Ugly the World has Always Been”

The experiential theme, **“How ugly the world has always been”**, encompassed the struggles Laura spoke of regarding how she views society and the impact of cishet—i.e., cis-normed and hetero-normed, norms on her lack of knowledge to understand her non-binary child. The impact of these conventional ideas seemed to cause significant conflict for her in the beginning of her child’s process, which she demonstrates as being created by barriers influenced by cishet norms. Laura spoke to way she understands conventional gender binary norms and includes perceived challenges with not understanding her gender fluid child. She illustrated positive experiences and spoke to this experience as being a transformational process for her. There were six micro-themes identified for Laura that seemed to relate to this experiential theme. They include *Parent’s transitional phases of Transgender child’s social transition*, *How mom experiences Western society experiencing TGE child*, *How mom experiences TGE child experiencing society*, *Emotional Distress and uncertainty*, *Fear of misgendering and other challenges*, and *Perceived positive experiences*.

Parent’s Transitional Phases of Transgender Child’s Social Transition. While Laura did not completely understand what her gender fluid child was trying to verbalize, she continuously affirmed and supported them in ways she thought odd, yet pertinent. Laura was disrupting gender binaries before she understood gender fluidity even though she held preconceived ideas about her non-binary child. These biases appeared to come from socially constructed ideas of binary gender and gender performativity that related to her gender fluid child who is AMAB, expressing feminine.

When we thought our child was a cisgender boy with feminine gender expression, things were really hard for me as a parent...There were several months there where I was

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literally tailoring all their t-shirts because they wouldn't wear them. Who tailors' t-shirts for their 4-year-old!?

Laura spoke to her continued support toward her gender fluid child even without any education or knowledge of non-binary or gender fluid identities, all while experiencing unique challenges of having a gender fluid child. These unique challenges included not being able to recognize their gender identity and fearing, what she later calls "misgendering" them. The essence of this transitional process for Laura seemed to shift the way she sees cisgender privilege and how she views seeing and labeling children as being cisgender or transgender. She stated,

Previously I saw children as cisgender until they identify otherwise. Now I would say that I am more likely to see all children as potentially Transgender until they identify as definitely Transgender. In a way, it's like there are no cisgender children for me anymore...I never thought cisgender was a bad word. I didn't think about it much at all...

One seemingly significant concept that resonated in Laura's transition encompasses a parallel she voiced. After she recognized her child was gender fluid and began to disclose to people in her circle, Laura reports seeing similarities having a gender fluid child and "being a parent of a stillbirth child." She described converging and diverging factors amid the two experiences. Laura stated,

I see unfortunate parallels between being a parent of a trans child and being a parent of a stillborn child. Our first child was stillborn at 41 weeks. When that happened, I lost friends and relatives who could not accept this, and I gained new people in my life who were amazing. And also, everyone told me about their own babies they had lost. Before our stillbirth, we didn't know how common miscarriage, stillbirth and infant death is, but

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we quickly found out that almost everyone has lost at least one child and many people have lost most of their children. Now that we have a transgender child (who uses they pronouns which makes things more public than they might otherwise be), all the people are coming out of the woodwork to tell us about their trans relative.

How Mom Experiences Western Society Experiencing TGE child. Laura's experiential claims of how she experienced her child's unconventional ways of expressing and behaving feminine also included watching how her non-binary child interacts with the Westernized world. These claims highlight the effects of conventional societal norms representative of cisnormative views around gender binaries. She stated,

Many places we would go people, particularly white women, would comment on our child's freckles...A cashier would rave about the freckles and then go on to "his blue eyes" and "his dimples" and blonde hair. It was way over the top...I now think gender had a lot to do with it too both for the strangers and for our child. When our child began wearing more feminine choices in public, they got much fewer comments on their looks...once they started passing as a girl, then strangers began to comment more again, but now always on the clothes and not on the freckles, dimples, blue eyes and hair...

How Mom Experiences TGE child Experiencing Society. It seemed Laura began to process these public experiences and came to understand socially constructed views of gender potentially influenced her child's desire to express as their gender fluid self at a young age, particularly when in public. Here is her perception of these interactions. She stated,

I can see our child not identifying with their assigned gender when we were out in public...I do think our child didn't like that attention from strangers...Now they seemed

to like strangers commenting on how they look, and they don't seem to hate their freckles.

Emotional Distress and Uncertainty. It appeared Laura experiences varying emotions related to her child growing up in a cisnormative society. Such emotions include fear, uncertainty, and sadness. Throughout her narrative, Laura spoke to such feelings as she recounted various situations related to her gender fluid child. These temporal references illustrate the uncertainty she felt when she was trying to navigate her child's gender expression and behavior prior to understanding gender fluidity and how she questioned her role as a parent. She reported,

For Christmas I didn't know what to advise the family to buy for them. I explained that they seemed to like everything a stereotypical four[-]year[-]old girl would like. For the five[-]year[-]old birthday they wanted Barbie ballerina dolls and ballet classes. So I got those. I didn't know what to do about kindergarten. Should they go to another year of preschool to give time to sort out the gender stuff? Other families with feminine boys said it was most intense around five years old. Surely then we should wait.

Fear of Misgendering and Other Challenges. Prior to questioning decisions she was to make that might impact her child's future, Laura's gender fluid child was dressing and behaving in ways, comparative to social transitioning. While Laura recognized she was affirming her child from the beginning, it seemed she had no idea she was affirming their internal gender because of the uncertainty she was feeling about the situation. The struggles Laura spoke of included her gender fluid child being young and using language around their gender experience that was difficult for her to understand. Growing up and living in a cishet society seemed to have influenced her understanding of TGE people and experience— Laura had not been taught about

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gender fluidity, which created a barrier in communication and comprehension between her and her non-binary child. This lack of understanding from Laura did not come from a place of discriminating against her child being too young to know their gender, but rather a developmental misunderstanding on a cognitive level and a lack of knowledge. She stated,

They would sometimes say ‘some people are boys and some people are girls and I am both’ and I didn't disagree, but I didn't understand either...now we realize [this] had to do with gender identity...We hadn't [been] given any vocabulary for a gender identity that changes over time or for nonbinary gender identities.

Perceived Positive Experiences. While Laura demonstrated specific barriers to her own process as a parent raising a TGE child, she also illustrated having positive encounters regardless of the challenges she has endured. It seemed she felt relief after obtaining education about gender fluidity and began to understand her child's experience and gender identity, and she was able to perceive this experience as delightful. She stated,

There is still fear and so many challenges with the outside world and plenty of disappointment with people in that world, but we at least have a path that seemed to fit, that makes sense, that flows for our child. And more and more we find ourselves surrounded by beauty and community

“Turning Point[s]”

Laura stated she experienced her non-binary child's social transition as “turning point[s]” for her and her family. Since her child has socially transitioned, she has engaged in significant life changes that include her leaving her job as a preschool teacher and moving her family into a co-housing community that embraces queer community members. She stated, “I realize I have also seen our child's social transition as being a significant turning point in our family's path.”

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The two applicable concepts were identified for this emerging theme for Laura are *Parent out of comfort zone* and *Integration back into “queer community.”*

Parent out of Comfort Zone. Laura’s child’s social transition appeared to be liberating for her. She spoke to the transition as influencing her to make major life changes that she might not have made otherwise. She illustrates making significant changes for her family, changes it seemed would not have been made had their child not disclosed and socially transitioned. Laura stated,

Previously I thought we would live in our same house forever. I thought I would always run my same preschool program in a similar way as I had done for the last 8 years for my whole career. A few months after our child transitioned, we had suddenly decided to give up that business and stop teaching children (at least for now) and sell our house and move into a cohousing community and live a totally different lifestyle than we had previously. I don’t think I would have made any of those decisions prior to this time in our lives when our child transitioned.

Integration back into “Queer Community.” In addition to illustrating the liberation she experienced with changing her lifestyle, Laura expressed self-growth and a renewed sense of self as part of her own transitional experience, particularly with regards to her sexuality. Laura spoke to the intrapersonal growth she appeared to be flourishing in as a result of child’s disclosure and social transition. She spoke to the way being in a straight appearing relationship has influenced her understanding of herself and it seemed she is becoming secure with her sexuality again and demonstrates the connection she is making with coming back into the queer community. Laura also conveys not wanting to tokenize her child as a way back into the queer community. She stated,

Also, when my partner [inclusive term for significant other, spouse] and I were young adults, we were pretty secure and open about our sexuality, but 20 years of being straight-passing eats away at that and while we certainly don't want to use our child as a ticket back to the queer community, our child transitioning to their true self also has helped me begin the process of reconnecting to myself.

Self-identified Support Systems

Laura searched for varying support systems and resources to assist her with supporting her child. She identified varying challenges around the search and recognized the impact of having chosen family available for her gender fluid child. The relevant ideas related to this emerging theme include *Difficulty finding supports*, *“Queer extended family”*, *Importance of co-housing community*, and *Peer led play support group as part of the “queer extended family.”*

Difficulty Finding Supports. Laura indicated searching for supports was not an easy task for her. It seemed lacking knowledge and being uninformed on TGE people played a role in how she understood the role of various supports. Because of being uneducated she had trouble with identifying appropriate supports for her family. Specifically, finding education, resources, and supports were challenging for her. She wasn't sure where to look, what to look for, what she needed to know, or what supports her, and her family needed. Laura stated,

It was difficult finding a support system...I didn't think to look for a transgender resource center because I thought my child was GNC [Gender Nonconforming] not transgender and I didn't know a center like that could help with either.

“Queer Extended Family”. Integration back into the queer community seemed to be a necessity for Laura to support her gender fluid child appropriately. Learning of the need to

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support herself and her non-binary child, Laura began her search to find a “queer extended family” after learning the value of having one as a queer person, on social media. This type of support for her non-binary child was important to her as a cis-person who might not completely understand her child’s experience. Laura expressed having a “queer extended family” increases visibility of queer identities for her non-binary child and addresses the PLPSG as being part of the “queer extended family.” She spoke to an appreciation for having the resource available for TGE children and families. Laura stated,

When we first understood that our child is nonbinary, a friend of mine who is a gay man posted on [social media] about the importance of ‘queer extended family’...he explained that it is your chosen family of queer people who can understand and empathize with you that your real cis-straight family will never be able to despite best intentions. And so began my quest to figure out how to create that for a gender-fluid five-year-old. The play group has been part of this effort.

Laura seemed to recognize the importance of having a “queer extended family” available to her child and conveys how she perceived having a chosen family. She illustrates how she interprets what that means for her child and other children underrepresented in a conventional society influenced by gender binaries. Laura stated,

I think this feels really important to me because we learn in education how important representation is to children from underrepresented groups...Representation is one aspect of a having a queer extended family for my child. Without putting significant effort into providing representation for my child, my child might not otherwise have met or seen or heard of another gender fluid or nonbinary person until they were in high school...

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It seemed Laura has found comfort in having “queer extended family” members inside of the PLPSG as well as in her co-housing community. She continued to convey a sense of freedom as a parent of a gender fluid child now that she is knowledgeable and experienced and expressed having this representative support for her non-binary child as a protective measure. She demonstrated the importance of learning from adult TGE folx [alternative inclusive spelling of folks] that her child can have a bright future and has the ability to live a positive life regardless of the data explicating suicide rates among TGE people. She stated,

Representation is one aspect of a having a queer extended family for my child...statistics about attempted suicide in trans youth being so high, the queer extended family also seemed like a way to extend a greatly needed safety net for our child.

Such a safety net described by Laura creates an added layer of support to her gender fluid child and she considers having that as being significant for her child’s future endeavors. It seemed Laura understood that as her gender fluid grows and develops, they may not want to discuss concerns with her and her partner. As such she found significance in having a variety of queer people for her child to talk to when they desire to and found solace in having a variety for her child to choose from. She stated,

When our child is older, we hope that they will feel like they are able to talk to us about anything, but the reality is that most teens don’t feel that way about their parents. If there is something going on for them that they feel they can’t talk to us about, we want to provide them with a large number of other people to choose from who they might think will understand and who they might feel comfortable talking about that with.

Importance of Co-housing Community. One element of having a safety net for her child seemed to resonate from having the co-housing community that her family lives in. Laura indicated having this community available for her Gender Creative child provided representation for her child and gave them space to create and maintain bonds with queer members of the community, particularly those who are “rainbow elders.” She stated,

...the cohousing community opportunity now looked to me like another opportunity to extend the safety net...while none of the other community members identify as transgender, my child would have the opportunity to grow up with three sets of lesbian grandmothers, as an example. Of course I wanted my child to have stronger ties to rainbow elders.

Peer Led Play Support Group (PLPSG) as part of the “Queer Extended Family”.

Laura stated she values the safe space the PLPSG provides for her immediate family. Her and her partner, their gender fluid child, and their cis-child all benefit from attending the PLPSG. Additionally, Laura believes having both cisgender and transgender adult co-facilitating the group as being beneficial for parents—cisgender parents can find a sense of comfort in having cisgender people in transgender spaces and the children have representation with having TGE folx in the space. Laura spoke to seeing benefits in sharing everyday experiences and frustrations raising a TGE child with other caregivers and illustrates feeling validated with other attendees and facilitators of the PLPSG. She specifically explicated the things she values most about the group and stated,

For my partner and me, we don’t yet have many opportunities to interact with people we know are trans outside of the playgroup. I value our new friendships...practicing using correct pronouns with people who are not our child...seeing trans adults doing better than

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those in the news (murdered) or depicted in movies or on TV (the brunt of jokes or murdered) so that I can see a brighter future for my child...having people - trans or not - to vent to, to get advice from and know that they understand in a way that other people in my life may not...being able to share my experience with new families who come to the group...

Laura also specifically conveyed how she perceives the benefits of the group for his cisgender child and the impact of attending on how she will be better able to support her gender fluid sibling in the future. She stated,

Going to the playgroup has helped [cis-sibling] continue to understand her sibling and to grow in her ability to be a strong support for them. When they are adults, she will be comfortable around her sibling's chosen family. She will continue to be confident that anything transphobic peers might say is totally off-base and unacceptable.

"I Do Make Meaning of my Experience as a Caregiver"

During her process of finding ways to understand, support, and affirm her non-binary child, like identifying AMAB femme representatives online, Laura illustrated she makes meaning of her experiences as a parental caregiver of a non-binary child through her child's experience. This emerging theme for Laura is illustrated by two relevant ideas that include *Child's experience impacts parent's experience* and *Sociopolitical influence on experience*.

Child's Experience Impacts Parents Experience. Laura spoke about her gender fluid child's experience to explain her own experience, which seemed to help her and her child search for meaning in the world. When asked about this in the second questionnaire, she clarified this

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interpretation, stating her training as a “Reggio-inspired teacher” has influenced the way she parents and understands both her children and how they co-construct their world. Laura stated,

In the Reggio Emilia Approach, parents are researchers, constantly seeking to deepen their understanding of learning and child development through...the hundred languages of children. Alongside children we co-construct the world around us. So yes, I do make meaning of my experience as a caregiver through my child’s experiences as well as through my child’s search for meaning in the world.

Socio-political Influence on Experience. Laura’s process appeared to have been truly self-reflective and educational for her. She recognized particular socio-political movements as creating a shift in her learning and unlearning processes and how she has experienced her non-binary child. Such a shift in political matters seemed to embody her experience and make her reflect on the impact of them on Westernized society. Such movements have impacted her own experience and include having a gender fluid child after the Trans Rights Movement. She comprehends this as another aspect of how she understands herself and makes meaning of her non-binary child’s experience. Laura stated,

I wonder how I would have thought about my gender if I was born after the beginning of the visibility part of the trans rights movement rather than almost 3 decades before...If I had had my child earlier in life, there could easily have been (comparatively) nothing for them. Our experience would have been so different. I for one thing would not have heard the term “gender fluid” at an education conference, so we might still be stuck trying so hard to be supportive of what we thought was our cisgender gender non-conforming boy and getting it all wrong because that wasn’t what was going on at all.

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Socio-political movements as such have increased representation and visibility of non-binary people. Social media is one method of showing her child people like them and Laura spoke to finding AMAB femmes on various platforms, which has helped her to support her gender fluid child. Having such representation in social media seemed to have helped them continue to feel good about themselves. She stated,

I would like our child to meet more people like them in person. To me that seemed to be AMAB nonbinary femmes who love their bodies the way they are (no dysphoria). I have slowly been finding people on Instagram who seemed to fit that description or at least are AMAB femmes that I can prescreen posts of and show some to my child...My child particularly loves Conor McKenzie, which is great and at the same time, he's a ballerina so his body is not the sort of body that a child should expect to grow up and have. It would be great for our child to meet more trans people and especially AMAB nonbinary femmes with normal bodies in a setting that is conducive to adults and children making a connection.

Carmen

Carmen is a mother of a young Trans-female child who began verbalizing she was not a boy as a toddler. In the beginning Carmen did not want to label her child but understood she was not identifying with being male, which is the sex she was assigned at birth. There are four experiential themes related to Carmen's experience and they include **“Those Conventional, Normed Gender Roles”, Consequences of Media, Self-determined Education, “Doing the right thing”, and “Therapeutic” Support.**

“Those Conventional, Normed Gender Roles”

The experiential theme, **“Those Conventional, Normed Gender Roles”**, embodied the impact of living in a cisnormative society on her experience and spoke to her overall experience as a parent raising a Transgender child as being a growth process that is transformative. Carmen seemed to have diligently worked to understand Transgender people and experiences so she could effectively support and affirm her child. There are five micro-themes included within this experiential theme that appear to sum up her experience, including the cisnormative societal influences she has been confronted with. These micro-themes will be offered in the sequence they were identified and include *“Grown a lot”*, *“Tumultuous”*, *“Navigating the world”*, *Conscious conflict of others finding out about child’s genitalia*, and *“Good space”*.

“Grown a lot”. Carmen voiced her experience with her child’s disclosure and social transition as, what appeared to be, occurring somewhat simultaneously since her daughter was defying gender norms prior to verbalizing she was a girl at a young age. The two appeared to experience very different transitional processes—Carmen unlearned what she was taught about gender norms and her daughter already conceptualized gender as not being binary. Part of Carmen’s process included not only unlearning what she had been taught about gender but also learning accurate information about Transgender people and their experiences. This learning and unlearning seemed to be completed in transitional phases—pre-disclosure/social transition, beginning of social transition, social transition, post-social transition.

As part of her own process Carmen spoke to how she came to be knowledgeable about transgender people and experiences as she came to realize she was raising a transgender child. In her discussion she includes coming to understand what she knew about transgender people and their experiences was inaccurate, discussed more in the **Consequences of Media** section, and

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influenced by living in a cisnormative/cishet society. Her own transitional phases will become evident as each theme is elaborated on; they appeared to fit appropriately with this experiential theme because Carmen only experiences these phases as a parent of a Transgender child living in a conventional society with gender binary norms.

Having some prior knowledge of gender diversity from college coursework seemed to support Carmen in the beginning of her child verbalizing their internal gender. This knowledge obtained pre-disclosure/social transition assisted her with identifying her lack of knowledge about TGE people and experiences and shaped recognition of her own cisgender privilege. Through this, Carmen seemed to understand the impact of marginalization among TGE people, particularly after she began to support her child's social transition. Carmen indicated she and her husband had always tried to raise their children to think for themselves and not fit within "conventional, normed gender roles," nonetheless she also recognized the need to support and affirm her transgender child regardless. She described how she experienced her daughter verbalizing her gender that does not match being AMAB and how she handled not knowing what her child was saying to her as she disclosed at a young age. She stated,

I was already kind of raising my kids a little gender neutral... at about two-two or three, she was very verbal, um, understanding gender and saying things like, "I'm not a boy. I'm a girl"...we didn't really know what to do with that...at first we were very much like, "You can have your own interests. That's okay."

Even though Carmen illustrated how she was trying to meet her daughter where she was after disclosing her gender verbally, she still struggled to cognitively understand what her daughter was experiencing completely. She described allowing her daughter to express more feminine in varying public spaces and conveyed advocating for her daughter in doing so at her preschool.

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Carmen illustrated that her and her daughter's experience at the school were met with stereotypical gendered norms. These cisnormative beliefs and behaviors seemed to relate to her daughter becoming increasingly emotionally distressed as she became more and more insistent about being a girl. Carmen spoke to the experience she had with the school, how she interpreted the experience for her transgender child, and how the encounter influenced her to acknowledge she and her husband were raising a transgender child. She stated,

...she was an older teacher, and we let her know that...[TGE child] has, you know, a lot of interests that are on the more feminine side...you'll see him wearing dresses and things like that...And she was like, "Oh, that's okay. Well, maybe just start giving him some more, you know, like, trucks and things like that and try to limit, like, the Barbies and things like that at home." And she would separate the kids by-by gender. You know, "If you're a boy, go wash your hands now. If you're a girl, you sit down on the carpet"... that's when it [TGE child's emotional distress] started to come to the surface a lot...

Though Carmen communicated that she understood some underlying cisnormative factors impacting why her daughter was becoming more emotionally distressed she also seemed to understand young children developmentally and how teachers label and understand them from conventionally gender normed perspectives. Here she described empathizing with her child's preschool teacher although they held cisnormative views of gender that impacted her child negatively. Carmen stated,

...to the teachers, um, benefit, I mean, it's hard to know at that age what's really going and if kids are just experimenting or whatever. Um, but it was a very traditional viewpoint, I guess.

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The experience Carmen had with her daughter's school seemed to be the beginning of her encompassing the social transition, including using she/her pronouns when referring to her transgender child. Carmen reports she and her husband have been supporting and affirming their daughter since she was the age of three, which at the time of this study was more than three years ago. Here she described the frustration she was observing from her child and how she interprets the transition to understanding she is transgender. Carmen reported,

We didn't push it either way, but then it started causing some, um, frustration on her part...in school and things like that, very adamant about-about that. So we kind of just came to understand it as this is, she's probably Transgender...you don't necessarily want to put a label on it, but she very strongly and consistently has identified as, um, um, you know, in, like, the more female roles and pronouns and everything...

Carmen also illustrated having held no expectations of what her life would be like as a parent raising a child, specifically one who is AMAB. Carmen stated,

I always say, like, I never had a boy really...there was never any question...Never have I ever seen her deviate from that.

“Tumultuous”. Carmen voiced various emotions she has experienced while raising her transgender child in a cisnormative society, each of them appear to be distressing. She stated her experience as an affirming caregiver has been “Tumultuous” and expressed that she encounters worry often. She illustrated the impact of varying situations that have caused her to experience anxiety in addition to feeling angry when she is compelled to advocate for her daughter; both of which will be conveyed in other sections. Carmen also communicates feeling uncertain and worried about her Transgender child's future and being ambivalent about consenting to hormonal

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therapy that is affirming her daughter's gender. These emotions, she explained, emerge from her overall experience with cis-people who hold cisnormative views.

“Navigating the World”. The challenges Carmen spoke to seemed to have impacted the growth she has made during this transition. She expressed she and her immediate family have come out on the other side of the social transition “mostly unscathed”, deeming a very poignant impact on her experience raising a Transgender child and living in a conventional society. Such challenges have imposed significant barriers for Carmen and include disclosing her child's transgender identity to multiple people and trusting they will not discriminate against her or her transgender child. Adversely these barriers also include remaining “stealth” or secret about her child's transgender identity in certain spaces, so she and her child were not faced with discrimination or transprejudice and the loss of relationships. Sharing this part of her story seemed to be uncomfortable for Carmen as her explanation of this experience was incongruent with her emotion. She stated,

The transition on our end with navigating the world (laughs) was probably the hardest part in the beginning...I think a lot of the things that people run into when they first start to transition is, um, dealing with different relationships and telling people and things like that...[Transgender child] has a lot of friends at school and none of them know. And so it's always kind of a worry.

Other concerns related to her daughter's social transition and close relationships that Carmen has experienced consists of mending relationships with extended family who were unsupportive in the beginning but were starting to be more supportive at the time of the study. This will be discussed further in the experiential theme **Self-determined support** under the micro-theme *Loss of family support*; however, the impact of this experience she had with her family of origin,

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illustrated increased emotional distress. “I still have a lot of anxiety and almost, like, PTSD...” from the experience. Her relationship, or lack of connection with her family of origin, seemed to impact her mental health and mending the relationships with her family. Here she spoke to her relationship with two family members specifically and how they reacted to her setting boundaries with them. Carmen reported,

We see my [family member #1] weekly and he’s been very supportive, but I told him as long as you’re with her, I can’t have any contact with you either...he got really upset by that...my [family member #2] kind of realized that that was not going to help anything. Um, so I still see my [family member #1]. I don’t, I see my [family member #2] maybe once or twice a year.

The traumatizing experience Carmen spoke to related to her family of origin attempting to take custody of her children from her and her husband for affirming her transgender child seemed to resound within her immensely. The judgement and discrimination she experienced seemed to impact her persistence of remaining stealth in many of their close relationships. Carmen conveyed worrying about people finding out that her child is transgender, fearing the relationship would end. Carmen seemed to wrestle with feeling ambivalent about these relationships and expressed being conflicted about keeping relationships with friends who hold religious views that were not accepting of transgender people. She recognized and acknowledged questioning these relationships, but because her and her partner have few close relationships with others, it is difficult for her to decide whether to end the relationship or not. This is particularly true of protecting her transgender child and the relationship that she has with a religious family and their child. It seemed she is more concerned with the impact the loss of relationship would have on her daughter than remaining stealth in that relationship. She seems to be more concerned about the

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heartbreak her child would feel if the relationship ended and remaining stealth was a protective measure. She stated,

[Transgender child] has a best friend and her mom, they're very, very religious. And so, I haven't told them yet. And I don't know if I will or what, but it's one of those things, like, if I do tell them and they're not okay with it, then there's, [Transgender child] just lost her best friend, you know...we've had to do some questioning of ourselves, like, do we really want someone as a friend who isn't accepting of this community? But [Transgender child] and this person are such great friends that it's, it would be a really tragic loss as a friendship. So, we're still, we're still navigating some of that... we have two sets of pretty close friends where, um, they're both very religious. And I think one is accepting of at least, um, people who are gay and one isn't...we don't have a lot of friends...we don't want to lose them.

It appeared Carmen has always had the intention of protecting her child and allowing her space to be a "regular" child. Besides protecting her child from the transprejudice of family and potential discrimination or loss of relationships with friends, Carmen has also shielded her daughter from stressful encounters related to socially transitioning for some transgender children—making a case to a judge for an affirming name change and gender marker daughter. She reported,

In the beginning, or for the first probably year or so, I tried to make it less about what [Transgender child] was experiencing...once she transitioned and we figured that was our next plan, um, she didn't really have any experiences, like, I tried to kind of shield her from the tumultuous time that we were going through with family and working through the court system...she kind of was just living her best life as a three-year-old...it was just

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a natural transition for her, and once she started wearing what she wanted to wear and having people call her what she wanted us to call her, she was just a regular kid and she didn't really have any different experiences than...a typical gender child.

Conscious Conflict of Others Finding out About Child's Genitalia. Other unique concerns that have affected Carmen's experience as a caregiver of a Transgender child resonates from her fear of other's finding out her child is transgender. This particular theme seemed to be significant to her experience as she focused on this a few times. Carmen's struggle with being consciously conflicted about other people finding out that her transgender child's genitalia do not, in a cishet society, match the way her daughter expressed her gender. She communicated worry that her religious friends may not be accepting her transgender child or her and her immediate family for supporting and affirming their transgender child. Here she spoke to one specific incident. She illustrated,

I guess her swimsuit was a little small and some of her privates kind of were hanging out a little bit. I'm like, I kinda freaked out and internally I wondered if they saw it...I'm of the opinion that probably most people in the beginning would be pretty judgmental about it, and, um, and not accept it.

This conscious conflict for Carmen caused an emotional response. During our first interview Carmen became tearful while she spoke about potential loss of friends if they were to find out about her child being transgender. As delineated in this subtheme, *Conscious Conflict of others finding out about child's genitalia*, Carmen seemed to battle with feelings of sadness and worry about her daughter losing friends. She stated "[TGE child] has a lot of friends at school and none of them know. And so it's always a worry" although she recognized positive shifts in socio-political spaces for TGE people.

Good Space. Although there were many multidimensional aspects to her experience living in a cisnormative society, Carmen expressed the positive impact of current socio-political shifts that have made life easier for her Transgender daughter. She stated, “I feel like we’re kind of in a good space politically.”

Consequences of Media

The second experiential theme identified for Carmen relates to **Consequences of Media**. For this study, media is defined as being as any form of communication that disseminates information found online and in social media platforms, and in published materials and movies, etc. Media seemed to influence how Carmen understood gender prior to her child disclosing and it offered information on how to understand gender that does not fit within the binary. Carmen was impacted by media negatively and positively. She portrays the complexities of being online in varying spaces and the impact websites and social media platforms can have on how people understand TGE people and experiences. This experiential theme is supported by four micro-themes, *Conventional ideas of gender before child disclosure*, *Understanding of unconventional views of gender*, *Positive impact of media*, and *Negative impact of media*.

Conventional Ideas of Gender Before Child Disclosure. Although Carmen reports not forcing conventional gender binary expression or behavior on either of her children prior to her child’s disclosure, she acknowledges holding stereotypical conventional ideas of gender growing up among the same family members who believed her Transgender child needed to conform to their assigned sex at birth. Before having an understanding about the variety of genders that exist, Carmen relates much of her knowledge of Transgender people to what she learned from the media. She stated,

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My only real experience with trans people was the media...a lot of the movies from, like, the '80's and '90's where you picture a man dressed up like a woman...it was really seen as a derogatory and, you know, the word 'tranny' was used pretty frequently when I was growing up.

Understanding of Unconventional Views of Gender. Carmen seemed to recognize not knowing much about Transgender people prior to her child becoming adamant about her internal gender. Being uninformed and having preconceived ideas about gender appeared to compel Carmen to accurately understand non-binary genders through various methods. Here she communicated how she interpreted the influence media has on how people understand gender and the impact of media on how she has come to unlearn gender as being binary and understand gender differently. Carmen stated,

Um, all I could really know, and I think that's what a lot [of] people know, is what the media portrays them as. So that's my viewpoint, and, uh, like I said before, after doing a lot of research and discovering what it actually is and meeting so many different people that are just like everyone else, you know, um, it's changed the way I view it [gender] a lot.

Positive Impact of Media. Just as media influenced the stereotypical views of transgender people for Carmen, media sources also seemed to assist in her search for supports and education to be accurately informed. Such supports and educational channels for her have been online and include social media outlets that have connected her with other parents of TGE children. She described the positive impact of such platforms and stated,

We just [did] a lot of research on our end to making sure we were doing the right thing, I guess, to support her...I'm part of a large group on [social media platform]...and they're

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from all over the world, and there's thousands of people in the group...you see a lot of success stories where their children are growing up and getting married and, um, graduating from college and having a great career and things like that.

Negative Impact of Media. While Carmen viewed being in online spaces as being a positive experience when parent's shared successful stories—i.e., getting job, medical transition, etc., she also stated such spaces can be difficult when they share stories related to their children's death by suicide or hospitalization. Carmen reported,

And a few where they, you know, it's probably on a weekly basis where the child has been admitted to a hospital for mental health issues or self-harm. I guess it's nice to be aware of the potentials out there, Um, but it doesn't make it any easier.

Also, Carmen had experienced viewing misinformation from hate groups or uninformed people within these spaces and conveyed specific instances online platforms had a negative impact on her experience. These experiences appeared to inspire her to speak up when she felt safe. As for finding hate sources or misinformation online, Carmen communicated how she interpreted the impact of cisnormative, transprejudice, hate speech on how new cis-parents understood their own TGE children. She illustrated the discrimination she views in online platforms and how she has come to know primary caregivers may feel conflicting feelings around their own TGE children when they disclose or begin to socially transition. She stated,

When parents go out and trying to find resources, they may find that statement by the American Pediatric Association and then they find the other one...they're the ones who put out these anti-trans articles talking about how dangerous it is to transition your child, and they're shared all over [Social Media Platform]...identified as a hate group...that's saying the exact opposite...the constant messages we get from the media or reading

through comments on any article ever that talks about transgender people. Um, just the extreme negativity, and it's child abuse, and everything like that.

Self-Determined Education

Although Carmen recognized and acknowledged there was need to support and affirm her transgender child, she struggled to find supports and resources. Growing up in a conventional society and lacking knowledge and understanding of non-binary genders required Carmen to actively pursue education on transgender people and experiences. The micro-themes that comprise the experiential theme, **Self-determined education** include *Figuring it out*, *Meeting TGE people*, *Educating TGE child*, and *Education to advocacy*.

Figuring it out. Because Carmen desired supporting and affirming her child effectively, she actively pursued education on TGE people and experiences. She was determined to unlearn cisnet/cisnormative beliefs and learn affirming terminology and language. She spoke to how she came to identifying resources to educate her and validate her experience so she could validate her daughter's experience. She reported,

We had to pretty much figure it out, or at least figure out where to get the resources all on our own...I think with some education on my part and some research and understanding that this can actually be a thing.

Carmen seemed to question her child being transgender when she first verbalized her internal gender. This seemed to be due in part because of the preconceived ideas she had learned. The need to educate herself seemed to resonate from being judged and discriminated against. Others told what she was doing as an affirming parent was inaccurate. Her family origin claimed she was abusing her children and expressed dissatisfaction of her supporting her child. She stated,

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Like, we had so much pushback from family that, like, your child could not possibly know this. And even if they could know this, it's your job to kind of steer them in a different direction.

Meeting TGE People. Although Carmen described her daughter not deviating from her internal gender as being female, she spoke to the surrealness she felt about having a transgender child and the importance of visibility on her being educated and informed on TGE people and experiences to parent her effectively. She conveyed her own intrapersonal process related to getting support from other TGE people. Carmen stated,

I can see little kids who are just like [Transgender child]. And even in our playgroup, too. And I'm like, okay, this isn't just in my head, it's not just in [Transgender child's] head. This is a real thing. That was helpful in the beginning...I've grown a lot... And then meeting actual, you know, gender non-conforming and transgender people was eye-opening and just seeing the different paths that they have taken...meeting the entire spectrum that I never knew existed and realizing that that's okay and that's that person's experience.

Educating TGE Child. Confronted with the reality that her child may experience transprejudice by her friends, or society, Carmen illustrated understanding the necessity of having exclusive conversations with her daughter. Carmen spoke to wanting her child to have a positive self-concept and recognizing how others can impact that. The education Carmen provided to her daughter about how others may respond to her if she discloses that she is transgender included telling her there were potentially people that may not be accepting of her for her internal gender. One such experience is illustrated here. Carmen stated,

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I've been pretty open with her... "if you really want to tell somebody, you can." But I also let her know, here's what they might say. They might say, "Oh, okay," and go on their way... they might not understand. They might be mean. Um, so I want her to be aware of that.... I want her to be happy with herself, but I also want to prepare her.

Other unique conversations Carmen has had with her daughter have been related to future transitioning options that will affirm her child when she is older. Such conversations have been focused on how her daughter feels about her own physical development and medical transitioning. Some of these transitional decisions Carmen and her husband will make while their daughter is still young. During the interview, it seemed Carmen was processing how to go about consenting to puberty blockers for her child when she reaches the appropriate developmental level to begin them. While discussing these concerns it appeared the information her daughter has given her thus far resonates in her willingness to consent to this form of medical treatment, nonetheless, she has other concerns to navigate around that including her own uncomfortableness related to managed care. Carmen communicated giving her daughter agency around her own transitional process. She conveyed that her daughter has a choice in medically transitioning and described hope for her daughter to live a happy and healthy life and be well "mentally and physically." Carmen stated,

We've talked a little bit about transitioning physically recently... I will probably put her on puberty blockers, which I guess is kind of a decision I'm making for her, but she has let me know, like, "I don't want to look like Daddy. And I don't want, you know, things to get bigger and hair to be in-in places, and my voice to get lower"... she's understanding that as she grows older, she has options. She doesn't have to do all the

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medication and surgery if she doesn't want to, but I let her know what that means for her if she doesn't or if she does.

Education to Advocacy. With the information Carmen collected and received she began to advocate for her transgender child and the TGE community—attempting to break down gender stereotypes and teaching affirming language and terminology. Here she normalized being TGE, communicated this advocacy effort, and described why she believes it is important to engage in doing so. She stated,

I went out and I found articles here and there...then I could send them to people... the advocacy and things like that for transgender children, showing people that it's normal, it happens, it's okay, there's nothing wrong with it...you just hear so many horrible stories and, um, she's already kind of displaying some depression and anxiety herself. So, it has caused me to be a lot more vocal in standing up for her.

“Doing the Right Thing”

It seemed Carmen actively pursued support like she did education. Support appeared to be the essence of her experience related to reinforcing recognition of affirming her transgender child is the right thing to do. She has engaged with the TGE community to support her daughter and in doing so it appeared her experience has been validated further and she feels connected with likeminded people. Unfortunately, Carmen felt she needed to search for supports because her family of origin was not supportive of her endeavors in the beginning and they disconnected from her immediate family. There are five micro-themes that fit with this experiential theme and they are *Affirming Transgender child is affirmed by Transgender adults*, *Not alone*, *self-initiated support to others*, *“Pushback”*, and *Chosen family*.

Affirming Transgender Child is Affirmed by Transgender Adults. Engaging in spaces with transgender adults has been validating for Carmen. Being that she has supported and affirmed her daughter from the beginning of her social transition, Carmen has been able to engage in dialogue with transgender adults regarding their process growing up. These adults have explained to Carmen how they would have appreciated their parents treating them as she has her transgender daughter. It seemed she is proud of the work she is doing and feels validated by TGE adults. She illustrated what this experience is like for her and stated,

Knowing that talking to actual transgender people and knowing that we're doing the right thing, um, it's, it is affirming...I hear from [Trans adult] and people like that...if their parents had kind of maybe listened a little bit more or society allowed it a little bit more, um, they would have been right there, too, at that same age, you know, three to five, transitioning as well. Um, and the struggles that they've had to go through throughout their life, I'm hoping to avoid some of those for [Transgender child]...just reinforces that we're doing the right thing.

Not Alone. Carmen actively sought out local and global supports dedicated to parents of TGE children for herself. She illustrated finding a local support resource helped her not feel isolated as a parent raising a transgender child in a conventional society. She stated,

...once we found the [undisclosed resource center] and actually met the people and saw other kids, we were like, wow, this is actually, we're not alone.

Self-Initiated Support to Others. Because she has found varying supports and resources, Carmen and her family now actively engage in supporting, affirming, and educating parents who are new to experiencing their child's disclosure and transition. Carmen's desire to

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support these parents seemed to be intrinsic and come from her own experience of needing to be informed and supported by people in the TGE community. Carmen reported,

Because a lot of us lose our family during that time, you know, you have to have somebody there and being able to provide that for other people when we had people who provided that for us, um, it's fulfilling as a person... We always want to help people and we always feel a lot of empathy for other people and, so it is such a hard transition that it feels, it feels good for us to be able to provide that to other people.

“Pushback”. Due to her some of her family of origin holding cisnormative, transprejudice views, Carmen lost relationships with them. This loss came as a result of her being supportive of and affirming toward her transgender child. Here she communicated what it has been like as an affirming parent to her daughter and encountering transprejudice from family members. She conveys why she lost their support and the discrimination she experienced as an affirming parent to her daughter. She stated,

We had so much pushback from family that, like, your child could not possibly know this...when we first transitioned her, I was getting emails and calls from people in my family who were just saying, like, “You’re a horrible parent. I can’t believe you’re doing this.” My [family member] even was going to draft a letter to get temporary custody of my kids... they’re [extended family of origin] coming around now, but in the beginning the whole family was just like, “We’re not gonna do that. That’s ridiculous. Why would we?”

Chosen Family. Having her family of origin reject her when she disclosed her transgender child’s gender identity caused Carmen to search for new supports. Carmen began to

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search the TGE community for people to help her learn how to support and affirm her transgender child effectively. She expressed finding trans and non-binary Folx was difficult for her as a cis-person at first, but once she did, she established relationships with them fairly quickly. Hearing their stories seemed validating and favorable to her own growth and knowledge in supporting her own transgender child effectively. Additionally, she found having trans and non-binary Folx as supports ensured her daughter had representation of people like her and provided her immediate family connections. Carmen also spoke to how her family of origin expressed their desire for her disconnect from them and illustrated advocating for herself and her family. She stated,

The first year or two our family was, like, the [undisclosed resource center] and people who were, you know, supportive...my family was very much, like...“You can’t choose your family. Your family is your family. You can’t cut us out”...And I was like, “Well, actually I can”...this community that I developed through [undisclosed resource center]...A lot of them have no contact with certain family members.

“Therapeutic” Support

The PLPSG seemed to be a buffer for Carmen and her family. The group provided them with an environment where they can all be their authentic selves. Carmen indicated that her husband, their transgender daughter, and their cisgender daughter have all found benefits of the group. Carmen finds the PLPSG to be a safe space that provides support for her family and seemed to have significant elements for her. She conveyed the group is therapeutic. She stated, “It’s a form of therapy in its own.” The two micro-themes that envelop this experiential theme are *Necessity in the beginning* and *Safe space for entire family*.

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Necessity in the Beginning. Carmen illustrated the PLPSG was particularly important in the beginning of her Transgender child's process. She communicated that she desired finding a space that would support both her and her daughter's needs. She spoke to finding the PLPSG and how being in the space of the group helped her to share things with people who were experiencing similar circumstances. Carmen spoke to the PLPSG as also giving her daughter space to be with other children like her. At the PLPSG, it seemed Carmen can be freed from the burden of worry about someone finding out her child's designated sex at birth does not fit with her internal gender and she herself can be her true authentic self. She stated,

In the beginning it [PLPSG] was, it was just kind of finding similar people in similar situations with kids who are similar and trying to figure out how they deal with everything...where you can just have people that know what's going on...they're totally accepting...I think it's more for the parents to kind of get resources and talk about school and just kind of have that place where...[Gender's] not a thing we have to worry about...I think she [TGE child] was also able to let her guard down a little bit.

Safe Space for Entire Family. It appeared finding a supports for her transgender child and family was significant for Carmen. The PLPSG is one safe space Carmen indicated as being an accepting space that she found to be especially important for her and her family. Carmen illustrates the significance of the group and stated,

The playgroup is...where you can just have people that know what's going on and they're, like, they're totally accepting of it... she [TGE child] was also able to let her guard down a little bit...they [children of parent] go and have fun and play...I think it's more for the parents to kind of get resources and talk about school and just kind of have

that place...like I said, we're stealth with everyone except for people in our family...
[within the PLPSG] it's [gender] not a thing we have to worry about.

Ali

Ali's experience differed from the other participating parents in that she is the stepparent of a 10-year old transgender child, all other parents identify as biological. The experiential themes describing Ali's experience are comprised of **“Awkward”**, **“Almost Fortunate”**, **Experience as a Stepparent**, and **Self-determined Resources and Supports**.

“Awkward”

Ali explains various challenges she experiences as a stepparent to a transgender child living in a cisnormative society. This experiential theme of **“Awkward”** embraces how she feels about this experience and seems to be related to six micro-themes, *“Constantly coming out” and other unique challenges, Emotional distress, Self-initiated continued education, Education to others, Debating, and Desire for professionals to be aware and knowledgeable.*

“Constantly Coming Out” and Other Unique Challenges. The unique challenges Ali faces being a stepparent were combined with the unique concerns and challenges of raising a transgender child in a cisnormative society. These challenges seemed to impact Ali and her transgender child's experience and such concerns included supporting and affirming her transgender stepchild. These concerns and challenges encompass feeling ambivalent about disclosure—disclosing her stepdaughters gender identity to people, not feeling comfortable disclosing, and fear of getting political when she does disclose. Ali illustrated being affected by things related to transphobia and transprejudice and raising a transgender child seemed to make

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her more political than prior to realizing her stepdaughter was transgender. In fact, she described her life as a caregiver to a transgender child is political. Ali reported,

I feel like I'm constantly coming out for [TGE child] to different people...[at work] I don't feel comfortable mentioning it [child being Trans] and it's awkward because now sometimes they'll see me and be like, 'How are your two boys doing?'... And I'll be like, how do I talk about this when they told me they don't want to get political with anyone?

Other unique challenges and concerns Ali expressed experiencing raising a transgender child included working with her "spouse" to make difficult decisions. She illustrated consciously deciding to end relationships with family for not supporting and affirming their transgender daughter. It seemed making these difficult choices came as a result of experiencing religious discrimination from her in-laws, which she views as a barrier to their knowing her stepdaughter and cisgender child. Ali stated,

The biggest change is dealing with my in-laws...What decisions we were making as parents was going to, in the long run, be the best decision for our family. Not just for our first kid, but our second kid, too... the religious aspect of their grand-parenting gets in the way of them getting to actually know their actual kids and grandkids...

Although eliminating her in-laws from their life was a difficult choice for her and her partner, the two found it was the best choice for their family. As she spoke to this experience, she appeared frustrated and irritated by their decision to choose their religion over family. This had been a great challenge for her and her family, at times making her feel awkward around her in-laws. She believes her in-laws were using their religion, and the priests blessing, as an excuse not to support her stepdaughter. Ali also seemed to recognize they might not be able to navigate their

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own thoughts and feelings about this, as religion is a part of their identity. She saw parallels between her in-laws not attending her and her partner's wedding, because it was his second, and not supporting her stepdaughter. Nonetheless, the pain she feels toward them not supporting her stepdaughter impacts her more than them not supporting her and her partner's, their son, wedding. She expressed experiencing ambivalent feelings related to losing connection with her in-laws. Such feelings include disappointment in their choice, but relief in dismissing the relationship with her in-laws altogether since they are not willing to have open dialogue about things. Ali stated,

I feel almost fortunate that's [issues with in-laws] the only hard thing we've really had to do up to this point...In a way, cutting them [in-laws] was kind of helpful to me personally, because it was hard to be near people who clearly, like, we're supposed to have this loving relationship with, but so much goes unsaid...It's sort of a relief for us to be like, "well, if you can't affirm our child, your grandchild, we can't have any contact, none of us can."

Ali reported experiencing less pertinent impactful barriers but stated the most difficult circumstance her family had experienced throughout the transition at the time of this study was the issues with her in-laws. The less pertinent challenges she spoke to related to finding resources and educational material appropriate for her young cisgender child. Ali seemed to work effortlessly to find books and other information that made sense to her young cis-child to ensure he grasped TGE experiences and understood more about TGE people accurately. The educational resources she located were lacking for young children. She stated, "I would try to find books to read to [cisgender son], the younger kid, and it's hard." After discussing reading the literature for young people she later stated, "This doesn't make sense to almost even a

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grownup,” which she conveyed can have a substantial effect on the way young people learn and understand TGE people and experiences.

Emotional Distress. Ali voiced feeling emotionally distressed and protective of raising her stepdaughter in a cishet society. Raising a transgender child in a conventional society that views gender as binary seemed to make things difficult for her, and consequently, resulting in feelings of being fearful, frustrated, helpless, anxious, and angry- culminating into intense grief. These emotional distresses, subsumed with the behaviors of others, appear to expand Ali’s protectiveness as a caregiver. She described this defensiveness metaphorically as “claws out” and conveyed why she feels the need to protect her stepdaughter. Ali also demonstrated feeling conflicted by her own behavior and how disagreeing in a hostile manner can potentially impact the other person and how they view her advocacy work. She stated,

It was hard for me because I would just get up in arms. And that’s not a good way to bring people to your side.

The overall distress Ali reported seemed to develop into ruminating thoughts about her stepdaughter being raised in a family that would be unsupportive. She paralleled her stepdaughter being raised in an invalidating home with being raised by her in-laws. Ali stated,

Sometimes I’m scared when I think about, you know, just imagining [name 12:47] born into some other family or raised by, for example, my in-laws, how awful that would have been...it’s just heartbreaking to think about.

In addition to the varying situations that heighten her emotional distress and negative thoughts, Ali asserted that current concerns with living in the COVID-19 pandemic has been particularly difficult for her as a caregiver of a transgender daughter. She conveyed concern related to

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navigating the pandemic and expressed this concern as having magnified her feelings of helplessness as a caregiver, which invariably seemed to be making her feel she needs to protect her children from seeing her emotionally distressed. Nonetheless, Ali also seemed to recognize the normalcy of her children seeing her emotions even though she is feeling the need to remain determined and balanced as a primary caregiver. Ali stated,

There's so much about parenting in this situation and during the pandemic that makes me feel helpless but I'm trying to keep it mostly inside because feeling negative feelings in this household right now would potentially make me too depressed or anxious to be a good caregiver. Not that kids shouldn't see you feeling your feelings but I'm trying to be strong here and project stability.

Self-Initiated Continued Education. Ali spoke to feeling compelled to learn more about TGE people, concerns, and experiences to better support and affirm her stepdaughter during her social transition. Although she knew transgender individuals prior to her stepdaughter coming out to her, Ali seemed to feel she had much to learn about supporting her partner in raising a transgender child. It appears she was attentive to enhancing her knowledge after her stepchild disclosed. In fact, Ali finds it problematic to be uneducated or uninformed. She stated,

I felt like I knew a lot before, but I definitely know more now...Just sort of out of necessity. How can you be supportive or an ally if you don't know what's going on?

Education to Others. As indicated previously, finding appropriate educational material for her young cisgender son about TGE people, concerns, and experiences was difficult, but also of great importance. When educating him, Ali attempted to identify various ways, and used several examples, to teach him about transgender and non-binary people. It seemed she made

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many attempts to help him understand his sister better, but recognized this concept is hard to teach and difficult for her cis-child to learn. She illustrated applying symbols to this learning process for her child and reported,

I've definitely, like, been reading more and making more of an effort to, uh, teach [cisgender son] younger brother about this sort of stuff from an early age...I'm having a hard time trying to figure out how to teach him [cisgender son] pronouns in a really complex...It's funny because when we tried to explain this to him about his older sister, um, I sort of had to go with metaphors that I thought he might understand about Pokémon and Transformers and, like, superheroes. And it helped him, I don't know if it 100% got him, uh, on the right path. I mean, I guess it's helped him begin to get it.

Debating. Ali spoke to one experience where she was protecting her transgender stepchild and found a need to advocate and create awareness online even though it is not typical for her to do so. She felt inspired to stand against discrimination in this setting and was empowered to do so. She stated,

I don't share political stuff or news articles in general on social media, but I made, I make a few exceptions...Because I thought, well, this is not gonna get out to enough people. So and I got into a vicious debate with certain people about it [specific incident involving a transphobic social media post].

Desire for Professionals to be Aware and Knowledgeable. Through her process Ali has come to be impacted by the conventional society she is raising her transgender stepdaughter in. For example, Ali seemed to feel annoyed when reaching out to various practitioners to make appointments for her stepdaughter and family. She conveyed feeling uncertain about how people

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were going to respond to her when she tells them her stepdaughter is transgender. She expressed because of the limited or lack of knowledge so many have about non-binary gender she feels forced to explain or educate them constantly. These experiences seemed to have increased Ali's desire for various professionals to be aware and knowledgeable of TGE people, concerns, and experiences to effectively help them, and understands this to be a necessity with regards to those who work with TGE children and families since there are limited resources. She stated,

It would just be nice to have more, I guess, more options is good. More people with experience is good... Because it's definitely frustrating when trying to be, like, um, just trying to live your life and you don't know if anyone's gonna get it when you're making phone calls to get, like, a dentist appointment or something. I just wish more professionals who deal with children were more aware, because I don't want every phone call I make to be something where I have to, like, brace myself. Like, what am I gonna have to do in this conversation? Like, how far am I gonna have to go to explain myself and my family?

Because of the negative occurrences she has encountered when engaging in outside public spaces for her stepdaughter and friends who were transgender or non-binary, Ali is an advocate for norming TGE people and their experiences. Her position on this matter includes,

Having more professionals give trainings or just try to get the word out that these people exist and are people...who just want to be treated as such.

“Almost Fortunate”

Except for losing a connection with her in-laws, Ali interpreted her stepchild's social transition as being uncomplicated. The varying transitional phases her stepdaughter has

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experienced seems to have created a space for Ali to experience her own transitional phases. She spoke to being fortunate because of the smooth transition even though these phases appear to have been difficult for her navigate. Her transition appeared to encompass how she feels about the social transition and the phases she has experienced with her stepdaughter. As such **“Almost Fortunate”** seemed to be a significant concept to how she experiences being a stepparent to Transgender child. This experiential theme appeared to have the following compatible micro-themes, *Opening doors to come out of*, *“Honored”*, *“Boom, Boom, Boom, Boom”*, *Normalizing social transition*, and *“Nascent Stage”*.

Opening Doors to Come Out Of. During the *Pre-disclosure* phase, Ali had friends in, and was an advocate for, the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, etc. (LGBTQ+) community. She held positive views of LGBTQ+ persons and had some knowledge about transgender and non-binary people. The preconceived notions she held about his community seemed to have developed from engaging with and being exposed to the LGBTQ+ community. Having this connection prior to her stepdaughter disclosing potentially advanced thoughts she held of her transgender stepchild being gay or bisexual prior to her coming out as transgender, and although she was aware of not making assumptions, she questioned if her stepdaughter’s transgender identity would “stick” because of her age. Here she tells a story about how she finds out about her stepdaughter’s identity prior to her disclosing it via text. This seemed to be a significant moment for Ali as she came to understand her stepdaughter better. It should be noted, Ali is using she/her pronouns even as she spoke of the past-pre-disclosure. She stated,

I think that in my head I would say like, oh, well, maybe this kid’s gonna come out as non-binary someday, or bi, or just, um, gay or something...It’s funny because we monitor our children’s online presences and, like, my stepchild has an account on [social media

platform] and we monitor what she posts and stuff. And I saw that she had left a comment, like, tra-, I don't, and she had given herself a user flare of male to female and-and bi. And I thought, well, that's interesting. I wonder if that's gonna stick.

“Honored”. It seemed as though Ali experienced a *disclosure* phase for a while after her stepdaughter came out to her. In the beginning of this phase she expressed experiencing ambivalent feelings even though she had experience with other LGBTQ+ people and it appeared her own stepdaughter coming out to her was unexpected. While speaking of her own process when her stepdaughter disclosure, Ali stated she had provided her stepdaughter with some education about TGE people and transitioning prior to her coming out. She conveyed having some knowledge and experience with transgender people. Ali interpreted sharing what information she knew with her stepdaughter might have opened a safe space for her to disclose being “trans” to Ali rather than other biological family members. She stated,

I had been talking to her about stuff about Transgender people...And I think that helped, and I don't know if she would, as part of her story think this, but I like to think it helped open the door a little bit, because in that same week is when she texted me saying, “I'm trans, by the way. My name is [name]”.

Although Ali felt privileged that her stepdaughter would disclose to her she also experienced turmoil related to the disclosure. She stated that her and her partner were concerned about the child's well-being because at the time her stepdaughter came out, she was staying at her biological mother's home. Her knowledge and experience with other transgender individuals, contributed to Ali and her partner being mindful of not “outing”, or disclosing to someone else without the child's knowledge or permission, their child to her biological mother. In being aware of the consequences of this, the two did not contact the biological mother to express concern

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about the child, rather they sat with their anxiety until their child came to stay with them again.

This situation is related in a temporal reference. Ali stated,

The moment [TGE child] came out to me via text followed by a week of her not replying to my texts. Those days sucked for me and my spouse. We didn't want to call her or her mom and potentially out her to her mom so we waited and waited for her to reply to my texts. We just wanted to be there for her, but we had no good way of knowing how she was feeling or what she was doing. Was she sad? Was she doing just fine? Did she need support? Had she come out to anyone else? Everything was just unanswered questions.

“Boom, Boom, Boom, Boom”. When Ali's stepdaughter left her biological mother's home to stay with her and her partner, Ali recounted her stepdaughter being diligent about socially transitioning. In Ali's own *Social transition* phase, she realized that she was unprepared for her 10-year old stepdaughter to begin socially transition, although she was willing to support and affirm. She conveyed feeling ambivalent about the instantaneous social transition because her stepdaughter was young and expressed feeling like the experience was a “whirlwind” for her and her partner. On one hand, Ali saw it as beneficial to making her transition easier and on the other hand, the age of the child played a role in her questioning her being transgender. As she spoke about her experience it is almost as though she was caught off-guard and not sure how to support a social transition even with the knowledge and experiences she had with transgender adults. Ali exclaimed this particular instance as such,

This is not something we were expecting to hear about with our ten-year-old...But, uh, it still, like, happened so suddenly, it felt. It was, like, just boom, out, want to be out entirely, completely. Want to socially transition. Want to get on, like, a doctor's list. Just,

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boom, boom, boom, boom. And it was like, whoa, whoa, whoa. You're sure? You're, like, ten?...

Related to this specific instance her how she experienced her stepdaughter's desire to socially transition, Ali spoke to her own process with it and how she was transitioning. She stated,

It took me, like, maybe a week to stop using the wrong pronouns or name. And then I had to teach [cisgender son]. Um, and of course we [her and her partner] had all of these closed-doors conversations as parents, with each other. But after this, like, whirlwind of talking it out, it was, like, quickly, like, to this acceptance period of just, like, this is life.

Normalizing Social Transition. Normalizing her experience as a family with a transgender child in it seemed to be significant for Ali. Here she communicated the views she has of her life raising a transgender child and it being similar to people raising cisgender children. She expressed,

We are still going to annoy each other and love each other and eat together and do things...slightly differently.

“Nascent Stage”. Ali seemed to be in the “acceptance period” or *Post Transition* phase at the time of the study. She conveyed that she sees this phase as being difficult for her and her family and illustrated that they are all in the “nascent stage” of transitioning. As part of getting to this point in her own transition, through her own process of budding and growing, it seemed negative experiences Ali has encountered have impacted her to further developing a sense of urgency to shield her family. She conveyed the seriousness of this and illustrated the necessity of talking about and advocating for her stepdaughter as being more arduous for her to do than it was before she knew about her stepchild being transgender. Ali stated,

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I definitely feel more protective now and slightly more passionate than before. And I feel it's almost harder to talk about now...I mean, it was hard enough before...I just feel like crying more.

Experience as a Stepparent

Ali spoke to her experience as a stepparent as having both perks and disadvantages. She stated "...as a stepparent, you are constantly, you know, walking this very thin line." The two micro-themes that encapsulate the experiential theme **Experience as a stepparent** include *Positives of being a stepmom* and *Challenges of being stepmom*.

Positives of Being a Stepmom. As a stepparent, Ali discussed experiencing special benefits, and when compared to the other participating parents, uncommon challenges. Her experience is also unique in that she, not the biological parents, was the person her stepdaughter first came out to as "Trans." Here she illustrated how she interpreted her role and the value of this role for her. Ali conveyed,

I think I occupy this sort of parental unit/grownup friend space, and that means I get to [have] that honor of being the one that she talked to first about it...I can do research, say my piece, express love and fear, and make recommendations to one parent only. It's just better that way since the coparenting relationship is tenuous...I don't want to start any fights and only want to help...It's not that I don't feel valued, but I don't know how to contribute as much as I'd like when I'm not the one in charge of schedules, legal aspects, etc.

Challenges of Being a Stepmom. As mentioned, Ali's experience as a stepparent has its own set of unique challenges not related to having a transgender child. She communicated that

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she does not feel as though she has a voice on some matters, which includes not being able to make decisions that benefit her stepchild and finding it difficult to discuss her experience as a stepparent of transgender child. She also expressed concern about how her stepchild will interpret her discussing her own subjective experience related to raising her and her being transgender. She illustrated feeling emotional distress about not having the ability to support her transgender stepchild in ways that her biological parents do and expressed the conflict she feels because of this. Ali stated,

In many ways I am afraid to care as much as I am capable of feeling or even talk about it because I don't want to feel helpless about something important to me. This is where I start tearing up about stepparenthood in general and playing a role as a caregiver to a TGE child.

Latching Onto Supports

Holding safe spaces for both her children seemed pertinent to Ali and being that she is a caregiver to both a cisgender child and a transgender child, she appeared to understand the importance of education and being informed. She spoke to the significance of acknowledging and learning about TGE people and it might be suggested that she worked to increase her own knowledge. This experiential theme included four micro-themes that illustrated how she has come to experience pursuing resources and the impact they have made on her experience as a stepparent. These micro-themes are *Importance of resources and supports*, *Desire to Support other parents and TGE children in the future*, *Impact of in-person support groups*, and *Online supports*.

Importance of Resources and Supports. Through her process, Ali stated she had trouble finding support systems and expressed, "It's like you have to know the right people [to

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find support systems].” Nonetheless, like searching for educational material, Ali was determined to find resources and supports for her stepdaughter and family. She deemed having these in place as being important, especially since her stepdaughter was ready to socially transition right away. Ali conveyed having these in place as being pertinent for her to ensure a supportive and affirming transition, particularly in post-social transition phase of her stepdaughter. She stated,

It just is happening all so quickly right now that I don’t know what to latch onto for support...I cannot say enough about how important that has been for us at this stage right now.

Desire to Support Other Parents of TGE Children in the Future. It appeared Ali’s experience has influenced her own desire to support other parents of TGE children. Because of her own experience struggling to find supports and resources in addition to losing connection with family Ali seemed compelled to help them. She recognized the significance of having supports available in the beginning of the transition and desires to be someone’s support in the future when she feels more prepared. She exclaims,

...maybe someday we can do that for other people, um, just because it feels so crucial and time-sensitive.

Impact of In-Person Support Groups. When asked about local supports and resources, Ali spoke about finding new connections and supportive people who took her and her family in during the holidays. She also touched on her own experience attending the PLPSG. While she found the group to be supportive and affirming, the time of the group did not work with her family’s schedule, so they had only attended a few times. However, she spoke to her and her partner’s experience at the evening parent support group and expressed the significance of

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attending that particular group. She specifically conveys one instance that occurred during that group that undoubtedly impacted her and her partner and created a space for them to begin making a difficult decision. Ali stated,

We went to the [parent] support group...the first time [Partner] went to the support group...he asked them like, "What do you do about your religious family members?" And it was very sobering when they talked about how at some point you just cut them off. And he didn't want to hear that. I didn't want to hear that. But I think hearing that from people who have been through it was a little helpful to know, like, what decisions we were making as parents was going to, in the long run, be the best decision for our family.

Online Supports. Other supportive spaces Ali indicated as being important were online spaces and social media platforms. She explained believing these spaces are more appropriate for her family to obtain supports and resources from and expressed specific platforms have helped her think more optimistically about her family and their future raising a happy and healthy transgender child. Ali conveyed,

We're a very online family, so I know how much we appreciate the online Facebook group...There's a social media account I started following [name of group] because I am trying to be more conscious of the joy that can be found in people realizing things about themselves and living lives that let them express that. It's not all doom and gloom, particularly for our family.

Jim

Jim is the father of a child who he and his partner identify as “gender creative.” During both interviews, Jim illustrated use of correct pronouns toward his gender child to validate her and her experience, an effort that seemed to make his child feel happy. During the first interview his gender creative child’s pronouns changed daily and during the second interview Jim stated his child was using “she/her” pronouns more frequently. So, while Jim uses he/him/they/them pronouns when he discusses his gender creative child in the excerpts, she/her will be the pronouns used when referring to Jim’s gender creative child by the author since those were the most currently used pronouns by the child and parents. Jim reports validating his child and her gender makes not only his child happy, but him happy as well and it seemed Jim recognized the impact of affirming his gender creative child being raised in a cisnormative society. He stated, “And obviously because it’s society...that’s why I’m trying to protect him.”

There are four experiential themes identified for Jim and they include **“It’s Society”, “Coming to Terms and “Owning Up”, Parent Impacted by Child’s Experience, and “Outlet”**. These four themes extend on various factors that have led Jim to be supportive and affirming of his gender creative child. They illustrate the growth he has made throughout the process and exclaim how Jim has come to unlearn normalizing gender as a binary system.

“It’s Society”

The experiential theme, **“It’s Society”**, summarizes how Jim perceived the impact of society on his experience raising a gender creative child. Society appeared to include spaces where Jim learned stereotypical views of gender and coming to understand the gender spectrum. This theme also illustrates the uniqueness of his situation as a parent to a gender creative child

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and described how he interpreted the nuances of raising both a cisgender child who was AMAB and a gender creative child who was AMAB. This experiential theme includes 6 sub themes that are *Upbringing*, *Normalizing stereotypical gendered behaviors*, *Unique concerns having a Gender Creative child*, *Perceived judgment*, *Unique conversations with Gender Creative child*, and *Difference in relationship with cisgender child*.

Upbringing. Jim indicated his upbringing influenced the way he saw and understood gender. He spoke about growing up in a home with parents who held conventional ideas of gender binaries and discussed how both his family and society influenced his thoughts of gender prior to realizing he had a gender creative child. This theme is time-oriented— Jim illustrated the impact of learning these conventional ways of understanding gender and current experiences with his family implying that he is not raising his gender creative child correctly. It seems many within his family are discriminating against him and seeing his supporting and affirming as being inaccurate. He stated,

I think the mothers are a lot more open-minded [to gender non-binary] than the fathers. I think my dad still has a hard time thinking about it and thinking that way...Same thing with my brother-in-law is totally, you need to be this, this, and this...

Jim spoke to the work he continued to engage in to learn and defy the way he understands binary gender. While speaking of how he understands gender on a spectrum now, it seemed he was reminded of how his family of origin responded to his supporting and affirming his gender creative child. He parallels what he was observing from them currently to when he was a child growing up. He conveyed not having the same support he is showing his gender creative child during his upbringing and expressed being open-minded and willing to learn from his child to support and affirm effectively. Jim stated,

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We got subjected to a whole lot of things when we were kids. I don't think I want to do that. I want him to be a kid. I want him to do what he would like...they said, "You need to do this, this, and this", instead of showing them, hey, well, what can I learn from you instead of you learning from me?...I want my kids to know that I don't know everything... I'm still learning every day.

Normalizing Stereotypical Gendered Behaviors. It seemed Jim did not want to label or make any assumptions about his own gender creative child behavior or expression, rather he normalized stereotypical gendered behaviors across genders. This normalization might be Jim's way of understanding the gender spectrum as a privileged cis-male raised in a cisnormative society or it might be how he educated his child to understand the gender spectrum. Normalizing stereotypical gendered behaviors could also be deemed as being a way Jim affirms his gender creative child and her gender performativity. Jim conveyed,

I was like, boys have long hair also...it's not just a girl thing...he likes to paint his nails. And I told him, you know, that's fine...I was like, guys can do it.

Unique Concerns Having a Gender Creative Child. It seemed Jim perceived stereotypical gendered behaviors potentially effecting his child negatively. Jim illustrated how he interpreted his child's attempt to relate to cisgender peers at school. He stated,

I still think he's adjusting to school. I still think that there's kids that he doesn't know how to play, interact with and stuff like that.

Another challenge or concern that Jim experienced is related to the necessity for information. He illustrated searching for information and needing to be informed while questioning how he can support and affirm his child. It seemed Jim is working towards creating a

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better version of himself through his search for information to support and affirm his gender creative child effectively. Jim explains his intrapersonal growth as such,

I'm just trying to find out all the information that I can to better help them figure out what I can do better, you know, what am I doing that they need help with? How can I help them transition into what they want to become? I need to find out more information.

Jim elucidated living in a cisnormative is a challenge. He perceived having a supportive partner as being essential to raising a gender creative child in a conventional society and exclaimed the necessity of having someone who you can endure society with. Jim stated,

Be strong, because, I mean, society, the way I see it, will eat you up if you're not, and just conform to whatever they want. And I think if you a strong partner then that makes a difference, too, because you have someone you can kind of rely on. And I think that's the biggest thing is, you can look at them and they're like, okay, he has my back or she has my back.

Perceived Judgement. Jim demonstrated encountering people who judge him and discriminate against him for affirming and supporting his gender creative child. He illustrated the things he has heard others say and demonstrated how he views his parenting. He reported,

We get a lot more looks and a lot more judging...“Oh, you're a horrible dad,” or, “You shouldn't be doing this.” It's my choice. I'm going to raise my child the way I see fit.

Jim also perceived the family being judged for allowing his gender creative child, AMAB, to express feminine. He spoke to feeling like he would get less judgmental looks or comments if his gender creative child were AFAB expressing masculine. Here is how Jim interpreted this

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experience, which includes questioning why people deem him affirming his gender creative child as being inaccurate. Jim stated,

And I think in society, the way I see it is girls can be more accepted to wear boys' clothes, than boys to be wearing girls' clothes...Because my niece wears boys' clothes. She likes everything boy. And it's an easier transition...we get a lot more looks and a lot more judging where they [niece and her family] don't really get a whole lot, as much as we would. And they're like, well, you're doing it wrong. What's wrong?

Jim spoke to the judgement his family has faced because of cisnormative views of non-binary gender being abnormal and appeared to become frustrated by the biases he experiences as a result of these norms. He discussed being protective of his gender creative child is necessary and one element of what he does as a parent. Jim stated,

I see myself as a protector just from all the things, society, all that kind of stuff...I'm here to, if we're somewhere and somebody makes a remark then, you know, that's my job to step in and be like, "Who are you to judge?" You know, I don't judge my son...they don't see what I see.

Unique Conversations with Gender Creative Child. In addition to the unique concerns Jim has experienced he has also been engaged in unique conversations with his gender creative child about gender and how understanding gender is impacted by societal norms. Jim recounted a conversation with his child regarding how he understood gender growing up and how he understands it now. One temporal reference is as such,

He's like, "Well, dad, why do you do that?" And I'm like, well, "I just do that. You know. That's what I've known." And I'll tell him, I'll be honest with him and tell him

straight up. You know, like, “Back then this is what girls were supposed to do and this is what guys were in a different time. And people are starting to think differently.”

Other conversations Jim has held with his gender creative child have been focused on her birth name. As Jim spoke about this it seemed apparent how important his child keeping her birth name is to him. He vaguely spoke about how he and his partner thought out their gender creative child’s name very carefully before she was born and the special meaning this name has to him. Nonetheless, this conversation seemed conflicting for him because of his desire to support and affirm his child while ensuring she keep the birth name he deems gender neutral. The impact of his child not keeping the name that was given at birth seemed to be significant for Jim; the name seemed to be one thing the he is not flexible about his child changing. He stated,

And I showed him, look, there’s a football quarterback, [name]. And then there’s an actress, she’s a woman, that’s [name]. There’s two different people, genders, same name. He goes, “Whoa. Okay.” So I think, I think that had a lot to do with, like, putting it together of, like, okay, well, I can still be okay with it... “We gave you this name, I would like you to have it.” And that’s just the way I feel.

Difference in Relationship with Cisgender Child. While there were suggested comparisons in Jim’s normalizing his gender creative child’s experience and name, Jim seemed to recognize distinct contrasts between the relationship he has with his cisgender child and his gender creative child, both AMAB. It can be assumed these contrasts were the product of his cisgender child behaving differently than his gender creative child—his cis-child engaged in more masculine activities while his gender creative child engaged in more feminine activities. Observing these behaviors unfold appeared to have helped Jim learn and understand that his gender creative child is being her authentic self, which gave him space to support her better and

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allow her to live as her true authentic self. Being mindful and aware of such differences has also informed and reminded Jim, as a parent of a gender creative child, that he is doing the right thing by affirming her gender creativity even though he is not as close to her as his spouse. The way that Jim discussed this part of his experience seemed difficult for him to do without engaging in cis-normed language and as noted he appeared to be better able to understand and relate to his cisgender child, AMAB. He stated,

It's interesting to see how different they can be...I feel like [spouse] has more of a connection with [gender creative child] because I feel like she's understood the information and everything...She's taken it that much more with [gender creative child] than I have. And me, I gravitate closer to [cisgender child]...maybe because he's more boy.

Coming to Terms and "Owning Up"

When his child began expressing and behaving in more feminine ways at a young age, Jim seemed to begin experiencing his own transitional phases. During these phases he became knowledgeable and mindful of using correct pronouns in addition to encouraging his gender creative child to be her authentic self. The various levels of Jim's transitional phases will be intertwined throughout this section because as they appear to fit with other important experiences Jim had, like making meaning of his gender creative child's experience. These phases included influences of socio-cultural-political views and ideas of masculinity as a cis-male parent, a shift in the way he understood gender and his own gender creative child's social transition, as well as his affirmation of the social transition and what will be identified as continued social transition.

Since their gender creative child began expressing and behaving more feminine, Jim and his partner, had provided her with an affirming and supportive home although it was a struggle

for Jim in the beginning. There are five micro-themes that describe the experiential theme

Coming to Terms and “Owning Up”; *Influence of socio-cultural-political views and ideas of masculinity, Parent’s shifted view of gender, Understanding Gender Creative child’s social transition, Affirming Gender Creative child’s transition, and “Question mark.”*

Influence of Socio-cultural-political Views and Ideas of Masculinity. The intersections of Westernized society, culture, and politics appeared to have influenced Jim, a cisgender male, to believe he is at fault for his not understanding non-binary identities. Such dynamics also seemed to influence his idea of being a masculine male, which he spoke to. Jim conveyed his ideas about masculinity and how learning biased views of gender impacted the way he understood his gender creative child’s disclosure, which seemed to be intertwined with the social transition. He voiced struggling with this concept because he grew up knowing and understanding only conventional views of gender. Jim’s turmoil as he illustrated it,

At first...I think it was really, really tough for me because, I mean, I’m the quintessential, you know, man, you know, football all that kinds of stuff, and I grew up that way...

While he spoke about being cis-male and the behavior that coincides with that, it seemed the intersection of socio-cultural-political views had influenced Jim’s identity as a “quintessential man” who, through learning and growing, is supportive and affirming of his gender creative child to ensure her happiness. This development during his own transitional phases seemed to have helped Jim shift his perspective, which he deems as being necessary living in today’s socio-cultural-political climate that is abrasive toward those underrepresented. Jim reported,

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I do feel like I have conservative views. But, you know, I mean, there's a few things that I'm pretty liberal on. And, you know, I think nowadays you kind of have to be that way...I see myself doing that more and more, which is, it's opened my eyes a lot better.

Parent's shifted view of gender. Jim's shift of perspective seemed to shift in the way he came to know and understand his child. The growth he spoke of during these transitions seemed transformational for Jim and he illustrated coming to terms of normalizing his child's gender creativity. He seemed to speak of overcoming his socio-cultural-politically held preconceived notions to get to where he is, which included acknowledging and accepting his gender creative child as they are and unlearning conventional cisgender views. Jim stated,

I've broadened my horizons a lot more with my child being a transgender. And, uh, I feel like I've broken down a lot of barriers that I've had previously. And this is, it's positive, you know, so...I think I have come to terms with me owning up to it [child being gender creative], you know, me being fine with it, and I'm fine with it. I think it's something that's normal for me now.

Understanding Gender Creative Child's Social Transition. Jim demonstrated he understood being gender creative was natural for his child but also indicated some speculations on the matter. As he spoke about his child, Jim changed the way he used pronouns to speak about his child and included observing a shift in his child's gender expression and behavior. He conveyed how he interpreted this change and the ways it has improved his child's emotional well-being. It is unknown exactly why his child is behaving more feminine currently, but one could assume it is because his child is not attending school where she has to perform and can be her true authentic self at home. Jim stated,

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I guess he was born to feel this way, maybe to wear the clothes that he or she, whichever he would like to, or she, would like to be [express] during that time...I've noticed it a lot more recently, probably in the few months that, you know, we all of this stuff is happening [pandemic]...more and more I notice, uh, them going to more feminine, you know, things...And I notice that they are happier.

Affirming Gender Creative Child's Social Transition. Jim seemed to recognize the significance of holding space for his gender creative child to be her true authentic self at home and in public and not just engage in gender performativity. He demonstrated pride toward his gender creative child and relates this to her being true to herself—behaving and expressing as she desires, and how he supports her regardless of how others respond. Jim stated,

So if he wants to wear a dress or he wants to wear this, he wears it regardless of what anybody says...being comfortable in the clothes regardless of what it is, um, whether it be, you know, dresses, leggings, high heels, makeup, uh, I'm glad that, um, my gender creative child is comfortable and able to stand up for themselves to be comfortable in their own skin. And that makes me happy because that makes them happy...that's owning up to...saying, you know, "I want to be a girl." "Okay, if you want to be a girl, I'll support you 110%."

"Question Mark". Prior to the second interview Jim had become more aware of his gender creative child dressing more feminine. This interview was approximately 3 months after the first interview and within that amount of time his gender creative child had made some significant changes, like using she/her pronouns more often. Nonetheless, Jim maintained an uncertainty of how he interpreted her expressing in the future which seemed to be related to her being fluid in her expression and behavior prior. This uncertainty may have also been connected

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to him not wanting to make any assumptions about his child and putting a label on how his child experiences her gendered self. Jim spoke to this experience,

I think they were a little bit more feminine this winter...than they have been in the past...a lot of things have changed more so from when we last talked to now...I think it's edging more towards the feminine more than the masculine...I don't know about the summer, maybe it [gender expression/behavior] might be different...that's kind of a question mark.

Parent Impacted by Child's Experience

Jim illustrated that his gender creative child's happiness is significant to his own experience as a parent. He stated support his child regardless of the consequences and demonstrated working toward ensuring he meets his child's needs so he and his child can live their best life. Jim stated,

I just support for him and that's, whatever that means...That's what I'm here for and that's what we're trying to achieve. [statement aimed toward Gender Creative Child] "As long as you're happy, I'm happy."

One micro-theme was identified for the experiential theme **Parent Impacted by Child's Experience** and it is *Parent believes affirming creates happiness*. Through learning, Jim seemed to believe his gender creative child deserves the satisfaction of being her authentic self. In fact, he spoke to finding joy in his gender creative child, AMAB, presenting feminine. While speaking to this happiness, it seemed Jim recounted the judgement he experienced in his upbringing. He illustrated how this impacted him and continues to impact him as a parent of a gender creative child. Jim recounted,

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I see them most happy with those things, with dresses, the hair. Uh, I think more so now, now that their hair has grown a little bit longer, you know, he can put it in ponytails and pigtails. And I've seen a total change with that. So they always want their hair done the way, some crazy thing, you know. Um, and being that way, it makes me happy...to see my child that happy, because I don't feel like I got that gratification of something in my childhood where I had a very supportive parent.

Parent Believes Affirming Creates Happiness. Jim demonstrated his gender creative child's experience effects his experience as a parent— his child's happiness is important to him and is emotional for him. Jim seemed to believe affirming his gender creative child created happiness for her. He observed compliments he makes toward her feminine expression and behavior creates an emotional response for his gender creative child. He indicated,

I try to catch myself and, you know, try to, um, compliment that. You know, saying, "Oh, hey, look at the girl." Or you know, "Look at her, she's beautiful." And try to compliment, um, them that way...I would try to provide more things or show more things that would make, that seems like that could make them happier.

"Outlet"

Jim's first experience attending the PLPSG was defined by him as being an **"Outlet"** and as such an experiential theme with the following micro-themes, *Preconceived notions of entering support space for TGE children and families* and *Safe space*. It appeared these varying concepts influenced how he deemed the PLPSG and were significant to his experience when he attended.

Preconceived Notions Entering Support Space for TGE Children and Families. Jim spoke to feeling fearful and uncertain about what to expect from the group. He conveyed feeling

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concerned people would judge him and respectively was apprehensive to attend his first PLPSG. That first time attending, Jim stated he was particularly concerned about how people would perceive him as a “quintessential” cis-male. These concerns of being judged alongside the uncertainty of attending seemed to resonate from other experiences in which people had told him affirming his child is wrong and makes him “...a horrible dad.” It seemed cisnormative views of TGE people impacted how Jim perceived the PLPSG prior to attending the first time. He spoke to wrestling with those biases while feeling the need to support and affirm his child by providing her with an inclusive space she can be with other children like her. Jim illustrated,

I think at first I was scared because I didn't have any information...oh, I'm gonna be judged...I don't know if they're going to be, is this going to be, like, a dolled-up thing in dresses?...this is where [Gender Creative child] can be like, okay, I'm gonna do this...I think it's kind of nice just to, just for [Gender Creative child] to go there and be accepted...

Even though Jim held some preconceived notions about the PLPSG, he found the group to be a supportive environment for him and his family. He voiced the space being welcoming and positive for all in attendance. Jim stated,

I think you guys have created something that's great because it [play group] is an outlet for kids and people, too.

Safe Space. It seemed Jim's first experience at the PLPSG was positive—he indicated feeling supported and approved of. He perceived members of the group being judgmental toward him being cis-male; however, his experience differed. He conveyed feeling acknowledged and

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accepted within the group. It also appeared Jim received comfort from the PLPSG that society ceases to provide parents of TGE children. Jim recounted,

Even when I first went, they were very accepting...they see me, you know there's no judgment regardless of anything...It was nice not to be, like, judged as a parent...But I think that was kind of nice because I didn't feel like I was judged for being a manly man.

Jenny

Jim and Jenny were married and raising the same gender creative child. Jenny, at the time of the study, used inclusive language of “gender creative” to describe her child’s gender fluidity. It seemed she experienced her gender creative child in a different way than Jim, yet some of the same examples or situations expressed in Jim’s explanation will be discussed in this descriptive account because the two of them were interviewed at the same time during their first interview and spoke to the same concerns at that time. Although Jenny uses varying pronouns in her excerpts, She/her pronouns will be utilized throughout this section to discuss Jenny’s gender creative child since those were the more frequent pronouns used by the child and indicated by the parent at the time of the second interview.

The experiential themes that emerged for Jenny include **“It’s more society”, “Fluid” phases, “Authentic and more meaningful”, and “It’s more society”, “Fluid” phases, “Authentic and more meaningful”, and The Invitation.**

“It’s More Society”

It seemed living in a cisnormative society has impacted Jenny’s experience as a parent of a gender creative child significantly. Although it appeared she felt unpleasant about how she perceived the influence society has on her experience, “...it sounds kind of bad, but it’s more

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society”, and it seemed she recognized the affect binary gendered norms have on how others view her as parent supporting and affirming her gender creative child. There are nine micro-themes that encompass “**It’s more society**” experiential theme to describe her experience raising a gender creative child in a cisnormative society and how she is affected by gendered norms. They include ***Perceived Judgement***, “*Open and Honest*” conversations with Gender Creative child, “*Not use stereotypical language*”, “*Like underwear*”, *Change in way understand gender*, *Representation*, *Personal growth and understanding own gender and TGE genders*, *Extended familial relations*, and “*More obvious.*”

Perceived Judgement. As someone who is meeting her gender creative child’s needs, Jenny expressed how the binary gender normed society she lives in observes and judges her as a caregiver of a gender creative child in two diverging ways: 1) As a good mom affirming her child, or 2) As a bad mom or like she deserves to be pitied. She described both perspectives feeling peculiar to her and stated,

I get two looks, either good job mom, you know, and I’m like, for what? Like, you know, it’s kind of, and then, or I get, oh, like, pity almost, you know, or under, you know, or look at that, you know, look, look, look, or whatever. And, um, it’s bizarre to me.

Jenny illustrated other perceived judgements from cisgender people for not enforcing her gender creative child to conform to gendered norms, instead supporting and affirming her child’s gender creativity. She utilized he/him pronouns in this excerpt because those were the pronouns her gender creative child was using more often with her at the time of the first interview. She pointed out that she is validating her gender creative child expressing as a stereotypical girl and explained how she interpreted how others perceive her as a parent and not enforcing her child to engage in cis-normed gender behaviors. Jenny stated,

So then I think people that look in are like, “Well, you’re only offering him girl stuff.”

I’m like, “Hmm, not really.” Like, we’ve done some work to get here. But from the outside it looks like, I think other people sometimes think that we’re, are not strict enough or we’re not, you know, offering him, you know, opportunities to be what they think is more appropriate.

“Open and Honest” Conversations with Gender Creative Child. For her child to feel validated through the social transition, Jenny described trying to meet her gender creative child where she is. Jenny illustrated giving her gender creative child options to dress the way she desires and options to be involved in activities that she wants to be involved in even though they were deemed defiant within conventional society and do not meet the stereotypical activities related to being AMAB. To meet her child where she was, Jenny engaged in conversations that included how society may perceive her, focusing on how her child perceived herself regardless of societal norms. She described feeling sad and uncomfortable about having challenging conversations with her gender creative child about her gender and spoke to one example of the significance of having these conversations. She recounted,

Really talking to him about...it doesn’t really matter what other people think...if you feel like a girl that day, then you are a girl that day...I want our relationship to be open and honest...“Some people might say mean things. People might say something or point to you or tell you can’t go in the bathroom or whatever.” One little girl in his class told him that he couldn’t be something for Halloween because that was a girl costume or whatever. And I said, “Well, some kids believe that. Some families believe that, but our family doesn’t”...It’s sad that you have to teach your kid that they’re gonna be picked on.

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Jenny acknowledged her gender creative child may feel dissonance related to understanding where she fits in with her cis-peers at school, subsequently struggling with not feeling like she is masculine or feminine enough. Because of societal norms around gender, and potential discrimination, Jenny spoke to recognizing the impact of labels. Here she described normalizing various gendered behaviors to help her child feel comfortable with other children in an attempt to validate her child's experience. She stated,

We didn't want...it to be this generalization or this negative, um, one thing or another.

Um, all girls are this so I want to be this, or all boys are this so I want to be this. We've always been pretty open about, you know, girls can do that, too. Girls can be (laughs) aggressive, too.

Jenny also described engaging in other exclusive discussions about gender and practicality of dressing feminine with her gender creative child. She conveyed that her child desiring to wear heels while riding a bike is an example of needing to limit the child from dressing in a desired way out of practicality. Here she illustrated feeling the burden of telling her child she cannot express as desired and potentially feel rejected for her gender identity. The conflict Jenny was feeling was stated as such,

A big moment for us, too, is to understand that us saying no to things like that seemed, you know, normal or, like, a boundary for us. But we really had to be careful that we weren't saying, that he didn't assume we were saying no to that, um, expression. Which I think sometimes he felt...I think being at home and constantly having access to whatever they feel is appropriate has really helped understand that you can be your authentic self, but you also have to be practical.

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Other conversations related to concerns around her gender creative child feeling rejected, included Jenny describing feeling compelled to discuss her gender creative's name with her child. She illustrated her gender creative child was fortunate to have had a transgender teacher who embraced her child's gender creativity, and while Jenny found having a transgender teacher to be beneficial for her child, she indicated some challenges with it as well. It seemed Jenny interpreted the teacher had experienced potential negative experiences as a transgender person, which may have influenced her to discuss name changes with Jenny's gender creative child. Jenny believed the child did not want the name change and that her desire for a name change could have developed from acquiescence toward the teacher. As Jenny described the situation she indicated her gender creative child had no discussion of a name change with her or her partner any time prior to having discussions with the teacher. Here she discussed briefly how she addressed this with her gender creative child. She stated the experience of having a discussion with her child she did not anticipate having as a parent. She conveyed the depth of the conversation on how she experienced it and illustrated how she recounted some of the dialogue. Jenny stated,

I think the name change thing was really impactful for us. We were like, ugh... That really opened the conversation to how important your name is. "And before we had you, you know, we put a lot of thought and a lot of, you know, and your middle name is after daddy." And, you know, and so that conversation was really rich, too, that we never would have had.

"Not Use Stereotypical Language". Discussing the name change was one situation where Jenny saw her gender creative child as being transparent with her and her partner; the other situation was the use of varying pronouns. Between the first and second interview her child

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had begun using she/her pronouns more often. During the first interview Jenny indicated her gender creative child had yet to correct the way she addressed her with he/him pronouns although she spoke to the gender creative child having been known to correct others—extended family members, teachers, and people dad works with. Since her child had expressed not caring about pronouns with Jenny, it seemed Jenny longed to know that she is supporting and affirming her gender creative child. She indicated she has asked her child how she feels about her or her partner using he/him pronouns toward her and stated her child voiced to her that she doesn't mind when they use he/him pronouns toward her, which seemed to be conflicting and relieving for her. Having this conversation with her child appeared to assist her with being more aware of the language she uses. She stated,

It's [gender] really fluid, it's really, um, we always ask him what pronouns he wants... he's never corrected us...And he says that it's fine, we can call him whatever we want... yeah. And, um, but I think we've tried to be more careful with our language, um, when we, when I speak in emails and things like that, I try not to use gender.

Jenny highlighted trying not to use, and being mindful of using, stereotypical gendered language, yet she realized when she does so it is due to societal influences. By not using gendered language it seemed she is trying to support and affirm her gender creative child who does not fit stereotypical gendered language, which appeared to be difficult for her to get her point across without it. Jenny stated,

I often feel that it's hard for us to not use stereotypical language. Because it's hard to describe without it...I try not to use gender.

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During the first interview, there is one incident where Jenny changed the use of her language to illustrate a situation with both of her children, AMAB. She changed the language when discussing them both, and this statement portrays the inclusive nature of doing so. She was recounting how her children found out they were going on vacation, “It was a complete surprise for the boys. So, um, for the kids, I should say.”

“Like Underwear”. Jenny spoke to having experienced several concerns and challenges related to raising a gender creative child. She illustrated gendered items being one of them. Here she described one such challenge related to a specific types of clothing she perceived her child as needing to wear as a person with an external organ—i.e., penis, and the concern she has about them being masculine. Jenny stated,

Like underwear, that one’s a big issue...they don’t make Minnie Mouse boy underwear. And they need boy underwear...it was hard for him...we were like, why are they gendered?...that really doesn’t need to be.

Other related challenges Jenny voiced being faced with include traveling. She recounted a trip the family took after her child began to dress gender fluidly and she conveys how she dealt with making sure her child felt supported and affirmed even when the family was away. She stated,

[Discussing a trip the family was taking] I don’t know how to pack because we never know what that morning is going to feel like... So I just packed both [masculine and feminine clothing options]. And then every morning, you know, I would lay out both.

One environmental situation that Jenny had confronted included her gender creative child’s current school. Although she reported they have been supportive toward she and her gender creative child, she spoke to how she experienced her gender creative child’s current teacher.

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Particularly with regards to her child being incapable of expressing femininely with a costume wig in the classroom. Jenny seemed to feel some frustration related to this even though she recognized the teacher being supportive just not knowledgeable. She stated,

And his kindergarten teacher is very, like, “But, you know, I have these rules and da-da-da-da-da. No toys at school, da-da-da-da-da.” And I’m like, well, “it’s not really a toy, you know...And if he comes to school in a purple wig, you can’t make him put it in his backpack.” I think his teacher has always been, I wouldn’t, uh, I wouldn’t say that she was unsupportive, I would say, uh, you know, she’s always been supportive, I just don’t think knowledgeable.

Change in way Understand Gender. Changing her language to be more inclusive is one method Jenny used to affirm her child. She spoke to feeling like there are situations where she has to be mindful of how she is relating messages to her gender creative child and dealing with various situations related to affirming or feeling like she cannot affirm her child. For example, Jenny conveyed not being able to afford buying her gender creative child an expensive wig to wear because she desires having long hair but acknowledged buying an attachable ponytail. Jenny illustrated meeting her child’s needs the best she can creates meaning for her and her child while also indicating other significant gender related issues that include telling her child she cannot have or wear something that spoke her gender identity to others. In these moments Jenny indicated it creates sadness for her gender creative child. Here she voiced the significance of telling her child she cannot wear specific feminine things to school because they were either deemed inappropriate or unable to accomplish. This is her interpretation of how her child experiences these situations and how she construes her child’s response. She stated,

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You can't wear that to school. But for him, that was such a blow because it wasn't a costume, it wasn't. It was definitely an identity...and for us to understand that, he has to articulate so much. You know, or one day he wanted to wear a hat with a ponytail out the back...your hair's not long enough, I don't have anything to make that work...and for him, that was just heartbreaking. And it was one of those moments that you're like, oh, this is deeper...I have something in my head that I had pictured and it's not possible.

Representation. Jenny deems being in spaces with other TGE people and experiences as being important for her gender creative child. She illustrated using resources as a tool to engage in dialect with her child about gender fluidity and how visibility and representation has helped her to understand her gender creative child. Jenny stated,

When I come across resources or I come across a kid that identifies as transgender or a kid that identifies as gender creative or, um, gender fluid kids or anything like that, I try and show [TGE child], you know, that those are options. You know, then we kind of talk about it...I just think that those parts, um, kind of expanding our knowledge and having resources that we can say, you know, this is a boy that wears makeup.

Personal Growth and Understanding own Gender and TGE Genders. Other reflective ways it seemed Jenny has grown during this process appeared to be related to having more knowledge about gender spectrums and holding more open perspectives toward gender and TGE people and experiences. Here she illustrated how conventional ideas of gender have impacted her as a cis-female parent and reflected on how this has impacted the way she viewed her gendered self. She conveyed acknowledging thoughts and feelings that come up and offered some suggestions to other parents. Jenny stated,

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And I think it's really made me kind of, um, introspective about my own gender and really think, you know, kind of about some of the things that, you know, I felt I needed to do or I felt that I didn't need to do, or, and why...it's important to understand what, you know, our assumptions could be...to understand it. And validate your feelings as the caregiver, that's okay, too. It's okay to be uncomfortable with it...question, you know, should he wear a dress to church? You know, and kind of sit with that and deal with, um, how you feel about it first.

Extended Familial Relations. Validating her child's non-binary gender had come with struggles for Jenny. She conveyed having issues with her extended family discriminating her and her child by not validating her gender creative child. Other discriminating factors included their identifying Jenny's child's age as being an influencing factor on not taking her child's gender seriously. It seemed she tried to find humor in their opinions and actions because it helps her not feel anger, yet she illustrated feeling frustration in their not recognizing or understanding that her gender creative child is not going through a phase. She stated,

It's always been, it's just a phase, he'll grow out of it...he's only two, he's only three, he's only four, he's only five... And she [Jenny's family member] would still, you know, buy clothes and things like that, and like, but, "not gonna wear 'em. So if you're okay with buying things that he's not gonna wear"

Jenny recognized some positive change she has observed within the last year from family members. She explained that her extended family is becoming more affirming toward her gender creative child. Nonetheless, Jenny seemed to continue feeling concerned that they were relating her gender creative child's experience to stereotypical gendered norms regardless of showing more accepting behaviors. Jenny stated,

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... it was interesting because my brother is engaged, and her kid is the same exact age. And he, his favorite color is green. And so, um, my mom's Easter basket for him was green. And that was really the first thing that she bought him that was all pink...it was interesting that that was, that took a while.

“More Obvious”. Observing the feminine behavior and expression of her gender creative child, AMAB, has assisted Jenny with seeing differences in how her cis-child behaves differently from gender creative child. Both children were AMAB, yet her cis-child engages in more masculine activities while gender creative child engages in more feminine activities. She indicated the immediate family attempts not to identify items by gender or activities by gender because of the differences in behavior, nonetheless, she and Jim agree the differing expressions of each child in this way “... made it more obvious for [Gender creative child] that it's more than an interest, it's more than a costume, it's something deeper...is his identity...” and not related to assigned sex at birth. Jenny stated,

With regards to her children both being AMAB, Jenny spoke to gender reveal parties as being peculiar. She illustrated questioning her decision to doing them prior to understanding gender creativity and fluidity. It seemed she came to realize cisnormative beliefs informed her choice of engaging in gender reveal parties. She stated,

We're all taught, like, well, this is what you are. The doctor said so...we had the gender reveal parties and like, oh, that's so weird. That is a very weird thing to do.

“Fluid” Phases

It seemed Jenny experienced various transitional stages since her child disclosed and simultaneously socially transitioned. At the time of this study it appeared Jenny was experiencing an ongoing transition of her own while her child continued to socially transition.

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These varying **“Fluid” Phases** experienced included *“Can’t assume”*, *“Affinity”*, *Pressure and Hesitation*, and *“Hardest thing”*, which are the micro-themes for this experiential theme.

“Can’t Assume”. As part of this experience, and her own transition, Jenny described the importance of her gender creative child guiding both her and Jim during her own social transition. Here she demonstrated how she has transitioned to understand gender fluidity differently and make no assumptions about her own child being gender fluid. She conveyed always being respectful of being directed by her child even though she desired to make the situation easier on herself, a privileged cis-gender person. Jenny stated,

You can’t assume that this is going to be forever, you can’t assume that this is not going to be forever. You can’t assume that this is going to be...a phase or not...or even what we, you know, initially were like, okay, well, then choose one. (laughs) You know. Okay, are you wearing a dress every day? Is this what we’re doing? You know, to simplify it...for us. But I think that more and more that we’ve really followed his lead, that it’s like, he doesn’t even know...we’re gonna let him pick what he wants.

“Affinity”. Jenny was educated in environments prior to her child’s disclosure that impacted the way she understood gender. She indicated she had been flexible in allowing both her children to be creative in their expression of gender and it seemed she had no intention of keeping her gender creative child from being able to dress and express in ways that defy societal norms. Here she described how she observed her gender creative child as a toddler, prior to disclosure, and how she was anticipating his being more feminine. She stated,

Because even when he was, I mean, like, eighteen months old. We had an idea. (laughs) I mean, like, he just had an affinity for anything that was glittery...I have a picture of him

as a baby almost, I mean, I think he was barely a year, wearing a Christmas bow...and it really started with tutus. He was, um, super attached to a tutu and, when he was two.

Pressure and Hesitation. Jenny specified she has not tried to censor her child's gender identity, yet she illustrated that in the beginning of the disclosure, simultaneous transition, she attempted to label it, only to find she could not because her child's gender is on a spectrum—i.e., masculine to feminine, and fluid—i.e., always shifting back and forth from feminine to masculine. In the beginning of her gender creative child's social transition Jenny found it difficult to make decisions around what her gender creative child would wear in public, particularly to church or around extended family members. She described being hesitant to allow her to dress feminine, yet allowing her to do so anyhow. Jenny expressed her hesitancy about it because of how others would view her as a parent, although she felt like the social transition was not about her as a parent. These concerns appeared to come from her pressures of conforming to cisnet societal belief systems, nonetheless, it seemed she realized her gender creative child's entire transition had nothing to do with how she feels about it. Jenny ultimately seemed to realize how her gender creative child feels about her own gender identity was more important and one way she makes meaning of her experience as a parent of a gender creative child—through her child's own meaning making of her experience, which was important to her because she wanted her child to feel validated and heard. She stated,

I think we felt some pressure early on to label it and to come to a distinct, you know, is he Transgender?...we had some hesitation with him at first...can he wear a bow to church? Can he wear a dress to, you know, his parents...we made the decision as a family that we aren't going to tell you that you can only do this at home. We aren't going to tell you that

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you can only be you some places...we were nervous about it. But it's always been kind of, we would take his lead.

“Hardest Thing”. One concern she illustrated was regarding being an ally and spoke to feeling the need to work with parents/guardians of children who were disclosing or expressing in ways that defy conventional gender norms, particularly those who are not accepting of their child gender nonconformity or gender creativeness. She indicated she is seeing these unsupportive behaviors by parents at her school and conveyed an understanding that these behaviors come from gender stereotypical mentality that conflicts with her views as a caregiver of a gender creative child and teacher who gives children choices not based on Westernized gender norms.

Part of Jenny's reflective process appeared to include the way she sees herself as a parent raising a gender creative child. She indicated that her and Jim play different roles as parents and advocates, and this appeared to be an important part of her identity as a caregiver. She illustrated seeing herself as an ally and he as the protector. Although Jenny sees herself as an ally, it was important for others to view her in that role as well. She explained the difficulties she has at pinpointing how she can be an ally and reported feeling like she can't get enough information to become an ally. It seemed she frequently works toward being thoughtful of truly understanding her gender creative child, yet she interpreted herself falling short at times as her child's primary caregiver. Here she spoke to her concern of not doing enough as an ally and adds concerns she has for TGE children coming out to their parents young age not getting support or having an ally. She reported,

I think my hardest thing is that I want to, um, I want to be perceived as an ally, but I'm not sure how to do that. (laughs) You know, and I'm such an information person that I need all the information. I want to know...but I do think that there are, um, for parents

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and for parents' extended family and for people on the outside of it, um, that have never experienced it, that worry, that, um, association with sexual orientation is so strong that I could see their aversion to taking their kid to therapy...And I think the population's getting younger and younger that feel more open to express it.

“Authentic and More Meaningful”

Her child being gender creative seemed to be the essence of what she does as a parent. Here she illustrated the significance of being guided by her child's gender creativity in her social transitional experience. She stated,

I think it's [child's social transition] made it more, obviously more authentic and more meaningful for us...

The three microthemes that encompass the experiential theme **“Authentic and more meaningful”** include, *Taking his lead*, *Positive self-concept of child is educational for parent*, *Positive impact of Gender Creative child's social transition*, and *“Such a blow.”*

“Taken his Lead”. As Jenny described supporting and affirming her gender creative child through various means, she spoke to both her and Jim meeting thier child where she is. Jenny stated,

We have really taken his lead...because you don't know what, there's no way to know what portion of their identity they feel needs to be addressed... I always try to really come from what [TGE child] is picking up. I try to understand what his questions are.

Like her gender creative child, Jenny seemed to defy conventional ideas of gender that have been normed in society. She offered some temporal references where she spoke about a few significant moments. One included an experience she observed of her child not being affirmed

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for dressing like a female superhero. She illustrated how she interpreted her child's experience with this meaningful experience and seemed to empathize with her child— understanding the sadness he feels when others do not observe or understand his true authentic self and discussed the conflict in the way others understand her child because of her developmental level and the complexities of gender. She stated,

He was all into PJ Masks because he wanted to be Owlette...nobody knew who PJ Masks (laughs) were, and therefore they didn't know who Owlette was. And her costume is mostly red, um, with pink wings...it was hard for us because he couldn't articulate that at the time, he had just turned four. And so I was, and so all of the sudden he didn't want to do that anymore. And he goes, "Nobody knows that Owlette is a girl"...

Other meaning making experiences that parallel how Jenny experienced her gender creative child experiencing cisnormative roles included not having the ability to express feminine on some occasions. She illustrated two situations and described her observations of how these impact her gender creative child. Jenny reported,

Because you think, you know, it's, for us, we don't want you to wear an Elsa wig to school because that's a toy, that's a costume...You can't wear that to school. But for him, that was such a blow because it wasn't a costume, it wasn't. It was definitely an identity. You know, and for us...to understand that, he has to articulate so much...or one day he wanted to wear a hat with a ponytail out the back. Like, your hair's not long enough, I don't have anything to make that work...and for him, that was just heartbreaking.

Positive Self-concept of Child is Educational for Parent. Jenny depicted how the feminine things her gender creative wears makes her feel good. Her child described them as

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“cool and sassy” and although she spoke to being oblivious to what these adjectives truly mean, she recognized the feminine items her child wears and expressed with create a physical change in her demeanor when people notice her femininity, “I forget what he wore makeup for, but, and you see a physical change in who he is.” Jenny recognized her gender creative child will dress as she desires at school or in public regardless of societal gendered norms, nonetheless, she remains concerned about how others react or respond to her child’s gender creativity, specifically at school. Correspondingly Jenny inquired about how her child interpreted people responding to her and interpreted her child’s responses and behavior as being a part of her own transition. Here she illustrated how experiencing her child’s reaction toward other children has been educational for her, she seemed proud of the compassion and empathy her child shows toward others regardless of the things they say to her about her expression or gender identity. Jenny stated,

It’s always eye-opening, and it’s always been a positive interaction with-with him because, um, he’s just such a loving kid. And he’s so kindhearted first. So it’s always eye-opening to us that it’s never taken as mean or hateful or that hurt my feelings or... Um, one of the things he said was, “I just don’t think they see a lot of girls in, boys in girls’ dresses.” End of discussion.

Positive Impact of Gender Creative Child’s Social Transition. Jenny illustrated other things she has come to reflect on and ways her child’s social transition has been significant for her. She included interpreting it as being positive and impactful for her family and conveyed her child’s experience has opened up conversations they might not have had otherwise and relationships her family potentially would not have engaged in. She stated,

I think it’s impacted us in a lot of positive ways...I mean, it’s really given us a wider, um, perspective. And I think it’s really given us so many chances to talk to, um, not only

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[TGE child], but everybody in our family about it...give him options instead of, you know, you should be doing this or you should be doing that...those options and those opportunities for learning for all of us has been one of the biggest ways that it's impacted us...it's open conversations with people we don't know...and relationships like the playgroup and things like that...I think just being more open and being aware that some kids don't identify as one or the other, and they don't see that you have to.

“Such a Blow”. Jenny described varying concerns she has for her gender creative child and paralleled those concerns with how she interpreted other families' experiences. As illustrated, it seemed apparent Jenny desired inclusive spaces that will meet her child's needs and she emphasized the need to be honest and open with TGE children. Here is a belief she finds to be important for others to understand and advised other parents of TGE children to affirm their children. She stated,

I think being honest with them, even from when they're really young to be, you know, kind of understanding of where they're coming from. But I think that's been the biggest part. I think that's what we would tell other parents.

The Invitation

Jenny described the PLPSG as being a support system for her family. She spoke to varying ideas and experiences she encountered within the group and illustrated attending the PLPSG has been positive. There are four micro-themes that emphasized how Jenny has experienced the PLPSG and they are *Preconceived ideas about PLPSG*, *Educational experiences*, *Positive experience of attending the first time*, and *TGE child at PLPSG*.

Preconceived Ideas About PLPSG. Jenny described preconceived ideas she had about her gender creative child attending group prior to attending and how she benefited from attending the group. She did not believe her child was transgender enough, a belief she held about being a TGE person from living in a cisnormative society. She stated,

It's funny because that in the beginning when [Transgender Adult] invited us, um, I was like, I don't really think he's Transgender, you know, or he's not enough, you know. And so when we got there it was really nice... We didn't really know what to expect.

Educational Experience. As part of the opportunities Jenny indicated she provided for her gender creative child, attending the PLPSG was one of them. She illustrated the significance of attending the group and discussing pronouns and conveyed the impact of doing so on her as a cis-female. The discussion of pronouns helped her recognize her own privilege. She stated,

I think that was one of the first times that we had really talked about pronouns because you guys all ask, you know... so all of us were kind of like, I don't know what my pronouns are. I've never really thought of it... as a cisgender person or even as a parent, you know, but that importance, um, of allowing that you know, to kind of naturally happen, too. And kind of become part of our speech.

Comforting. Jenny illustrated the PLPSG has been a safe place for her to be herself. She spoke to the group giving her opportunities to engage in dialogue with other parents about their similar unique challenging experiences having a non-binary children. Jenny stated,

I think the most comforting for me was to hear kind of some of the parent conversations because it's so similar... with parents understanding that that's [Gender creativity among children] common helps.

Opportunity. Jenny interpreted her gender creative child benefiting from the PLPSG as well. The group created visibility for her gender creative child which seemed to be significant for her as a parent. She stated,

I think it's just been an opportunity for [Gender creative child] to see other kids like him.

Gabby

Gabby is the mother to a trans-female child who illustrated varying challenges living in a conventional society that views her child's gender as abnormal. Gabby uses the term "transgender" toward her daughter instead of TGE. There are three experiential themes that describe significant factors that impact her as a parent raising a Transgender child in a cisnormative society. They include **"Fucked-up society", Social transition necessary supports, and "Beautiful colors and spectrums."**

"Fucked-up Society"

Gabby spoke of the significant influence society has on raising children. For Gabby's experience, there are eleven micro-themes that relate to the significance societal norms have had on her experience raising a transgender child. They incorporate varying contexts of the experiential theme **"Fucked-up Society"** and include *Continued "New challenges", Advocacy for supports at school, "Education is everything", "Their voices" create change, "Strong statement", Ambiguous loss, "Recovering Catholic", "They weren't very receptive", Impact of "One truth", Questioning own identity and gendered self, and "Stealth"*. She poignantly illustrated her views on society and the impact conventional norms have on people by stating, "We were socialized in a fucked-up society."

Continued “New Challenges”. Though Gabby recognized her transgender child is happily living as her authentic self, she indicated that her doing so does not come without challenges and concerns or consequences. Challenges, she expressed, come from navigating cisnormative society and systems influenced by gender binary norms. Here she recounted these challenges and finding ways to show herself grace as she maneuvers through marginalizing systems. Gabby stated,

...we continue to experience new challenges (i.e. blockers = reality of fertility being compromised, [Transgender Child] being “out” about gender fluidity with some friends = managing parent reactions), and the process begins again – but perhaps I do more to validate and normalize mine and [Transgender Child]’s experience, to educate myself, and to have self-compassion and patience with myself... although she typically presents as more feminine, it’s hard for me to imagine us as being “post transition”, as we are continuously faced with some of the same and new challenges...[Transgender Child]’s school was adamant that they could not change her name in the school computer system or records without a legal name change and would not change her gender marker without ‘medical documentation of sex reassignment surgery’.

Advocacy for Supports at School. Gabby spoke to needed supports and resources to help her advocate for her transgender child at school. She described the success of this encounter and the continued struggles she and her daughter encountered with the school district. Such challenges she voiced occur in a state that now has affirming laws and policies for TGE people. Here Gabby reflected on seeking out legal support to help her advocate for her child in school and illustrated the oppressive language still used by her child’s school district toward TGE children and the consequences of her child being out at school. She stated,

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After receiving support from the American Civil Liberties Union, [Transgender Child] is now able to use the school facilities of the gender with which she identifies, and after a legal name change the school now formally recognized her as [Transgender Child].

Despite these little victories, [Transgender Child] continues to struggle with unaddressed bullying at school, and we have been unsuccessful in advocating for change in the school district's requirement of 'medical documentation of sex reassignment surgery' prior to changing a student's gender marker.

“Education is Everything”. Gabby explained awareness and growth are created by education and advocacy efforts. It seemed she viewed education as being vital to creating multiple truths and inclusive spaces. This is an element that appeared to be a positive endeavor creating change for people who are marginalized for the gender and sexual or affectional orientation or attraction. Here she illustrated the influence of education on improving the lives of LGBTQ folx and her role of educating and advocating for systemic change. Gabby stated,

Education is everything. And by education, I mean increasing your awareness of your own worldview, and being open to changing that shit. Really. We all have implicit biases that NEED CHANGING [Emphasized by participant]...Education is dropping that stuff at the curb, and allowing yourself to hear someone's experience without reservation, and truly accepting their reality as truth...Of all of the education I've received/engaged in, learning from LGBTQ community members lived experience has been the most impactful...I often have to step up to either educate someone or advocate for a change in policy or approach.

“Their Voices” Create Change. Gabby described hearing the stories of LGBTQ persons impacted negatively by systems and interpreted meeting and hearing from the community as

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being educational for cis-het-people. She also deemed doing so would create systemic change beneficial for TGE people. She stated,

It is their (LGBTQ community) voice[s] that will change the world...it was the systems that perpetuate these harmful black-or-white beliefs that needed to change. It's students and parents who continue to try to police [Transgender Child]'s gender through hurtful words, that need changing.

Gabby voiced her experience with getting educated about TGE people and their experiences. Education seemed to be a necessary factor in her coming to truly understand her own transgender child and she conveyed the humbling growth she made from learning more about this community. She stated how she viewed her child and understands the importance of learning although she can only understand as humanly possible as she can as cisgender person. Gabby stated,

It took a whole lot of education, and expansion of my thinking before I realized that her gender identity is truly expansion. Her identity doesn't fit in a box...The more I learn about the history and realities of Transgender and gender-expansive people, the more I feel like I understand her experience, and the more empowered I feel. I acknowledge that I'll never fully understand what it is like to be a gender-expansive child, or adult.

“Strong Statement”. Gabby admitted her own need for perspective change toward her transgender child in the beginning of the transition. She illustrated following the “one truth” ,or cis-het normed beliefs, she had grown up to know prior to accepting and supporting her transgender child. Gabby labeled the distressing emotions she felt prior to her child's disclosure and during her child's disclosure and conveys how she views oppressing her child. She stated,

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I'm ashamed to say that in many ways, my behavior made me [Transgender Child]'s first bully. If that sounds like a strong statement, it is...There's still a sense of guilt when I think about what life was like for her before she transitioned (life before age 6)...I still feel ashamed for having set this boundary with her– because she should be able to be her authentic self in every space...Fuck what everyone else thinks.

Gabby also illustrated current feelings she struggles with and conveys how she interpreted those feelings influencing rejecting behaviors. She spoke to the fear she feels raising her transgender child in a cishet society that may cause her child harm and stated,

I'm often fearful that someone will hurt or harass her for being her authentic self...I often worry that my fears guide my behavior– for example, I don't allow [Transgender Child] to stand up to pee when we are in public restrooms...I find myself much less anxious about her going to school and extracurricular activities, although this might be less about the time since transition – and more about how we've managed to establish affirming community (school, colleagues, etc.).

Gabby seemed to be impacted by the cisnormative beliefs she once held and the influence of those beliefs on how she treated her child. It seemed she felt guilt and shame about not meeting her child's needs sooner and recounted how she views the effect of her own rejecting behaviors toward her child to be able to find grace for herself. She stated,

Some days I feel a little down about just how long it took me to see that gender is more than blue and pink boxes, and that love is bigger than the cishet-monogamous norm I've always known...I often think that I should've been a better listener, that I should've heard what she was trying to tell us – but I try to have some compassion for myself.

Ambiguous Loss. Other concerns Gabby confronted included coping with, what she called, “ambiguous loss.” These feelings of loss toward her transgender child seemed to have developed into varying feelings for her at various times in her child’s transition. She related this loss to memories of her child to the expectations she had of her daughter and seemed to recognize these concerns were based on the same socially construed cis het norms that she grew up learning and knowing. She appeared to be focused on how she deemed their connection, mother to a child AMAB, and the loss of that connection. Gabby wrote,

As a caregiver there was this ambiguous sense of loss when we started using [Transgender Child]’s new name and accurate pronouns. Even now, when I hear her old name, I have this little pang of sadness in my chest and stomach. I’m not entirely sure what I lost. I’ve spent a bit of time thinking about this, and I think that that sense of loss comes from having to change the dreams I had for my child.

Gabby spoke of situations intensifying the feelings of ambiguous loss for her. These situations appear to be part of the transition she is going through alongside her transgender child. She recounted one situation in particular and how she is dealing with ambiguous loss. She stated,

Then, each time we reach a new stage in her transition, there’s a renewed sense of loss. For example, when we stopped calling her [Transgender child’s name given at birth], I had to change all of my nick names for her...This sounds silly...but these nick names mean a lot. They were part of our little relationship, of that intimate exchange between child and parent, that started when she was an infant. So, I made it my goal to develop new nick names immediately...and this actually helped quite a bit.

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Another significant moment regarding the ambiguous loss Gabby feels included a recent experience. She spoke to having educated herself on side effects of hormone replacement therapy yet being taken by surprise by the doctor speaking to them. She stated,

I recently experienced a renewed sense of loss when we went to get [Transgender Child]’s first puberty blocker. We had talked about all of the side effects, and long[-]term consequences of starting blockers – we did our research and knew that it would prevent her from being able to have children.

With this situation, Gabby spoke to being concerned about her transgender child’s inability to have children due to side effects of being on hormone replacement therapy and the impact of that information on her during the very moment the doctor informed her. She conveyed how she has come to understand the need to process her ambiguous loss and create new expectations or a shift in perspective. She stated,

But when the doctor said “now you understand that this will prevent her from being able to produce sperm, meaning she will not be able to have children in the future”, I felt that pang in my heart and stomach again. It doesn’t mean that she won’t be able to adopt children or have them through other means...but as a parent, I have to change my vision for her.

“Recovering Catholic”. The ideas that people who are TGE are abnormal or immoral create frustration and anger within Gabby, particularly with regards to religious discrimination. She spoke to how she perceived the intolerance of such beliefs and language, adding the significance they have on people within the LGBTQ communities. Gabby indicated her own experience being raised Catholic and conveyed this influence on how she learned such

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intolerances. Additionally, she voiced her own encounters with being reflective and growing while unlearning these stereotypical labels that impact LGBTQ persons negatively to improve spaces for LGBTQ+ persons. She stated,

I was raised Catholic, I now identify as a recovering Catholic...I can no longer tolerate that level of ignorance, and that type of speech – those words – they kill people. They stigmatize, isolate, and emotionally and psychologically wound our LGBTQ community members; they contribute to dysphoria, and dysphoria kills. So, [Transgender Child]'s transition has shed light on so many parts of my life – such that I can no longer use my ignorance as an excuse for staying in the dark about the oppression LGBTQ folks experience...Changing my vision for [Transgender Child] meant re-examining all of those beliefs, and learning new beliefs, behaviors, and ways of thinking...Since I came out to my family of origin about [Transgender Child]'s gender identity, a lot has changed.

Impact of “One Truth”. Religion seemed to influence Gabby's experience significantly. She described the negative implications Christianity had on her ideas of gender binary and expressed how the influential beliefs she was raised knowing have changed since she began affirming her transgender child. She spoke to a holding a new way of understanding Catholicism and conveys messages that provoke anger. Gabby stated,

I was raised in a ‘devout’ Roman Catholic household, where anything outside of the male female binary and prescribed gender roles was not only rejected, but seen as against the natural order, and would prevent one's soul from entering heaven (well, purgatory if we should be so lucky)...I grew up hearing ‘hate the sin, love the sinner’, that tolerance of ‘other lifestyles’ is a ‘slippery slope’ into moral disintegration, and that people who are trans/gender-expansive are ‘perverse’.

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Unlearning the preconceived ideas about binary gender taught by her family of origin, society, and religion seemed to have been part of her process. It appeared she has created a new awareness for how she sees subjective experiences of others and herself that do not include religion. Gabby explains,

This idea that there is “one truth” is just one privileged groups way of reinforcing a specific power dynamic, where the group who knows the ‘truth’ needs to guide the behavior of the group who ‘needs to know the truth’ (for many folks, truth is synonymous with God). For me, the word truth has so many meanings – all of which are negative.

“They Weren’t Very Receptive”. Part of Gabby’s change had come with setting boundaries with others. Gabby recounted her family of origin’s response toward her regarding supporting and affirming her TGE child and illustrated how she has come to understand their being ambivalent toward her child. She spoke to the turmoil that she experiences being affirming toward her TGE child, and such turmoil Gabby illustrated included needing to disconnect from many members of her family. She stated,

When I came out to my parents and brother about [Transgender Child], they weren’t very receptive or willing to honor her name and pronouns. So, they finally became “ambivalent” towards [Transgender Child]’s transition and honored her name and pronouns after I set some boundaries and reinforced them when they crossed them. I let them know that if they wanted any of our family in their lives they needed to respect [Transgender Child]. Although my immediate family shaped up, a good number of members of my extended family did not. Some even felt the need to email and message me letting me know that what I was doing was child abuse and against God. I’ve cut off all contact from...most of his [parent’s father] family.

Questioning Own Identity and Gendered Self. Through her own process of finding compassion for herself, Gabby seemed to have experienced a reflective process regarding her own gendered self. Gabby illustrated she had only known the privilege of being a cisgender female and described a memory that seemed to develop through her child disclosing and socially transitioning as a transgender person. She recounted being younger and unconsciously desiring to appear more masculine because of an assault, not because of being TGE. Gabby's intrapersonal growth is described by her. She conveyed,

I am a cisgender female, but I now question so many aspects of my own gender development and current identity. There was a time in my life where I would have given anything to shave my head, bind my breasts, and use male pronouns. In one way, I am a little more on the masculine end of the female spectrum in regards to gender identity (not presentation), but at the time in my life when I would have presented as male – I recognize now that I was trying to create safety around male peers, and that this was preceded by an assault.

Safety Concerns. Gabby expressed safety as being a concern she has while raising a transgender child. She stated being out in certain spaces is a significant concern to her and described her reason for implementing specific evaluative measures in varying cis-normative spaces, like school, where the child is “stealth” for the most part. She stated,

I also know who I can and can't (or shouldn't) reach out to when I need to talk about stresses and such related to others' response to [Transgender Child]'s gender identity. I've also learned how to evaluate if a person is safe to talk to about [Transgender Child]. Most of the time I just introduce her as my daughter, then if someone seemed safe and it seemed pertinent for me to share then I'll share that she's trans – but I only share that she

is gender fluid with people that I know are safe...we are technically “stealth” at school right now, only a couple of people know her as trans.

Social Transition Necessary Supports

Gabby spoke to needing various supports and resources throughout her Transgender child’s transition to her affirming gender. She described these supports and the benefits they provided to her, her partner, and their daughter while transitioning. Five micro-themes encompassed how she conveyed the necessity of support while raising a transgender child and they are *Needs in the beginning of transition and the impact of those needs*, *Self-determined education*, *Need for visibility*, *LGBTQ+ community as family*, and *PLPSG*.

Needs in the Beginning of Transition and the Impact of Those Needs. The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) appeared to be a necessary support for Gabby and her daughter in the beginning. The organization was just one of the supports she reached out to and here she explained her need for supports at various aspects of her child’s transition to her affirming gender. Gabby described her and her child’s needs and recounted the impact of getting supports and how they influenced her as a cisgender parent to a transgender child, particularly in the beginning. She stated,

Our primary needs when [Transgender Child] first came out were: Normalization and validation (shifting your entire worldview and dealing with rejecting family and community members can feel crazy making!), and education (we needed to understand what [Transgender Child] was experiencing, that it was healthy and normal, and also needed to learn about how her identity fit within the greater context our of society and community).

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It seemed Gabby deemed having supports available as a great necessity to parents because of the impact they make. She illustrated normalizing and validating other parents or guardians to TGE children and equated this to her own experience as a parent raising a transgender child. She exclaimed,

...it's important to validate parents, normalize their experience, and provide education (all while being patient!) – these are the things I needed at the beginning of [Transgender Child]'s transition, and because I was provided these things, I was able to grow and stretch and transform as a parent.

“A Whole lot of Education”. Gabby voiced her experience with getting educated about TGE people and their experiences and expressed the impact doing so had on her. She demonstrated the growth that came from learning more about this community to better support and affirm her own child and exclaimed unlearning cis-normed values. She stated,

It took a whole lot of education, and expansion of my thinking before I realized that her gender identity is truly expansion. Her identity doesn't fit in a box...The more I learn about the history and realities of Transgender and gender-expansive people, the more I feel like I understand her experience, and the more empowered I feel. I acknowledge that I'll never fully understand what it is like to be a gender-expansive child, or adult.

“EVERYTHING”. Gabby emphasized such education and change comes from engaging in and being a part of the community in addition to participating in change efforts, like research and advocacy. She expressed value in having the LGBTQ community available for her and her family was significant. She stated,

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Getting the families of trans/gender-expansive youth AND LGBTQ community members together is EVERYTHING [emphasized by participant]. I learned so much from these community members – and when my partner and I’s families rejected us – the LGBTQ community became our family. Events where we can meet and learn from each other, that was the most helpful for us...

While Gabby viewed having a community available for her and her family as being important, she also interpreted giving her child space to voice her subjective experience as being educational and a change agent for herself and for other TGE children as well. Gabby spoke to her experience with giving her own transgender child opportunities to create visibility for her other TGE children. She described this as such,

In order to help [Transgender Child] express herself and feel heard, we participated in several studies and advocacy efforts whose primary aim was to elevate the voiced of our gender-expansive youth...At the age of 8, [Transgender Child]’s visibility and desire to share her story have helped her to become an advocate for her community.

Play Group. Gabby’s education and growth were first experienced when she and her partner attended their first PLPSG. She described this experience as being significant for her, her partner, and their transgender child. Gabby illustrated the immediate changes that followed leaving the group the very day she attended the PLPSG for the first time and described the changes that occurred as a result of attending. She conveyed beginning to understand the way she understood gender was inaccurate and illustrated how the group assisted her with acknowledging her transgender child and respecting her internal gender so she could live as her authentic self. This was Gabby’s first experience as a supportive and affirming parent. She stated,

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My partner and I realized we needed help, that we didn't have the tools or knowledge we needed to help [Transgender Child]. We went to the [undisclosed resource center] and attended a Parents of Transgender and Gender-Expansive Kids Playgroup. At the playgroup, we met an amazing advocate and co-director of [undisclosed resource center] named [-]. He let me say everything that was on my heart – even things I said out of ignorance, things I'm embarrassed to say I believed at that time. Then [He] very gently educated my partner and I. It was like our eyes were opened to a reality we hadn't realized was there the entire time. After that first play group, we took [Transgender Child] to the store and let her pick out a new wardrobe. Every piece of clothing had a combination of glitter, sequins, rainbows, neon leopard print, or pink and/or purple. We stopped censoring her altogether, and she went to school the next Monday in a dress, with a huge stripped purple flower in her hair.

LGBTQ+ Community as Family. Attending the PLPSG impacted Gabby positively and created a space for her to find the LGBTQ+ communities. She began to recognize them as family for her and her immediate family who had lost connection with their family of origin. Having the LGBTQ+ community seemed to have helped her to shift her perspective on family and she began to understand that family can be anyone who is loving, caring, and supportive. She stated,

When we started attending LGBTQ+ community events, I learned that family can be affirming, loving, respectful, genuine, and compassionate. These are things I had not known in my immediate family. The LGBTQ+ community welcomed our entire family with open arms. I learned that family is not blood, it's community. As we met members of the community, and saw them at multiple events, and connected with them on social

media, and started attending their family events (birthdays and such) – we started to feel connected to them in a way that was so much healthier than the connections I’ve had with blood relatives. These amazing people have changed how I view family, and the connections I chose to cultivate with others.

“Beautiful Colors and Spectrums”

Gabby seemed to find meaning of her experience as a parent to a transgender child through her transgender child’s experience; through her own observations, Gabby interpreted how her child experiences the world. There are six micro-themes that describe how her Transgender child’s experience has been significant for her. They include *New reality*, *“Incredibly Special”*, *Disconnected language*, *“Gender-Unicorn”*, *“Continued social transition”*, and *Celebrating*.

New Reality. Here Gabby illustrated how her child’s transition has impacted the way she sees and understands her transgender child. She described feelings she is conflicted with and conveyed the similarities of both her and her transgender child’s emotional process. She stated,

Having [Transgender Child] as a daughter has helped me to see the many beautiful colors and spectrums of identity that color this world... she often talks about feeling like her gender identity is this “big secret” and that it’s “complicated”. I’m often fearful that someone will hurt or harass her for being her authentic self. Maybe there are some parallels in what we are both feeling.

“Incredibly Special”. As part of her making meaning of her experience as a parent to a transgender child through her child’s experience, Gabby also demonstrated how she experiences her child’s transitional phases to her affirmed gender and the meaning of the transition. She

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discussed the impact of her child's transition on being more open-minded and understanding that her child will continue to transition regardless of the challenges they were faced with. Gabby seemed to be proud of her child and her willingness to defy cis-normed gender norms. She stated,

We always knew that [Transgender Child] was different, that there was something incredibly special about her...I've always called her my rainbow child – not as a reference to the LGBTQ community, but as a way of describing just how colorful her personality is...This transition is ongoing – I would say that we are more established, but we are constantly met with new challenges since there's no real 'end' to the transition... [Transgender child's transition has impacted parent] In so many wonderful ways! She opened my eyes to a brave new world and showed me that the reality I once believed to be so black and white is in fact colorful and dynamic.

“Gender-Unicorn”. One aspect of Gabby's meaning making also included how she experienced her daughter's disclosure, the difficulties she had with understanding her transgender daughter, and how she continued to experience her child positively. She recounted her own intrapersonal process in the beginning of her child's transition and adds where she is with it now. She also conveyed the varying nuances of the transition, lending to her finding her child fascinating. Gabby stated,

The first time [Transgender Child] tried to tell my partner and I that she was a girl on the inside was when she was 3 years old. During the beginning stages of [Transgender Child's] transition, I held on to the idea that we simply assigned the wrong gender at birth, but that she still fit the male-female binary...Neither she nor I had the language to describe what was happening in her mind, body, and spirit...Now I think of her as a kind

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of gender-unicorn. She's unique and kind of magical – and still leaves a trail of glitter wherever she goes.

“Continued Social Transition”. Language seemed to be of great importance to Gabby. Her meaning making resounded in the language she used to discuss how she interpreted the transitional process for her daughter. Here she described the various levels of transition for her child and how she observes her child's future transitions. She stated,

Perhaps this could be framed as pre-coming out and social transition, being out and social acknowledgement as a Transgender female, continued social transition – start of medical transition - and navigating self-disclosure of Transgender identity...

Celebrating. Gabby's transitional experience has created a new way for her to see and understand her transgender child. She illustrated how she interpreted her daughter using her voice in the future to create change and giving space for other TGE children to feel safe coming out. She celebrates her child and her gender. Gabby is open to her sharing her true self and spoke highly of how she views her child. She stated,

[Transgender child] is a fearless, courageous young lady with a powerful voice. She celebrates her identity, and hopes that by sharing her story, other kids might be brave enough to live as their authentic selves.

Pam

There are seven experiential themes that encompass Pam's experience being the mother of a trans-female child. These themes are **“Society tells you it's something to be sad about”, “Lucky”, Advocacy agenda, Normalizing, Support for other cis-parents, “I know that I don't know anything”, and Self-determined resources and supports.**

“Society Tells You It’s Something to be Sad About”

Living in a cisnormative society appeared to have impacted Pam’s experience significantly. There are ten micro-themes that incorporate the experiential theme **“Society tells you it’s something to be sad about”** that illustrate how she experiences the influences of society on how she and other people experience her child. These micro-themes include *“You’ve never met a real Trans kid”, “Onboard”, Ambivalent emotions, “On the fence”, “My issue”, Normalizing TGE kids struggle, “So many worse things”, Positive and Negative experiences,* and *“People don’t get that.”*

To begin with, here is an illustration of how Pam perceived societal influences on how people were socialized to understand TGE people’s transitional process. This excerpt from Pam appeared specific to the sadness she feels, or tries not to feel, about her child being transgender, and where this emotion transpires from. She stated,

It’s an easy thing to be sad about because society tells you it’s something to be sad about.

And I’m gonna tell society, “F’you, we’re not being sad about this.”

“You’ve Never Met a Real Trans Kid”. Here Pam expressed concerns and challenges she experiences while raising a TGE child. These barriers include having cis-people question her affirming her TGE child, feeling the need to protect her TGE child, and the conscious conflict she has about others finding out about her child’s genitalia. Cisnormative society standards seemed to have impacted the way Pam understood and construed gender. These norms do not respect TGE children or their internal gender and are discriminatory. She stated,

...you have people come and say, “Well, they’re too young to make these decisions.

These kids are too young.” And it’s like, well, that means you’ve never met a real trans kid...

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Societal norms around binary gender seemed to have also influenced Pam's desire to keep her child's identity safe. She spoke to being the spokesperson for her family in order to keep her child safe. Pam stated,

I'm going to keep her, um, identity very private from kind of this point...I decided I'm going to be, I can be the advocate for my family and I can be, but I'm not going to put her picture out there...

While discussing the conscious conflict she experienced about people finding out that her daughter's genitalia does not match, what cisnormative values recognize as being, her designated sex at birth, Pam emphasized being concerned about how someone might misconstrue the way she understands her own experiences about her transgender child's genitalia and how she feels about it. She expressed the ambivalent feelings she experiences about this and stated,

It's overwhelming, this sounds silly, and I know I'm being recorded, so I hope it's taken correctly, but, um, I think about, you know, that she has a penis. I think about that a lot. And I think about if I could get her the gender surgery now, I would. She's totally a girl. That's the only thing that makes her not a girl right now, in society's eyes...Yep. It's the only thing. But it's something that nobody sees but her.

Another challenge Pam recounted is her experience with navigating the TGE community as cis-person. She illustrated value in being determined to go out and find the community and engage with the community members so she can be educated and able to support her daughter effectively and conveyed her desire to be educated by people in the community. She stated,

They're not gonna come find you and you don't know who is Transgender in the community...unless you're actively seeking them out...so that can be scary when you're

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trying to find them to try to get support and to try to say, “Help me to do this right. Help me. Educate me. Tell me how to do this correctly so I don’t mess it up as a parent.”

Pam spoke to her need to be knowledgeable about TGE people and experiences, specifically around medical interventions that may prevent her child from enduring surgical procedures she understands to be evasive. This narrative included a conversation Pam has with her daughter about medical interventions and why she believes having connections within the TGE community as being valuable. Pam described common conversations she has with her daughter,

...she comes to me probably once a week and will say, “When” I get the surgery, is it gonna hurt?” Or, you know, “When I get a vagina is it gonna be, do, um, will I know when I have to pee?...they’re very age-appropriate, authentic questions, and I answer them. And most of the time I say, “I’m not really sure. Let’s, you know, we need to start writing these down so that when we do talk to a doctor...she talks about, you know, “wanting to be a mommy someday”...We don’t want until they’re eighteen and quote/unquote, “make these [medical intervention] decisions as an adult.” It’s too late... from my research...

Pam illustrated concerns she has about having a child, AMAB, in transition. She voiced what she has learned from the research and from speaking to TGE people about the importance of early interventions for her child. Such interventions, as Pam described, are preventative measures.

When you’re born male, you know, there are issues with once you go through a male puberty, there are things that structurally happen with height, with bone structure of the face that are very hard to change without mass, major, major surgeries. And if I can prevent that, then I’m gonna do that.

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Being concerned about affirming medical procedures is just one concern Pam attended to. Here she voiced a challenge that was difficult for her and conveyed one such situation in which her daughter encountered religious discrimination from a neighbor child. She seemed to be bewildered by damaging comments her Christian neighbors made toward her daughter and exclaimed,

...the only hiccups I've really experienced are related, it's- it's from a religious base...

Just before her hair grew out. Um, the religious family down the street telling her that Jesus doesn't love her anymore, that was a hard day, um, not because we're religious, but just the-the nerve of some people...

Pam seemed to understand that not all cis-parents feel the same way as she does. She also appeared to recognize they are not going to encounter their TGE child's transition in a similar way to her. Here she recounted situations with other cis-parents with TGE children and illustrated how they respond to her supporting her child at a young age. Pam appeared to be astonished by their reaction toward her affirming her TGE child as parent and expressed uncertainty about how she thinks about such situations and seemed unable to process by what means she should take to handle these circumstances. She stated,

I've had a few parents of [TGE] teenagers tell me they're jealous. They're jealous of me and their gender and it almost makes them angry that I got on board earlier than they did and, you know, and I don't really know what to do with that...it makes me sad and I don't want to be sad...

“Onboard”. It seemed a large part of Pam's change process included learning and using language that is affirming toward her daughter and other TGE people. Pam seemed to recognize the use of pronouns as being an important part of her story and pertinent to her showing her

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daughter she is supporting her. She spoke to this in the first interview so the interviewer could understand how she makes meaning of language use.

...I'm gonna refer to her as him in the beginning just for, so you know when the transition took place... We're all pronouns, onboard with pronouns, clothes, all the gifts are exactly, you know, when birthdays come around, it's, everything is what she wants. Everything is, you know, there's, nobody's trying to change anything about her. We're all on the spectrum.

Ambivalent Emotions. Although Pam was adamant about not feeling sad about her child being TGE, it seemed she experienced conflicting emotions around raising a transgender child who is living in a conventional society. These emotions seemed to include fear, happiness, and pride in addition to being scared. Although she mentioned refusing to feel such emotions or be sad about her child transitioning it seemed she might be trying to confront emotions she does not want to feel because of implicit and explicit societal constructs that are forced onto people about TGE individuals. She stated,

These kids need...procedures and these medical needs done earlier and earlier... my child is really getting to be in these first, you know, decade, two decades of this happening, and that's so great...it's still new...it's hard because it's new...this is all new so it's hard...I don't want to be sad in a situation that's not a sad situation...I refuse to be sad. (laugh)... I have a healthy, happy, loving, good person on my hands, so how could I be sad? How could I be mad? How could I be unhappy with my situation?

Through this dialogue Pam pointed to where she focuses her attention, seeing her situation "as a gift" and expressing the importance of raising her daughter in a supportive environment. Pam

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seemed to desire ensuring her child receives appropriate affirming procedures so her daughter can then engage in micro- and macro-levels of systemic change in the future. Pam stated,

I'm going to be happy, and I'm going to look at this as a gift. And I'm going to educate myself. And I'm going to align myself with people like you and like [TGE adult co-facilitator]. And I'm going to raise a really healthy Transgender adult, and so that she can go out in the world and align herself with other healthy Transgender adults and hopefully help other Transgender adults who aren't getting wrapped up in their mothers' arms right now, you know, and-and then change the world. Hopefully she can go change the world.

“On the Fence”. Although Pam recognized the reality of transprejudice being close, she also expressed her own interpretation of socio-political change in conventional society that supports and affirms TGE people. As she immersed herself into the transgender community more, Pam came to understand visibility of TGE people as being significant to her own educational experience. She appeared to interpret this as being beneficial for other people as well. It seemed she is speaking directly to cis-people when she illustrated her own experience of engaging in the TGE community and how she perceived it being helpful in normalizing TGE people and experiences. Additionally, Pam described being positive that future systemic changes will be affirming toward TGE people. It seemed she made sense of this through a metaphor,

This isn't the end of the world. This isn't religiously tied...it's a new day...We live in an amazing time with medical intervention...we live in a time where people are more open and more understanding, we just have to find those people. And then the people that are on the fence will eventually, they'll eventually come over...

“My Issue”. Pam seemed to recognize her own limits of being in spaces with people experiencing a similar phenomenon and processing their loss. Further, she appeared to perceive

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her child's transition differently from how other parents have observed and experienced their own child's transition, yet she described similar emotions experienced with ambiguous loss. This loss appeared to be a painstakingly difficult process for her to work through and such complications of finding closure with her TGE child's transition may suggest ambivalence for Pam as feeling as such does not appear to fit her values or morals as a primary caregiver.

Although Pam recognized and acknowledged she needs to work through the ambiguous loss she feels she also seemed to understand that such feelings fester from implicit and explicit social constructs influenced by cisnormative society belief systems. She distinguished her feelings of loss as not being her child's concern, but rather her own to acknowledge and work through. Being a mother is part of her experience, being a mother to a transgender child is another part—both parts of being a mother impact her identity. She emphasized this being a minor hang up for her, yet she spoke to the pain she feels about the expectations she had for her transgender child.

When I was growing up, I always wanted four kids and I thought the coolest combination was a girl and three boys, and that's what I ended up getting...now I have two girls and two boys. And that has been hard for my emotion, you know, like, I always thought that was so cool, a girl with three brothers...And so that's my issue, and that's something I have to get over. And that's nothing to do with her, I'm not mad at her because of that, you know. That's me...So it's, like, little things like that are my issue...getting rid of all the boy clothes, the little boy clothes was hard, but that's about me. That's my, you know, that's my issue. That's not her...

Here is one specific instance Pam feels ambiguous loss related to her child's name change. This seemed to have impacted her more than she anticipated, as it is "just little stuff." She stated,

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...the name, the name is hard, changing the name has been, you know...that's an issue that I have to deal with. And it's just little stuff...And they may always be a little, hurt my heart, my mommy heart.

Normalizing TGE Kids Struggle. As a parent of a transgender child, Pam seemed to normalize TGE children and their experiences although she seemed ambivalent about putting her child's face out into the community to create visibility and normalize. She appeared to feel concern about making her child's identity visible to people she does not know because of safety precautions. Normalizing her child's experience appeared to include having conversations about defying gender and being open about raising a transgender child. She stated,

...I struggle with, too, as a parent, how open do I be that I have a trans kid? You know, and say, I mean, I don't mind being open that I have a trans kid, but how open do I say, "Here is my trans kid, and here is her face, and here who, here's what she looks like"... That's something I struggle with quite often...in the presentation I did have her picture in it. Um, and I struggled with that, um, about whether to put that up there. But I did do it, I, because I thought it was important to show, you know, um, that these kids just look like normal kids.

"So Many Worse Things". Normalizing her own experience and the experience of her child, and other TGE people, seemed to be significant for Pam. She voiced how she interpreted raising a TGE child in a cisnormative conventional society and shared how she has observed the growth her daughter has made since disclosing. Pam also conveyed how she experiences this process and stated,

I think there's so many worse things in this world than having a trans kid...it's humbling and, uh, emotional and, you know, I have very much enjoyed meeting so many people in

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the community and, um, yeah. It's been, it's an adventure...She's 100% girl now...
passing...happy...the last few years she's just blossomed.

Pam also adds feeling fortunate that she is a mother and able to raise her children regardless of the challenges that come from being a parent in general. She spoke to this experience, conveyed the normalcy of it, and shared having a transgender child is not a crisis or disaster. Pam stated,

I feel lucky because, um, well, I'm, my whole life all I ever wanted was to be a mom.

Um, and I got very lucky in that I have four children, four very healthy children, and, um, and so I feel very lucky in that way. But I feel lucky that I got who I got. And I think there are so many worse things in the entire world to have other than a trans kid. (laughs)
Like, to me, I just think it's not, while there are challenges and there are, I mean, there's challenges with just being a mom. There's challenges with any kid. You could have the quote/unquote, "most perfect kid in the world," and there's still gonna be challenges

Positive and Negative Experiences. In her narrative, Pam expressed both positive and negative experiences as a caregiver to a Transgender child in a cisnormative society that values gender binary. Here is an example of the disparity Pam has experienced within systems that have supported her and her child and systems that have not been supportive. In her description of one experience within an unsupportive space Pam illustrated her interpretation of what seemed to be cis-people behaving absurdly toward her child, AMAB, wearing a feminine costume at Halloween prior to her transition. She stated,

We went to Disneyland on Halloween and he wore a Supergirl outfit...the shuttle driver was like, uh, "Super, he's a boy." And I'm like, I was like, "I'm looking at a grown man dressed as a bunny. like, I'm looking at a whole family of M&M's walking by. It's Halloween, leave him alone."

“People Don’t Get That”. Pam seemed to have experienced her very own understanding of self during her child’s transitional process. During this time, she began to reflectively understand her own gendered self—through this reflexivity she appeared to gain a new perspective of her gendered and privileged self. She described it as such,

...I can sit here as a woman and be completely content being a woman and not be attracted to anything going on around me and be okay, you know. And it’s like, people don’t get that...I think, it’s not that I didn’t get it, I just never stopped to think about it...

“Lucky”

Pam described various stages she, as a parent to a transgender child who continues to transition, experiences with her daughter during her social transition. She illustrated this experience as being one where she feels “Lucky.” The micro-themes that encompass this experiential theme include *Upbringing*, *Pre-social transition*, *The journal*, and *“Blossomed”*.

Upbringing. Pam’s upbringing seemed to impact the way she experienced her child, her child’s transition, and herself throughout pre-disclosure, pre-social transition, disclosure, social transition, and continued transition. Growing up in a supportive environment appeared to influence how she understood her child and the support and affirmation she showed to her transgender child. She stated,

I grew up in a very loving, open, accepting family...at about two is when we started to notice [gender nonconformity...we were really onboard about, like, the kids can play with whatever they want to play with, they can wear whatever they want to play with...we never said no to any, you know...it just never stopped [with Transgender child]...

Pre-Social Transition. Pam spoke to the observations she made of her child prior to realizing she is transgender. Some of these observations were gender related while others were emotional and behavioral. Pam disclosed she is not certain if related to not being authentic gender self or not and illustrated it as such,

I thought, okay, well, we'll see, you know...then at three, um, he was Elsa for Halloween, obsessed with Frozen...my mom knitted him...a long, a yarn, um, wig...then at four, he was Supergirl for Halloween...She was a tough little kid...There was a frustration there that came out in her behavior.

The Journal. Her child's disclosure seemed to be significant for Pam. The moment included finding her transgender child's journal and observing her child expressing sadness and hopelessness about her gender. This was when Pam realized her child was transgender,

...in first grade, I, um, found a journal. And in it, it is a pink sparkle journal... it had a picture of a girl... a stick figure... and then a picture of a stick figure little boy with the eyes crossed out...and it said "I have a secret. I want to be a girl. But I don't tell very many people."

That special moment of finding out her child was Transgender also encompassed how Pam responded to her child's journal statement. She voiced what she wrote in her child's journal near the disclosure response to relay her love regardless of her daughter's internal gender. She seemed to recognize the importance of supporting her child in that moment.

Dear [TGE child], I love you so much as a boy and I will still love you so much...as a girl.

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“Blossomed”. Learning to identify resources and supports and understanding affirming language were just a few aspects of Pam’s experience with the social transition of her daughter. She voiced having trouble in the beginning with navigating the transition and conveys how she views her child and her child’s social transition as including various emotions and experiences. She stated,

The beginning was probably the most overwhelming...She’s just got this really funny pers-, you know, she’s funny and wild and silly. But, and I just look at her, and I think, like, I’m sorry, if you don’t love that...She’s a cool cat...there’s just so many other things in this world to worry about than whether this kid looks like a girl and wasn’t born technically a girl...

Pam voiced her experience as a parent raising a transgender child as being “an adventure” and expressed how she observed her child post-social transition,

She’s 100% girl now...passing...happy...the last few years she’s just blossomed.

Advocacy Agenda

As part of her experience, it seemed Pam has come to understand that she can use her privilege to support the TGE community and create change. By sharing her story, it appeared as though it is a cathartic experience for her. An experience she deemed an educational experience for others. This experiential theme has four micro-themes that explain Pam’s reasoning for advocacy work. They are *Telling narrative as advocacy*, *Using privilege as a cis-person for advocacy*, and *Parent’s reasons to advocate*.

Telling Narrative as Advocacy. Pam expressed telling her narrative as being part of advocacy work that she does to inform and support both parents of TGE children and TGE

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children themselves. This work seemed to be significant for Pam, conveying an interest in helping others unlearn cisgender norms. She stated,

[to say] it will be okay. So however I can help in that way...I don't know what that means yet, but that's how I see my information and my story helping other families or helping the community...I would love to be able to change people's minds...that would be amazing and if I can do that to one person, my work is done.

Using Privilege as a Cis-person for Advocacy. It seemed Pam deemed she can use her privilege to create systemic change for TGE people. Here she illustrated how she feels about advocacy work as a cis-person raising a transgender child to attempt to decrease marginalization that TGE people experience. She stated,

I have a lot of privilege, and I want to use it for power. I want to use it for good. And I pride myself on that...there will always be that marginalized group in this society because this will never go away if people not supporting it, but if I can use my privilege for good and, you know, and for good power and to be able to say, "No, let's do this right. And tell me what I need to do to do it right."

Parent's Reasons to Advocate. Advocating seemed to be the essence of what Pam does as a parent raising a transgender child in a cisnormative society. She stated she advocates to support people like her child, AMAB in transition to female, and to assist cisgender parents who were struggling when their child discloses or transitions. Pam indicated,

I want to be an advocate for other trans girls who were born male...if I can help parents, you know, yeah, if I can just help that and say, you know, this is okay...

Normalizing

Pam voiced parallels of having a child who goes into a career field that may impact them financially and having a child who is transgender. She also spoke to how she interpreted the sociopolitical movements supporting TGE people and the resemblance of paradigm shift for gay and lesbian community. It seemed she found normalizing her child's identity and experiences as being significant, recognizing the significance of sociopolitical movements that have paved the way for her daughter and other TGE children to be normalized. There are two micro-themes that encompass this experiential theme, they are *Normalizing ambiguous loss* and *Sociopolitical shift*.

Normalizing Ambiguous Loss. The pain Pam feels from experiencing ambiguous loss appeared to coincide with her need to normalize attending to the expectations of what she envisioned for her TGE child. Such expectations seemed to play a role in the ambiguous loss she feels as a result of living in a cisnormative society. She emphasized supporting her child regardless of which path they choose because they deserve to be respected as their authentic self and stated,

...I think we all have things with any kid, like, oh, we want, we see one of our kids who say they want to be a doctor and then they end up being a teacher...or they, you know, want to be a doctor and they end up being an artist, or they want to be an artist and they end being a Who knows?...it doesn't matter. Like, you have a vision for your kid and it's not, but you have to support your kids.

Socio-Political Shift. Pam spoke to socio-political movements that seemed to have been significant to her in understanding the current and future climate for TGE people. She voiced how she perceived this as resembling the paradigm shift for gay and lesbian communities in the

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past yet recognized her own limits of understanding as a cisgender heterosexual person. She stated,

I feel like where we were twenty-plus years in the gay community where we are now in the transgender community. That is my limit, you know, what little bit of me diving into the community in the last couple years...it's scary because so many people are not welcoming and not okay with it. And I'm hoping within the next decade it will be like where we are now with the gay community where it's not a big deal.

Supports for Other Cis-Parents

Pam seemed to want to be a support and resource for cis-parents who are new to experiencing raising a TGE child or having issues with supporting and affirming for various reasons. She spoke to being open to meeting where these new cis-parents are in their process and providing the space to process. The two micro-themes that align with this experiential theme are *Sharing* and *Showing grace to new cis-parents of TGE children*.

Sharing. Since Pam has experienced the lack of education available as a result of living in a cisnormative society she desires being a support and resource for cis-parents with TGE children. Educating cis-parents seemed to be a significant part of her journey and an important meaning making experience for her.

So my biggest thing that I have found for my calling to be, is to help other families' parents not be scared. That's, so that's my biggest thing, is to not be scared and not be sad... how can I use that to help the next parent who maybe might have a little bit of a fight?...It's more about sharing that kind of information...kids are just a couple years older than her are starting the hormones and, like, what's that like? And tell us how that's going. And how's insurance going?

Showing Grace to New Cis-Parents of TGE Children. Being a supportive cis-parent who has a TGE child appeared to a part of Pam's identity— she desired providing others with information through her own knowledge and experience and interpreted this as a process of showing grace and reassuring cis-parents that their feelings are valid. Pam seemed ambivalent about new cis-parents of TGE children feeling sad about this process and at one point she indicated she does not want them to feel sad, but also seemed to understand the importance of feeling the various feelings, like sadness, that come with being a parent of a transgender child. Here she voiced how she interpreted this process, offering that she wants to help cis-parent's feel safe with their experience on their journey having a TGE child. She stated

I keep going back to offering each other that grace and that space to be upset.... or it is okay if your religious views are creating conflict for you. It's okay to have the space to discuss that...giving everybody the grace and the room to have their, have their emotions and their feelings...it's okay to be mad or it's okay to be sad...We just need to be able to offer each other that grace to get through it.

“I Know That I Don't Know Anything”

There are six micro-themes that encompass the experiential theme **“I know that I don't know anything”** and they are *Humble*, *Actively pursued self-determined education*, *“Education is not readily available yet”*, *Educating others with her story*, *Impact of education on difference between affectional identity and gender*, and *“Less scary. Less foreign.”* The nuances of education for Pam seemed relevant to her own story and understanding how she makes meaning of her experience raising a transgender child in a cisnormative society.

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Humble. While Pam works to advocate for the TGE community she finds necessity in staying humble when learning about TGE people and experiences. She spoke the challenges that she experienced searching for information and educating herself and conveyed,

...I try to be humble and I try to say, I know that I don't know anything. I know a little bit right now, and I'm open to learning as much as I possibly can about this community...

Actively Pursued Self-Determined Education. It seemed part of normalizing her own experience included not feeling sad about deciding to support and affirm her TGE child. While Pam spoke to societal norms influencing why parents feel negatively about their child transitioning, she also acknowledged this as part of her process, and meaning making, as a parent to a TGE child. Here she spoke to being self-determined to find educational supports and resources and illustrated how difficult this can be. She stated,

Is it tough? Yes. Things are tough and there's a lot of education that I have to teach myself and I have to actively pursue.

"Education is Not Readily Available Yet". Through her own process of learning and growing, Pam realized the education on TGE people and experiences was lacking. It could be assumed the lack of education available is a result of living in a cisnormative society. She stated, "the education is not readily available yet."

Educating Others With Her Story. Pam viewed her narrative as a cis-gender parent raising a TGE child as being educational and a way to improve the overall well-being for TGE people living in a cisnormative society. She appeared to find meaning in not making TGE people's lives more difficult through transprejudice practices and cisnormative society standards.

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She described why she shares her story and illustrated the hopes of changing people's minds.

Pam stated,

I would love to be able to change people's minds. I would love to be able to say, for somebody to say, "This is totally against everything I believe in." And then just talk to me and then say, "Oh, you've totally changed my mind. Yeah. Let's go for it"... don't make it harder for them, don't put up roadblocks in front of them when-when these are life-saving, the research shows this is suicide preventions or life-saving things.

Impact of Education on Difference Between Affectional Identity and Gender. Pam recounted learning the difference between sexual/affectional orientation and gender. She illustrated the value of knowing this and interpreted the importance of knowing how they differ to make the social transition for TGE people more accessible. She conveyed this with the use of separating the ideas into buckets to help people understand this better. Pam stated,

They [gender and sexuality] have nothing to do with each other...It's so different.

They're completely separate buckets. And, like, if we could, yeah, if more people could really conceptualize that, I think it would make life and this situation, the transition so much easier for everybody, yeah...And grasping that was a huge eye-opener for me...I wish more people would really take the time to learn that because it really puts stuff into perspective...I think that will help with, really help people who are struggling.

"Less Scary. Less Foreign". Pam seemed to experience visibility as being important and interpreted this as being significant for cis-people particularly. She spoke to visibility as creating a sense of normalcy regarding TGE people and experiences and voiced how she experiences and feels about the TGE community overall. She stated,

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The less scary it [TGE community] becomes...And the less foreign it becomes...I've met amazing people in the community and I hope to meet more...So, yeah, it's a, it's a really cool community. And it's made up of all different walks of life.

Self-Determined Resources and Supports

Pam recounted the value of having resources that were affirming and supports, like the PLPSG and other parental support groups, in place because of the positive impacts they have on both parents and their TGE children. For Pam, there are 2 micro-themes that illustrate the significance of having resources and supports available; they are *“Kid play”* and *Parent support group*.

“Kid Play”. Pam spoke to how she perceived the PLPSG as being “amazing” and conveyed the importance of talking with TGE people cofacilitating the group. She illustrated the group as being helpful for both the children and the adults who attend but recognized that children just want a place to fit in and play. Pam stated,

I think the playgroup, the kid play, the one for the little kids is amazing. And I think... really for me, it's-it's to meet the parents, right? It's to meet people like you. It's to get to talk to [Trans co-facilitator] one-on-one. It's to meet people like [TGE child's name], [TGE child's name] mom...the kids could care, like, they just want to play, right?

Parent support group. Although Pam experienced the PLPSG positively she described difficulties she had encountered while attending a parent support group for parents of TGE children. She explained why it was a significant endeavor for her and emphasized how she interpreted the group for her and for other parents. Pam seemed to recognize the value in having spaces as such for parents who need to speak their story even if it impacts her negatively. Her

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own process with ambiguous loss might be influencing the difficulty she experiences while in attendance at the parent's group, nonetheless, she stated,

The [parent] support group, um, I have a hard time with...because it's sad...I've been to three, I think, and they're just very sad. And I'm not to take away, people are clearly in pain. And I'm not in pain. And I don't, I don't want to be sad...I don't want to take away from their pain, but it's, it's almost too sad for me...

Although she does not want to be sad about her child being transgender, it seemed having a space where she can hear positive experiences is beneficial for Pam. She continued to express pain in her "mommy heart" and conveyed this pain as such,

I don't want to take away from their pain, but it's, it's almost too sad for me...that was hard for me to hear the parents being sad, but that was their journey and, you know, and part of my journey in this is really, really giving everybody the grace and the room to have their, have their emotions and their feelings and-and choosing what I want to be around, you know...I would have much rather have been around a room full of healthy Transgender adults and heard their stories and positivity than the sadness. That was really hard for me.

Lee

Lee is Gabby's partner and the father to their trans-female child. While they both have different lived experiences and interpretations related to having one transgender child together, there may be situational overlaps in their narratives. One similar experience they shared was reaching out to the non-profit that supports the PLPSG to get informed on ways to help and support their child. Another is the ways in which they both observed their transgender child

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behaving and desiring to express feminine from an early age. There are two experiential themes that encompass Lee's experience as a parent raising a transgender child and they include **Impact of living in a conventional society** and **"Safe space"**.

"Ugliness"

Lee's experience as a parent to a transgender child seemed to be impacted by a cisnormative society. As a cis-male with privilege he spoke to realizing influences society had on the way he understood gender prior to his child's social transition. There are ten micro-themes that circumscribe Lee's experience within the experiential theme **"Ugliness"**. They are *"Bought into gender stereotypes"*, *"To heart"*, *Fitting the mold*, *Reassessing*, *Rejecting to Accepting*, *Language of Parent*, *Protective*, *Parent's reflective process on sexual/affectional self*, and *Words of advice for other cis-parents of TGE children*.

"Bought Into Gender Stereotypes". Lee described preconceived ideas he had about gender prior to unlearning cisnormative socially constructed views of gender. Here he discussed the impact of being uninformed of transgender people and being subjected to inaccurate depictions of transgender people in media. Learning accurate information about TGE people and their experiences, as voiced by Lee, gave him space to process his transgender child to understand and give her space to socially transition with his support and affirmation. He stated,

I think that from day one, being a new parent, I bought into the "blue for boys, pink for girls" thing. I really created the mold by pushing what I saw as masculine from the time my first 2 children (1 cis[male] and 1 trans [female; close in age]) were born...I had a very limited knowledge of the trans experiences. The most exposure I had had was through very limited and inaccurate portrayals in the media. I always saw trans people as sexually deviant...

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Here Lee spoke to how he observed his child conforming to gender normed behaviors that are deemed appropriate for children AMAB. Lee conveyed the difficulty with his own process of this and stated,

I saw her try to fit the ‘mold’ that we had set forth but I really didn’t know what it meant or how to process it.

“To Heart”. Lee discerned the impact of unlearning preconceived ideas he knew about gender during his upbringing, which was reinforced in the military. Such gendered understandings came with embracing masculinity as someone AMAB. Lee spoke to this being something he believed until his child, AMAB, taught him otherwise. He exclaimed,

I was raised with the idea that my job was to ‘make my sons into men’ and I took it to heart. I was raised only having access to very gendered toys and activities and thought that that was what I had to provide my kids... I joined the military and adopted a very ‘caveman’ tough guy persona. When I got out of the military... I kept up that conservative tough guy attitude until my kid rocked my world.

Fitting the Mold. Lee recounted how he experienced the differences between his two AMAB children, specifically the different gendered behaviors and expressions, as they were growing up. He stated how he came to realize his Transgender child was conforming to cisnormative ideas about socially constructed ideas of gender binary prior to her disclosing and social transition. Here Lee described how he observed his daughter’s experience prior to being able to be her authentic self and illustrated understanding she was not happy. He stated,

I knew pretty early that my kiddo was different because of her likes and interests. At 3 years old, she wanted to dress up as a female monster for Halloween...She always

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gravitated towards shiny/glittery toys and crafts while my cis child preferred things like GI Joes and superheroes. I could always tell that she didn't really like the clothes that we picked for her but I didn't make the connection until after her transition that she was going along with what she thought she wanted but that she wasn't really happy...I saw her try to fit the 'mold'.

Reassessing. Lee acknowledged he was not always supportive toward his daughter's disclosure or social transition and admitted he needed support from the TGE community to help him become educated on transgender people, experiences, and concerns so he could meet his daughter where she was and affirm her. He spoke to ways the undisclosed non-profit benefited him and his daughter and voiced the significant change he made through this experience. He stated this significant experience as such,

Meeting the people at [undisclosed resource center] made me reassess my limited experiences and realize that I had it all wrong. Meeting and talking to [Two Transgender adults who direct the undisclosed resource center] really opened my eyes to how much I didn't know. I also learned how important it was for me to support my kid no matter what. I really changed who I thought I was and shifted most of my world views, I gave up the idea that my worth was defined by my masculinity. It was really a life altering process for me (in a good way).

Rejecting to Accepting. As part of his own unlearning process, Lee described a point where he assumed that he was shielding his transgender child by preventing her from dressing feminine in public. He spoke to how he interpreted this experience—going from displaying rejecting behaviors to accepting behaviors toward his daughter, and the impact his behaviors had on her. Lee described this as such,

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After meeting/talking with folks at [Undisclosed resource center] I really started to get it [Being Transgender] and opened up to her transition. Prior to that we felt that we were protecting her by not allowing her to be her authentic self outside the home but I came to understand that this was actually pretty harmful.

Language of Parent. Using specific language to describe his child's transition seemed too significant for Lee. He referred to his daughter's transition in these phases, "Pre-Transgenderition, Transgenderition, and Post-social Transgenderition."

Protective. Sheltering his children seemed to be one aspect of Lee's identity as a father; he described his role as a father as always alert and "on guard." Here Lee spoke to the challenges he has faced as a supportive parent to his transgender child and exemplified specific incidents that have impacted him and his family and compelled him to be protective. This discriminatory experience seemed to influence the necessity of protecting her. Lee stated,

I have become very protective of her (as well as all my kids). I always was but it changed with her transition. After seeing and hearing the ugliness that people can generate I have felt an intense need to shelter all of them from it...Shortly after my child transitioned at school, I had a parent confront me and inform me that she is possessed by the enemy and that allowing it was child abuse. We also had a distant family member accuse us of child abuse. I lost a repetitively close friend and so did my older son. After my kiddo was on the news (for [undisclosed non-profit organization]) I made the mistake of reading comments on social media.

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Lee seemed to feel vulnerable when he is protecting his family. He recounted how the situations described above have affected him personally and continuously keep him from being able to trust others. He stated, “These experiences have really caused me to go through life wearing ‘armor.’”

“On Guard”. Lee seemed to understand the harmful effects of his own rejecting behaviors toward his daughter, but also recognized the impact of rejecting behaviors that were displayed within society. Lee seemed to be fearful and untrustworthy of how people react to TGE people in a cisnormative society and spoke to how he interpreted humanity. He illustrated the need to shield all three of his children from, what appeared to be, discrimination and hate. He stated being hypervigilant and indicated other protective measures he takes for his children. Lee stated,

...I am constantly on guard and ready to not just educate but fight with negative people. I have really had to watch myself so that I don’t teach this kind of reaction to my kids...I do try to educate my kids about basic stuff like being aware of their surroundings but I try to hide how distrustful I am of just about everyone around me.

Lee’s need to wear ‘armor’ all the time seemed to resonate with both his desire to protect his children and living with symptoms of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). It seemed important to Lee, himself, that he hide a part of himself triggered by PTSD to protect his children. This is how he appeared to live his life in a cisnormative society.

Anytime I go anywhere, I am watching everyone. I am diagnosed with PTSD related to military combat so I have had that since I was active duty but now, I constantly am looking for a threat towards my kids. I try to hide this from them, I don’t want them going through life looking for the threat around every corner like I do.

Parent's Reflective Process on Sexual/Affectional Self. Lee voiced experiencing some intrapersonal growth through, what can be thought of as, a reflective process over the course of his child's social transition. He described his view of how he deemed his own sexual/affectional identity. Lee stated,

...I would say that I am either Bi or Pan...I am in a monogamous hetero relationship and don't really desire to anything else. I am comfortable saying that I can be attracted to any gender and that relationships for me are about the person that I'm with and not their genitalia.

Words of Advice for Other Cis-Parents of TGE Children. Lee spoke to choosing to reach out for support to get informed, and through this experience he began to comprehend the harmful effects of his behavior and unlearn cisnormative beliefs. He described being taught the importance of showing acceptance toward his daughter and her socially transition, which is something he wants other parents raising a TGE child to know. It seemed he felt like he would have benefited from this advice in the beginning and found it significant to share and stated,

I'd like other parents to know that supporting a trans kid is the most important thing they can do. You may not always get it right, but support and acceptance are number one.

"Safe Space"

Lee seemed to have experienced the PLPSG positively although he is untrustworthy of other people. Although Lee speaks to being skeptical of people in society, he voiced feeling "safe" in the PLPSG. Here he stated how he experienced attending the group,

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The play group has been a great experience for myself as well as my cis kids and partner.

I feel that it has given [TGE child] a safe space to connect with peers without having to worry about other's reactions or negativity.

Lee also offers his interpretation of how he viewed the group for his children and partner and conveyed not identifying spaces where can voice his experience being a parent to a transgender child in conventional society. He stated,

It has provided a space for my partner and I to discuss and sometimes just vent about our experiences with others that understand and have been there...My other kids have become more loving and accepting of other kids that may be different from them in all areas of their lives...I have had a hard time finding an understanding ear for these issues outside of this group.

Terri

Terri is the mother of trans-female child who is older than most of the other children portrayed in this study. There are three experiential themes that illustrate her experience as a parent raising a transgender child. These themes are **Supporting and affirming child**, **“Journey”**, and **Support systems**.

Supporting and Affirming Child.

There are four micro-themes that illustrate how Terri has experienced or continued to experience the impact of living cisnormative society. As a feminist scholar Terri indicated she has been knowledgeable of TGE people and experiences, which seemed to have occurred prior to her TGE child's disclosure, and these educational opportunities seemed to influence the way she has raised her TGE child. She indicated she and her husband have created a supportive and

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affirming environment for their TGE child and stated they have collaborated to give their daughter space to be her true authentic self. A safe environment to be able to ask them for assistance when needed appeared to be of great importance to Terri. She stated,

My husband and I tried to encourage her voicing her needs and concerns and provided her a safe space in which to make her needs known.

The micro-themes for the experiential theme **Supporting and affirming child** include *Clarification*, *Interesting challenges*, and *Pride*.

Clarification. It seemed the language Terri used regarding her transgender child were significant for her. She spoke to the fluidity she observed in her daughter's gender and illustrated the age her daughter was when she identified as a girl. Terri stated,

[Talking about her child] Daughter...To clarify, it wasn't until she was 10 that she picked to be a girl. For a few years before this she would be fluid and vary between girl and boy as she desired in different situations.

Interesting Challenges. Having access to available supports and resources also appeared to have influenced the way Terri and her family have experienced unique challenges raising a TGE child. She spoke to the encounters that have impacted her and her daughter and explained the nuances of handling them. She provided two examples of challenging factors she has encountered, yet she focused on one. She explained this situation has been particularly challenging for her to deal with and expressed the disappointment she feels after working for several months on identifying ways to accommodate her TGE child attending camp only to confront another unique challenge that made the work she had done with the camp a moot point.

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Getting a passport for her was interesting because we had to get attestation letter from her pediatrician. But then our travel plans were cancelled due to COVID-19. Coordinating sleep-away camp bunking was also unique, but then camp was cancelled due to COVID-19, which sucked after the year-long of work we did with the camp to ensure appropriate bunking for her.

Other unique challenges that Terri had written about were those that she has experienced with her daughter's school. She illustrated that the school has been supportive toward her TGE child and conveyed they have been helpful with accommodating. Nonetheless, it seemed in being supportive those working with her daughter asked cisnormative questions to help support and affirm. She stated,

There [were] also the standard questions from teachers and school counselors, but most of those were really supportive to ensure that [TGE child's] needs were being properly accommodated.

Terri did not elaborate on the specific questions the school asked in her written response, nor did she complete a third optional written response to provide further clarification on this. Thus, it can be interpreted that “standard questions” might be somewhat stigmatizing— focused on cisnormative ideas about gender, to obtain necessary accommodations for her child at school. Terri's experience with disclosing her daughter's internal gender to the school, and the interpretation she has of her transgender child's school, seemed to have been an overall positive experience for the both of them, but not without feeling some discrimination. She does, however, seem to understand the need to educate and inform school staff, so parents of TGE children do not feel interrogated by cisnormative questions around their child's gender identity. Ultimately,

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through training and informing, it appeared Terri interpreted this as creating a space for TGE children to feel safe and supported at school and other community spaces.

Pride. Other elements of this affirmation and support shows through with the pride Terri felt toward her daughter living as her true authentic self within this ciscentric-westernized society focused on binary gender. She illustrated here how her daughter inspires her and paralleled her daughter's experience to her own as a child, which seemed to be of great importance to Terri. She stated,

So, as her caregiver, I am frequently amazed at her sense of self, because I had very poor self-esteem compared to her.

“Journey”.

Terri seemed to interpret significant moments for her child that have impacted her as a parent as though this process has been a “journey.” She illustrated making meaning through her daughter's experience as a transgender child and two micro-themes encompass this experiential theme. They include *“Realization”* and *Unlike her*.

“Realization”. While observing her daughter's transition odyssey, it seemed Terri also experienced and continued to experience other circumstances that may be significant for her. These meaning making moments include Terri's interpretation of her TGE child's experience and an interpretation of her recounting how her own experience as a child differs considerably from her TGE child's experience. Here Terri demonstrated how she experienced her daughter's process to becoming her true authentic self, illustrating how the two of them differ cognitively, affectively, and behaviorally. Additionally, Terri exemplified the pride she has toward her daughter for being herself. She stated,

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As soon as she was able to verbalize her desires, and felt comfortable in sharing them, she would insist on more female oriented things (e.g., clothes, toys, accessories, notebooks, school supplies, shoes, etc.). A toddlerhood preference for all things pink, transitioned to a preference for stereotypically girl-centered toys and activities... as she acquired more language ability and a sense of self... a greater proportion of female to male friends, and ultimately at age 10, a realization that she is a girl...

Unlike Her. The bravery Terri has observed her daughter showed appeared to support her recognition of how their journeys through life differed to the age of her daughter. She stated,

No, I don't think I was like her at this age, at all. The reason I am very proud of her is because I don't think that I could be as strong and self-sufficient when I was her age. I was much more worried about fitting in and not calling any attention to myself.

This sense of pride seemed to stem from her observing her daughter's transition to her true authentic self and through observing this process through the lens of her daughter, she seemed to be making meaning of her own experience as a caregiver to a TGE child through her TGE child's experience. Terri stated,

My daughter has been making a journey to discover her true identify since she was 18 months old.

Support Systems

It appeared Terri was well-informed prior to her child's disclosure of being trans. Although she was knowledgeable it seemed she needed to identify supports outside of her and her husband's family of origins. There are three micro-themes that encompass her experience

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with needing to identify support systems. They are *Support preconceived notions of TGE people*, *Support received throughout process*, and *Timing of support*.

Supportive Preconceived Notions of TGE People. Although Terri expressed having experienced strain from some family members for many years, she also indicated being comforted by having access to other family and friends who have been supportive since the beginning and having resources to further educate her available. She demonstrated this as such,

My friends and other family members have been very supportive, so that has been really great...I have always had access to learning tools about TGE. Once I was a faculty member...I accessed medical literature and attended trainings and conferences as they became available...

Support Received Throughout Process. In addition to having these individuals as a support system, Terri illustrated other self-identified supports she has accessed as a both a scholar and a parent to a TGE child. All of these supports and resources seemed to have been readily available to Terri and were helpful when they were experiencing strain with family members. She stated,

Supportive people in our lives were always very encouraging of our efforts and [they] went out of their way to share how proud they were of us as parents. It was their way of showing their support for us. Sometimes friends shared with us web links, books, or articles they read about the topic. Other times they would talk to us about how we are doing and provided us with emotional support when we were facing difficulties with our parents.

Timing of Support. Although Terri described herself as not being “strong and self-sufficient” as a child, it seemed, as a parent raising a transgender child, she seemed compelled to be both, “strong and sufficient.” It might be implied that her daughter was modeled such qualities by Terri and may be the courageous person she is as a transgender child because of having parents who were willing to support her even though doing so created issues with family members in the beginning. The timing of loss came at the beginning for Terri and her child and gaining supports came more recently. Some of those family members were “supportive” of her daughter now, but it seemed cisnormative ideas influenced them and strained the relationship for a long time, leaving Terri to fend for herself and identify supports on her own. She stated not having support from family was significant on her and her immediate family and illustrated it as such,

The toughest part for us was dealing with our very old-fashioned parents. There was years of pain and stress until our parents ([Husband’s] parents came around)...Her transition gave us some issues with my parents and in-laws, but they eventually came around to be supportive of their grandchild.

Rhonda

Rhonda is the mother to a child who is trans-male. Her child uses they/them/he/him/his pronouns, thus varying pronouns will be signified throughout her vignette. It should be noted that the pronouns “They/Them” and “She/Her” will be used interchangeably when speaking of Rhonda’s experiences, as they have indicated those are their pronouns. There are four experiential themes that emerged from analyzing her data and they include the **“He’s just at tomboy”, “Relief”, Advocacy in education equal change, and Need for resources and supports.** Rhonda spoke to her experience as a parent to a transgender child as if it were

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transitional and voiced multiple varying experiences, she has encountered that seemed to have impacted her as a caregiver of a TGE child.

“He’s Just a Tomboy”

The impact of living in a cisnormative society appeared to affect Rhonda’s experience raising a transgender child significantly. She spoke to many nuances of the influence cisnormative ideas that have affected her and continue to impact her. The experiential theme **“He’s just a tomboy”** embraces twelve micro-themes and they are *Lack of awareness, Communication, Happy and proud, How other parent’s perceived TGE child before disclosure, Parent’s reaction to TGE child’s disclosure, Parent’s process of gendered and sexual self through learning, Surprise but not surprised, Parent’s experience with TGE child in crisis, Parent observations during TGE child social transition, Process of allowing TGE child to be authentic self, Interpretation of the impact of expectations on ambiguous loss, and How parent interpreted grief process.*

Lack of Awareness. Rhonda also spoke to the preconceived ideas they held about gender and how they came to understand TGE people prior to their own child disclosing and socially transitioning. Rhonda described the impact of her family of origin and how she was raised as being significant to this process for her in addition to being well-traveled. While also illustrating lacking knowledge about TGE people and experiences because of living in a cisnormative society Rhonda conveyed her experience lacking awareness as such,

...my generation really didn’t grow up with any awareness around gender identity...
growing up in California and having traveled quite a bit, it wasn’t like I never met a trans or nonbinary person, but what I didn’t have was all the terms and definitions, the lexicon

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per se, the history, the understanding of the culture, and the reasons why things like pronouns, gender expression, etc. are so important in regards to respect.

Communication. It appeared Rhonda's child's communication skills have been influenced by her. She seemed to interpret communication as being necessary to growth and development and explains how she works with children outside of her home and how those same ways impact how she is raising her TGE child. She expressed the value in providing a safe environment for all children to be their genuine and authentic self and illustrated the ways she is raising her child differently from how she was raised. She stated,

...I teach children the concept of communicating who they are in genuine, authentic ways, not in ways to conform to what the expectations of them are. And that's how I raise [TGE child] too. Speak your truth and I -will listen and learn. I was not parented that way and I always knew if I had a child, I wanted to parent differently than how I was raised.

Happy and Proud. The pride that Rhonda felt for her TGE child seemed to also resonate with them living as their authentic self in a cisnormative society. This particular experience appeared to be related to, somewhat of a re-birthing of her child, when he got a name change. This meaning making event reveals itself as a temporal experience she parallels to giving birth to her son. She stated,

The day he received his court order for his legal name change, I couldn't have been happier and prouder watching him answer the judge's questions all by himself in his suit. I felt just as much joy in that moment as the day I gave birth to him in the hospital. I think I've been impacted as a caregiver because I always hoped I'd be a fantastic mom even though I didn't think I would be. But, now that I see I've gotten this right, I feel like,

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well, whatever else I messed up, at least I did this much right in his life and I can be proud of that!

How Other Parent's Perceived TGE Child Before Disclosure. Generational concerns appeared to be impactful for Rhonda, particularly with regards to other cis-parents of the same or similar age to her. She revealed having experienced positive encounters with cis-parents regarding how they perceive her son's internal gender pre-disclosure. Here she illustrated having positive experiences with people when speaking about her child's gender behavior and expression prior to his disclosing. She stated,

Other parents could see [TGE child] was different too and commented on it all the time (in a positive way [Parent's emphasis]).

Although she spoke to having experienced some positive interactions with others and the way they perceive her child's gender expression and behavior, Rhonda also voiced having experienced struggles with how others perceived her child pre-disclosure. Here she illustrated comparing her Transgender child's experience to hers when she was a child. She stated,

...when others tried to tell me oh he's just a tomboy, I always told them no, it's more than that, because I was a tomboy, and I never had a boy name or asked my mom to call me her son. I never calmly explained I was a boy to my preschool classmates...

Parent's Reaction to TGE Child's Disclosure. Rhonda's experience with her TGE child coming out seemed to have caused a reaction, which developed into her feeling uncertain and frightened. She described not understanding her child's experience and the significance of lacking knowledge about gender expansiveness and why her child was behaving differently from other children AFAB. Rhonda stated,

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I wasn't shocked or anything [when TGE child disclosed], but honestly I just had never really mapped any expectations onto [TGE child]...In the beginning I was scared of being alone and isolated...I think at first, I wasn't sure what to think. I just knew [TGE child] was different than other kids, but I don't know that I automatically jumped to thinking about 'gender'...I had no idea it was a thing.

Parent's Process of Gendered Self and Sexual Self Through Learning. Through her understanding gender better, Rhonda also seemed to have experienced a reflective process regarding the ways she viewed her gendered and sexual/affectional self. With encouragement from her TGE child to use "They/Them" pronouns, this experience appeared have been liberating for her as a woman living in a cisnormative society. She stated,

Interestingly, learning about all of the terms, definitions, etc., has helped me sort through my own gender identity and sexuality a bit. I realized there are terms to describe me that I didn't know existed, like pansexual, and I realized I had a lot of unresolved issues around my own femininity and gender identity as a woman to sort out...encapsulated the scope of who I am which is feminine in some ways but also very masculine in others, and somewhere in between in even other ways...They/them gives me permission to be exactly who I am and not feel pressure to conform to societal expectations and "norms" of/for women. They/them feels like freedom from all of that and a hall pass to be me.

Surprise but not Surprised. Rhonda elaborated on her own experience of her child coming out at his preschool and the feelings that resonated for her around this experience. It seemed his coming out was a significant moment for her although she described it as not being a "surprise." She stated,

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[I] heard from the teachers that he DID calmly explain to the other kids he was a boy, I was surprised, because...he had only said that at home and in public places where people didn't know him. But I was also not surprised, because, it was kind of the natural next step to tell his friends which I figured he would at some point...

Part of her experience with the preschool appeared fraught with uncertainty—how to support her transgender child at school. Although she lacked knowledge, it seemed she had some intuition of how to explore conversations around gender and use of preferred name with his teachers. She added how she perceived teachers who teach preschool being supportive and affirming toward her child. Rhonda stated,

...we all kind of stood there not sure what to do. But back then, I always kind of made it more casual, and I would just say things like, so, is it cool if he just writes [preferred name] instead of [birth name] on his papers? Things like that. At that age, many educators are willing to just kind of roll with things.

One such experience that appeared to be significant to Rhonda is the way she felt about her child being in crisis, after they socially transitioned while attending a private school. She expressed how she observed her child during this time and interpreted the impact of being engulfed in cisnormative environments on her son. She illustrated this experience as such,

[TGE child] was attending a private school at the time that was pretty homogenous, and he was becoming more aware that there was no one like him at the school (that he knew of)... it made me a nervous wreck. I'd never seen him like that, not wanting to go to school, coming home crying every day, stressed because he knew he was different, stressed because kids were staring when he went to the bathroom, etc.

Parent Observations During TGE Child Social Transition. The way Rhonda spoke to her experience of not recognizing gender as being a concept to evaluate when her son disclosed his true gender, seemed to be a flaw that originated from living in a cisnormative society. Here she reiterated recognizing stereotypically male gendered behaviors from her child at a young age that differed from other children AFAB. Rhonda stated,

He was obsessed with “boy” clothes, colors, toys, mannerisms, how to be a gentleman, how to be a daddy, etc., in a way that other kids didn’t seemed to be at 3 and 4 years old. He insisted on using his boy name...insisted we refer to him as a boy, our son, and male, only shop in the boys section, etc. All of that seemed way different than most other kids.

Process of allowing TGE Child to be Authentic Self. Although Rhonda makes it apparent that she struggled with understanding her son in the beginning of his disclosure and social transition, she illustrated learning and growing as being part of her own transition. She described the opportunities she has provided to him—allowing for him to be his authentic self and explains her own process with understanding and becoming more knowledgeable about her transgender child and TGE people. She described this as such,

My understanding and thoughts about gender have definitely expanded over the past several years as [TGE child] has continued to transition socially. [TGE child] has had lots of room to think about being nonbinary and Transgender, experiment with pronouns, names, and gender expression,

Through observing and supporting her TGE child, it seemed Rhonda has learned how to provide him with necessary items, resources, and supports. This seemed to be a significant factor to her being a parent raising a transgender child and illustrated this through her own interpretation of

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how she sees her child feeling good about himself because she has taken time to engage in learning and growing. She stated letting him try various gendered items create meaning for her and her child and demonstrated this as such,

...I've learned a lot by watching him, and also researching for him and helping him try out different things... Hair, clothes, underwear, toys, friends, pronouns, packer, costumes, bathrooms, names, talking about different things, books, conferences, presentations, legal name change, name and gender change on his legal documents, discussing blockers and hormones with doctors, learning about puberty, helping him learn to be a gentleman, [TGE child]'s really done it all, and all of it has helped him feel confident and explore his gender so he can figure out who he is.

Interpretation of the Impact of Expectations on Ambiguous Loss. In addition to how she interpreted her own experience within a cisnormative society, Rhonda spoke to how she interpreted cisnormative societal influences on parental expectations. Such expectations included the expectations of how parents perceive how their children will grow up and turn out as adults. Rhonda illustrated, these ideas have an impact on the way parents perceive their TGE children after they disclose and transition and the ambiguous grief they experience. She stated,

I have my child I've always had, and I am very lucky to have him. Whomever he is, is wonderful and the world will think so too...If I had grieved a loss of losing a child then that would mean I had placed my expectations on [TGE child] to be something specific AND it would also mean I only had a child to fulfill my own desires, or just to have a mini me, or just to fulfill some preconceived vision/idea in my head of what my child's going to be like...that child is at a disadvantage before they're even born because that

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parent is setting themselves (and the child) up for disappointment and the child can never live up to preconceived expectations...

Here Rhonda expressed, what seemed to be, frustration with other parents who experience ambiguous loss and delineated the positive impact having a TGE child has on her as a parent. She stated,

Anyway, how could I grieve a loss, my child is still standing right there! I thought he was a girl, but I was wrong, he is a boy, ok great. If anything, I'm impressed with [TGE child], not sad he doesn't meet some preconceived ideas I have about who he's supposed to be. My child's alive, healthy, curious, bright, well-mannered, and a good person... I'm not grieving; I'm grateful.

How Parent Interpreted Grief Process. To add to this interpretation, Rhonda illustrated how she interpreted the ambiguous grief process based around cisnormative belief systems. She expressed her perception of how she viewed ambiguous grief and the impact ambiguous grief has on the TGE child. Rhonda stated,

Parents don't see how "grieving" the "loss" of a child they thought was a different gender is just a backhanded form of rejection...Also I think to "grieve" the "loss" of a TGE child is just super devaluing and sends them a really depressing message. I was very committed from the beginning of never sending [TGE child] that message ever...To me, people should be who they are.

Here Rhonda spoke to how she understands ambiguous grief as being selfish. This seemed to be of great importance for her to share and described why she believes this to be so. She conveyed the need to celebrate TGE children and stated,

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And unfortunately grieving contradicts that idea that the other person can be themselves. Grieving is a self-centered process. Grief is a projection of our feelings onto the situation and other person...And parents who “grieve” the “loss” of a child when their child says they’re trans, that’s what they’re doing – they’re putting themselves first, they’re centering themselves in a situation and experience of which they are actually not the center, their child is. They get self-absorbed in that instead of celebrating that they have a wonderful and brave little kid.

“Relief”

Rhonda spoke to how she experiences her transgender child experiencing themselves, others, and the world. There are three micro-themes that illustrate the significant moments her child experiences that impact her as a parent raising a TGE child. They include *Pride*, “*Space to be himself*” and *Passion*.

Pride. Rhonda seemed to be proud of her son, which seemingly impacted how she makes meaning as his parent. The pride she spoke of seemed to resonate in how she tells her story as his parent and here she stated why she is proud of him,

I am very proud of [TGE child], watching him be exactly who he is, and educate and inspire others while being himself. Watching him socially transition was such a relief.

“Space to be Himself”. Rhonda illustrated the influence of intuition on how she came to understand her TGE child and his transition, how she views his continued transition, and the significance of their relationship as a result of his transitioning to his affirmed gender. She

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conveyed meeting her child where he was regardless of what she had been taught living in a conventional society and stated,

All of that [masculine behaviors from AFAB child] seemed way different than most other kids but for a long time I continued to wonder if it might possibly be a ‘phase’ although deep down I always knew it wasn’t...it didn’t matter to me either way, I just wanted to give him the space to be himself. It [TGE’s experience] was always super positive... I guess one thing about raising a TGE child is I get to see the beginning of everything. I see how his gender is a part of who he is and always has been. I observe how he’s navigating it. I see how it’s an intimate aspect of who we are because I’m observing my child learn who they are.

Passion. While reading Rhonda’s written response it appeared she was passionate about how she views her son, cisnormative beliefs, and systems. It can be assumed this is her truth and is illustrated when she spoke to passion driving her to ensure her son is getting his needs met. An element that appeared to create meaning for her as his parent who is doing what a parent should do and learning from mistakes made. She stated,

I’m a very passionate person. I’m very passionate about [TGE child]. I believe [TGE child] deserves every good thing in life because he projects so much positivity out into the world. Do I think I’m doing a good job? Yeah I do, but I do make a ton of mistakes, and I do get scared for what lies ahead for him. However, I’m going to make sure he gets what he needs and gets the best.

Advocacy and Education Equal Change

It seemed Rhonda found advocacy and education to be instrumental in her ability to create change within herself and among systems. She voiced the importance of using cis-parents of TGE children to help break down barriers for TGE children and families. The three micro-themes that encompass this experiential theme include *Interpretation of how parents of TGE children are viewed*, *Experiences with advocacy work as a parent*, and *Advocacy is teamwork*.

Interpretation of How Parents of TGE Children are Viewed. Rhonda's pride and passion seemed to spill into the advocacy work she does. It appeared advocacy and education were significant factors for her—the two create systemic change. She explained the importance of utilizing parent of TGE children to help do social justice groundwork and stated,

We've got a new generation coming up with parents who are OUT there. Don't be afraid to use them!

While Rhonda conveyed viewing parents of TGE children as being helpful, she also interpreted parents of TGE children as being detested as advocates in TGE spaces. Here she described her views and expressed her feelings on this issue.

It feels like parents are the red-headed stepchildren in the trans world but it is ok to allow allies to actually DO stuff to help educate and inform. In some cases, parents are the best people to actually get out there and do the work, AND, not every trans person wants to advocate for their community, so we've got to rely on cishet allies to help do the work in order to create change and cultivate accepting environments much faster than one or two people can.

Experiences with Advocacy Work as a Parent. Rhonda's concerns with feeling unwanted in TGE spaces resounded in her writing, yet she remained focused on doing advocacy work for her child's overall well-being. Here she delineated the impact of doing advocacy work to create an inclusive accepting environment for her son as such,

I've always been very happy to go out and do whatever needs to be done to pave the way for him so he experiences inclusivity and acceptance. I just believe if you have a child that's the responsibility you take on.

Advocacy is Teamwork. To Rhonda, being a responsible parent means advocating for your child. Here she explained the importance of advocacy for both her and her son. The two have teamed up to educate people and advocate for inclusive spaces that were accepting of TGE people. She stated how she interpreted working with her son,

We're just people who have the capacity to take on a lot, generate a lot of ideas, and get excited to see things get going.

Need for Resources and Supports

Rhonda described how and why she reached out for support for her and her transgender child. There are five micro-themes that illustrate her need and reason to identify resources and supports. They include *Need for change*, *Resources parent uses*, *Learning from TGE child*, *PLPSG needed*, and *PLPSG as life saver for TGE child*. She spoke to how she observed her child after socially transitioning and illustrated his struggle at school.

Need for Change. Rhonda explained how she came to understand needing to meet his needs and described how and why she reached out to supports. Additionally, she voiced feeling remorse about not doing so sooner.

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I knew something had to change, AND I felt guilty, because I had known about the playgroup for a year and hadn't taken him...He kept telling me he wanted to meet more kids like him.

Rhonda used a metaphor to describe being cautious about engaging with supports. She illustrated how her child's communication with her aided in her understanding the necessity of doing and offered how she will work to meet his needs sooner in the future. Rhonda demonstrated a need to offer space for TGE children to use their voices and stated,

I think in the past I was more wary of tipping the boat; if everything seemed fine, I wasn't so likely to seek out something that 'wasn't needed' but of course it was, and thank god [TGE child] is the kid who will speak up. I learned my lesson, and now I'm more proactive with that kind of stuff [getting resources for TGE child].

Resources Parent Uses. Specific self-identifying resources that Rhonda indicated help her learn and navigate the TGE community included online resources and visibility. Here she illustrated the various resources she continued to use as a parent raising a transgender child and conveyed how she interpreted some of the resources she continues to come across that seemed to have implicit cisnormative undertones to them. She stated,

A lot of Google, still!...finding people in our community, connecting with people, listening to their stories. Attending the Gender Spectrum conference...[social media platform], online groups...Reading various books. And some of those books really help in a way because I read them and just think "Nope, we're not doing that, we're not going to try and correct or downplay anything!" So sometimes, I've gotten a lot of clarity from hearing wrong and backward ideas.

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Learning from TGE Child. Working with her son to educate others has not come without putting in the work to get educated and finding resources that will help her, her son, and other cis-parents with TGE children. She spoke to the impact of learning from children within this community, particularly her own TGE child, to grow and work effectively with them. Rhonda stated,

I believe children are wonderful teachers...So, [TGE child]'s taught me a lot about those things [importance of pronouns, culture, definitions, terminology, history, etc.], and so has everyone else I've met in this community.

PLPSG Need. Navigating the TGE community led Rhonda to find the PLPSG, which they deem as being a beneficial resource for both Rhonda and their son. She described her first experience attending the group and voiced feeling validated as she engaged in dialogue with TGE folx. She described the impact of having people with similar experiences available to her and her child. Rhonda stated,

I didn't realize how badly I needed the playgroup either; but that first session was so therapeutic for me. Being able to talk to other parents but especially folx from the community was incredibly reassuring and beneficial to me. I felt relieved, like, thank god, I'm getting most of it right already. And then there was stuff we were both exposed to that helped us gain momentum and make even more rapid strides in his gender expression, identity, and how we handled it socially...

PLPSG as Life Saver for TGE Child. It appeared Rhonda found the first group experience to be significant for both her and her son—the PLPSG was an environment where Rhonda met other parents experiencing similar circumstances and her TGE child engaged with

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other children like himself. This first time attending appeared to be therapeutic for the both of them. She stated,

The playgroup saved [TGE child]'s sanity and possibly life. He was in crisis mode when we began coming to the playgroup and after just one play group session, he was so happy, and I remember he got in the car and told me "I'm good mom, I don't need to see a counselor anymore." I really think he desperately needed to see other kids like him.

Sue

Sue is the mother of a trans-female child, who expressed the nuances of being a parent raising a transgender child. The experiential themes identified for Sue include **"Not a choice"**, **Search for resources and supports**, **"Intense internal Hell"**, and **Parent's experience with transition**.

"Not a Choice"

For Sue, the experiential theme **"Not a choice"**, investigated the concerns, emotions, and challenges she encountered while raising a transgender child in a cisnormative society. Sue described how she experiences this and conveyed how she interpreted the way [cis]people with cisnormative views deem being TGE is a choice. Sue stated,

I think it's important to realize that no one chooses this life...

Sue voiced how she experiences her own transgender child, having not chosen to be trans, and the anxiety she feels about her child potentially being abused by another or possibly attempting suicide because she is trans. She reiterated being transgender is not a choice and conveyed the absurdity of believing that it is. She stated,

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As a parent, I live in constant fear of suicide or abuse from someone on the outside. It's very difficult...This is not a life I would wish on anyone. Living in constant fear of being outed, bullied, etc. is certainly not a choice and it's a ridiculous notion to even suggest it.

This particular theme examined both positive and negative experiences Sue has encountered, which are illustrated in seven micro-themes that involve *Fear and devastation*, *Uncertainty and doubt*, *Unique concerns and challenges having a Transgender child*, *Assumption around TGE child's sexuality*, *Parent's experience with TGE visibility*, and *Loss of relationships*.

Fear and Devastation. Sue voiced disturbances she experiences raising a transgender child and she illustrated how she interpreted the impact of her perceived troubles on her daughter's experience. She demonstrated the influence socially constructed ideas of gender binary have on the way her transgender daughter views herself, and the fear she feels when she thinks of her child's future—how she might respond to herself and how others might respond to her as trans. Sue stated,

It's terrifying as they get older and you fear what will dating look like[.] Will someone get so mad and feel lied to that they take it out on your child and brutally beat or kill them?... It's devastating to know... that they [TGE child] wish they [TGE child] were dead; You never know when their mood will shift dramatically for a few days as they internalize the self-hate; You never know if they will shift from just wanting to die to actually creating a plan.

Uncertainty and Doubt. Other concerns Sue conveyed related to raising her daughter in a cis-normed society seemed to encompass meeting both hers and her daughter's emotional and physical demands to ensure her daughter is supported. Sue illustrated how she handles her child's needs and described perceiving she is the only person who can do so adequately. She elucidated conscious fear she has regarding a perceived threats and voiced this fear as resonating from a flourishing physical ailment that advances to her dying. Sue explained how she interpreted the outcome of this perceived threat if it were to occur and described the impact her death would have on her Transgender child life. She stated,

It's hard on a parent to have a child who has so many emotional needs. I know how to deal with her and how to navigate her emotional outbursts, her crying, her self-hate. But what if something happens to me. She will have no one. I'm feeling this even more with COVID. We are completely isolated; I won't take any chances at all. I've decided that 100% I must stay alive and cannot risk getting sick. Her dad could never support her the way she needs, and I doubt she would ever make it out alive.

Unique Concerns and Challenges Having a Transgender Child. Other troubles that appear to significantly impact Sue include lacking resources and being distrustful of others. Sue stated,

I would love to change my daughter's name and birth certificate, but just don't have the funds...

Further, Sue perceived she needs to be her transgender child's counselor; her daughter lacks trusting others and the two have experienced transprejudice with counselors in past. Sue appeared to feel helpless and worried that she is not meeting her child's overall needs and able to appropriately process her child's internalization of negative self. Here she illustrated observing

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what she perceived as the “internal hell” her daughter experiences and not feeling like she can provide enough support to help her child live as her authentic self. Sue stated,

I am her counselor. She won't open up to anyone... It's a lot of pressure, especially since I am not educated as a professional in psychology. I worry about doing something wrong, not giving her what she needs, etc....I had gone to several counselors, and even they seemed to want to find blame with me. I had one lady who asked me if deep down I just really wanted a little girl. :::rolling eyes::: [Parent emphasis]... [TGE child] live in their own internal hell and you have no idea how to get them through life or offer hope.

Sue also expressed enduring the effects of having diminished contact with cis-son because her transgender daughter externalized her anger toward him. She stated being hopeful that her daughter will come to recognize the impact of her actions and conveyed hoping that progress will be made to improve the relationship between her cis-son and trans daughter. She stated,

We separated the kids (I have a 15 [year old] son as well) because her anger was so extreme...I've realized that she is just so jealous of him because he's a straight, white, male. He's also an athlete. He's well-liked and for the most part his life is easy. We have been working through this presently, as I explain that it's unfair to be hated just because of the way one is born. Since she can relate to that, I think we are having a small breakthrough.

Assumption Around TGE child's sexuality. Prior to understanding that her child is transgender, Sue perceived her daughter as being gay. Her preconceived notions of gender appeared to come from being raised in a cishet-normed society that interpreted feminine people

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AMAB as being gay. Sue stated, “At first, I just thought my child was gay since (she) was so feminine.”

Parent’s Experience With TGE Visibility. To understand that her child was transgender, Sue explained viewing a well-recognized trans child, Jazz Jennings, in the media as being an essential part of her experience. She spoke to visibility of TGE children being educational for her and giving her knowledge and understanding to support and affirm her daughter. She conveyed recognizing similarities between the two children and stated,

When I first saw the video of Jazz, it was her at her birthday party, wearing a girl’s bathing suit. [Their] personalities were so similar...I knew that I knew.

Experiencing the child in the media assisted with Sue feeling relieved at knowing more about her child and understanding her better. She conveyed the importance of this as such,

I felt a peace wash over me, as I felt like I finally had the answers needed. I felt empowered to support my daughter, because I finally understood what was happening. I allowed her to dress fully as a girl.

Loss of Relationships. While it seemed seeing Jazz in media created harmony for Sue, she illustrated the discord she encountered in other areas of her life. Impacted by cis-normed socially constructed ideas of gender, Sue explained the demise of close relationships with family because she affirmed her transgender child. Sue expressed her experience with this loss and explained the significance of allowing her transgender child to be her authentic self regardless of having people in opposition of her. She stated,

Coming against my mom, my (ex)husband, even my entire community, I bought her girl clothes...Everyone was against me, but I knew in my heart that I had the right answer

and my daughter was infinitely happier...I lost my entire community due to this situation...

Search for Self-identified Resources and Supports

The experiential theme of **Self-identified resources and supports** seemed to be a significant factor within Sue's experience as a parent to a transgender child. She indicated the use of online resources and stated she searched the "internet again and again" to find supports for her and her child. This experiential theme contains three micro-themes. They consist of *PLPSG experience*, *"Priceless"*, and *Continued learning of new age appropriate local supports for TGE child*.

PLPSG Experience. Sue's experience attending the PLPSG differed from many of the other parents. Her daughter was older than other children within the group and at an age where she would be transitioning to the older youth group soon; at the time of this study Sue's daughter was 13 years old. Sue interpreted the group was not suitable for her child at the time they began attending and illustrated how she perceived the PLPSG for her as parent of a transgender child. She stated,

When we first started with this group, she was a little bit older than the other kids and just didn't connect to anyone, so we stopped going...Personally, I'm grateful for the group and completely support it because I lost my entire community due to this situation.

"Priceless." Sue spoke to having supports available as being "priceless" and described online resources as being valuable, "I searched the internet again and again." Sue's experience with finding supports for her daughter seemed to be challenging. She exclaimed feeling hopeful that she will find suitable groups for her daughter now that she is older. Sue indicated,

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I hope this part of finding a peer group is changing now that she's technically a teenager, I'm finding there may be more options available.

Continued Learning of New Age Appropriate Local Supports for TGE Child. Sue illustrated she continues to learn of new age appropriate local supports for her transgender child. She spoke to her continued effort in searching for support groups for her daughter as being successful even though there is one barrier keeping her child from being able to join immediately. She spoke to this and stated,

I just found out yesterday that the trans group we joined a few years ago also has a teen group...Now that she's almost 13, she can join the teen group so I am definitely hoping to get my daughter involved with this group once COVID is over. I have a contact information and plan on reaching out very soon to get us in the loop.

“Intense Internal Hell”

Sue's experiences raising a transgender child in a cisnormative society as being a significant impact on her life as a parent, and so have the ways she experiences her daughter's experience. This experiential theme, **“Intense internal Hell”**, captured how her transgender child has made a significant impact on Sue's life. This theme seemed to resonate with 1) How Sue interpreted her daughters experience being trans and 2) How she also deemed her own experience and the interpretations of how she senses her daughter's experience. The use of the term “we” might infer a collaborative effort of internalizing the hellish experience of dealing with the obstacles that originate from living in a cisnormative society and interpreting how people might view her and her child. She stated,

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As we navigate this further into the teen years, I'd have to say that understanding the intense internal trauma is probably the most important thing now. Having tools to navigate this could be life changing.

This theme seemed to encapsulate why Sue desired her child to accept her true self as trans and simultaneously is concerned for her daughter's safety. Micro-themes for this experiential theme include *Survival*, *"World against her"*, and *Importance of TGE child accepting self*.

Survival. Dealing with the turmoil both Sue and her daughter experience seemed to require the both of them having endurance. This subtheme overlaps with the previous subtheme, "Intense Internal Hell" and here Sue spoke how she experiences raising a transgender child and encountering situations she has identified as being meaningful to her daughter's survival. She emphasized how she interpreted the way her daughter feels about her body and the impact that has on her daughter's emotions. Sue stated,

It's devastating to know: how sad your child is ALL THE TIME...that your child hates their body ferociously...They are always in fear of being "outed" - to the point of panic attacks...That they live in their own internal hell and you have no idea how to get them through life or offer hope. Life with a trans youth is survival, rather than thriving.

"World is Against Her". Observing her transgender child suffering because of her own internal agony appeared to be only one aspect of how Sue perceived the turmoil her daughter is suffering through. Within this third subtheme, "World is against her" Sue illustrated how she observed her daughter perceiving the world and the sense she makes of this experience with her daughter. Sue stated,

She doesn't always see her experiences realistically. She has this lens through which the world is against her. Her personal experiences attest to that, even though on the outside I can see that it isn't the 'truth'. When I try talking to her about it, she thinks I'm taking their side against her.

Importance of TGE child accepting self. Sue's experience with her daughter sensing the "world is against her" influenced her desire for her daughter to accept her true self. Up until now, Sue has recounted the impact of negativity on her and her daughter's experiences. Now she seemed to be pleading with her daughter to affirm herself. Here Sue spoke to viewing her own experience as not always being negative, though she lives in constant fear. She also illustrated how she interpreted the magnitude of her daughter blossoming as a trans-female regardless of living in a cisnormative society. Sue stated,

While there is an underlying fear always present, I want to be clear that life isn't horrible. I love my daughter and hope beyond anything else that she can learn to accept her body and maybe even be proud of who she is. I'd love for her to enjoy life again, to find joy and figure out how to give back to the world. I look forward to getting to the point where she isn't just surviving but actually thriving.

Parent's Experience with Transition

In the final experiential theme identified for Sue, **Parent's experience with Transition**, Sue appeared to enter her own transitional phases alongside her daughter. For this particular theme, Sue illustrated how she experienced her child's transition and how she interpreted others to have experienced it. There are four micro-themes that support this experiential theme and they cover the *Beginning phases of TGE child's transition*, *"Difficult transition"*, *Parent's*

affirmation during social transition, and Supporting and affirming family members-after social transition.

Beginning Phases of TGE child's Transition. When her daughter began socially transitioning as a toddler, she was unable to verbalize what she was experiencing. Sue conveyed that lack of understanding her child came from lacking language to assist. She spoke to the necessity of being determined to learn more about transgender people and experiences as such,

My daughter (AMAB) transitioned at 3 ½ years old. She is now 12 ½, so this was 9 years ago. At the time, there wasn't a lot of information out about being Transgender, so it was a new experience of having to find information.

“Difficult Transition”. The nuances of her daughter's social transition were fraught with difficulties. Sue described being supportive and affirming from the beginning and resisting the opposition of her doing so from community. She stated,

It was a very difficult transition for everyone around my daughter and...I allowed her to dress fully as a girl, much to the dismay of my ex-husband, mother, in-laws, and the counselor we were seeing...I had come to terms with it, heartbroken when I realized that her Grandmother wouldn't let her come into the house unless she was wearing boy clothes.

Sue adds that her daughter's social transition was life changing for her. She illustrated accepting that she would need to shield her daughter from transprejudice, even from family members, and not implement cisnormative parenting practices as her own. She stated,

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...That moment changed my life forever, because I realized that it was only my job to protect my child's spirit. Not base my parenting on outside influences. From that moment on, she had my total support and I become her biggest ally.

Parent's Affirmation During Social Transition. Part of Sue's experience with her daughter's social transition also included observing how her transgender child responded to being allowed space to be her authentic self. She voiced the observations she made of her child being affirmed as trans and illustrated the emotional and behavioral concerns that halted. Sue conveyed that the meltdowns her daughter was having stopped and stated,

She had no issues getting dressed and smiled a smile that reached from ear to ear. I could see the pride and joy emanating from her whole being.

As part of this affirming process Sue described severing the relationships she had with others. She spoke to acknowledging in doing so she was supporting her child's well-being and stated, So, I accepted the bullying from my family and community, knowing she was healthy and happy finally.

Supporting and Affirming Family Members-After Social Transition. Although Sue described her experience with family as being "difficult" in the beginning of her child's transition, she also illustrated it being more manageable now. She indicated that while her ex-husband has attempted to support and affirm their daughter in his own way from the start, he continued to do so more effectively. Sue stated,

He loves his daughter, finally has used her preferred name, and has used the correct pronouns almost from the beginning. He supports her in his way.

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As for her mother, Sue seemed to understand she is cultivating a supportive stance toward her child being her authentic self. She stated, “My mom has since come around as well and is fully supportive.”

Case by Case Analysis

Followed by each caregiver’s vignette, case by case themes are discussed in detail to understand the diversity between and within the various caregiver experiences (Chan et al., 2017). Similar to the individual vignettes, these findings offer specific excerpts from participating parents to support the identified superordinate themes and micro-themes across the group (Chan et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2009). Data that assisted with identifying themes across cases came from examining the first and second interview or written responses in addition to referring to the primary investigator’s research diary kept throughout the entirety of this study. No emerging themes were identified after the third optional response since very few participants participated in the third round and those who did participate concurred the data in the table was an accurate portrayal to their account.

The individual cases were combined to maintain IPA’s hermeneutic circle. The parts, or each individual case will become a whole. The whole of this study includes the case analysis that links the cases together to create the results. After two rounds of data collection from each participant and an idiographic analysis for both collective processes and a third collection from some participants, several themes emerged. These themes appeared to be representative of all parent’s experiences with raising TGE children.

After clustering, condensing, and synthesizing the emerging themes for each individual three superordinate themes were identified across all 11 cases. These case by case superordinate

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themes are 1) **Impact of living in conventional society**, 2) **Loss**, and 3) **Advocacy and Education as Change Agents**. Two of the superordinate themes had subthemes that encompassed the parent's experience. The superordinate theme **Impact of living in conventional society** had two subthemes which included *Socio-cultural-political influences on parent's experiences* and *Parent's transition*, while the superordinate theme of **Loss** included two subthemes, *Ambiguous loss* and *Loss of Relationships*. The final superordinate theme, **Impact of advocacy and education as change agent** did not have any subthemes that covered these experiences of parents.

Case by Case Themes

This section will describe those identified case by case superordinate themes and subthemes.

Impact of Living in a Conventional Society

The **Impact of living in a conventional society** is a queer theory informed superordinate theme that encompassed two subthemes, *Socio-cultural-political influences* and *Parent's transition*. While many of the parents discussed positive changes in how they see the current socio-cultural-political environment, many of them continued to focus on negative elements of it as well. Such negative and positive impacts of socio-cultural-political influences seemed to have increased resources, supports, and education as a result of improved visibility of TGE people as illustrated in the next section. These influences seemed to be a part of the parent's transitional process.

Socio-cultural-political influences. The subtheme **Socio-cultural-political influences** on parent's experiences encompassed a vast majority of the impact conventional society has on the

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parent's experiences raising a TGE child. This subtheme explored the participant and their families *various intersecting social identities*— culture, race, ethnicity, and religion, *challenges and concerns they have encountered*, and *perceived ideas and assumptions they had about sexual/affectional identities and gender before their child disclosed being TGE*, as well as *perceived judgment they faced*. Each parent spoke to nuances of socio-cultural-political influences on their experience. Here Sue described the “intense internal hell” her child experienced as a TGE child traumatized by living in a conventional society influenced by the dominant cisnormative systems. She described,

As we navigate this further into the teen years, I'd have to say that understanding the intense internal trauma is probably the most important thing now.

Similar to Sue, Pam's experience seemed to have encompassed a bit of perceived negativity related to socio-cultural-political influences. Pam also spoke to the way people were socialized to understand TGE people's transitional process. This excerpt from Pam appeared specific to the sadness she feels, or tries not to feel, about her child being transgender, and where this emotion transpired from. She stated,

It's an easy thing to be sad about because society tells you it's something to be sad about.

And I'm gonna tell society, “F'you, we're not being sad about this.”

Recognizing the impact of socio-cultural-political movements that have created a shift in how they understand TGE people and experience their children, Pam, Laura, and Carmen all spoke to how they see this shift in political matters as impacting Westernized society and improving systems that are cisnormative. Such movements, like the Trans Rights Movement, have increased opportunities for representation and visibility; these participants seemed to interpret these changes as making things easier for their TGE children. In fact, Carmen stated, “I feel like

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we're kind of in a good space politically" while Pam indicated seeing a shift in how people are moving to a more accepting and supportive way to treat TGE people. Pam utilized the metaphor "On the fence" when speaking to how various people from a variety of backgrounds and identities are becoming more understanding in their attempt to support and affirm TGE people.

Various Intersecting Social Identities. Across cases, there is little variety in social identities. Most of the parents reported they and their immediate family members—partner and children, were Caucasian or White. Two participants indicated otherwise. Gabby specified she is "White, " and Ali stated her immediate family holds varying racial/ethnic identities— Ali is Asian (Korean) American; her partner is Hispanic. She identified her TGE step-child as being half Hispanic and half Caucasian and her and her partner's cis-child is half Hispanic and half Korean. These various social identities and the way they intersected did not seem to be of great importance on the parent's experiences, yet they appear worth mentioning since each parent lives in New Mexico, a Westernized state influenced by its own unique socio-cultural-political values.

A socio-cultural-political values illustrated by participants included religion. While very few participants indicated they were spiritual or affiliated with a religion, many indicated not being spiritual or religious at all. Ali, Lee, and Rhonda specified they are atheist and Terri stated she is an Ashkenazi Jew. Jim and Jenny, who are a married couple, reported being Christian and involved in a Non-Denominational church that has supported their TGE child and family since the beginning. Contrarily, several parents actually reported being affected negatively by religious family members, peers, and colleagues in addition to religious affiliations.

Dissimilar to Jim and Jenny's experience, Ali and Gabby experienced a negative impact of religion. Ali indicated religion caused her immediate family to break ties with her in-laws and Gabby referred to herself as being a "recovering Catholic" because of the way religion impacted

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her growing up. This experience seemed to continue influencing the way Gabby sees religion as being a negative factor that impacts the way society sees people who do not fit conventional beliefs. She finds holding “one truth” that reinforce...

...a specific power dynamic, where the group who knows the ‘truth’ needs to guide the behavior of the group who ‘needs to know the truth’ (for many folks, truth is synonymous with God). For me, the word truth has so many meanings – all of which are negative to be more appropriate on the way diverse intersections are seen and understood.

Challenges and Concerns They Encountered. These “one truth” socio-cultural-political beliefs might be an influence on the challenges and concerns these parents experienced. Each parent spoke to the various challenges and concerns they had experienced raising their TGE child. One element of these challenges and concerns appeared to have been related to socio-cultural-political understandings that developed into judgements these parents received from family, friends, and community. Parents, like Jim, expressed being concerned about their child internalizing cisnormative belief systems and judgement—hating herself, her body, or her gender.

I still think he’s adjusting to school. I still think that there’s kids that he doesn’t know how to play, interact with and stuff like that...

Sue’s TGE child is older than many of the other children spoken about in this study. She explained her daughter had already begun to internalize the cisnormative ideas that are implicit and explicit. She spoke to feeling devastated and fearful about her child attempting suicide. She stated,

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It's devastating to know...that they [TGE child] wish they [TGE child] were dead; You never know when their mood will shift dramatically for a few days as they internalize the self-hate; You never know if they will shift from just wanting to die to actually creating a plan.

Sue described how she experienced and interpreted the way [cis]people with cisnormative views deem being TGE is a choice. She voiced how she experiences her own transgender child, having not chosen to be trans, and the anxiety she feels about her child potentially being abused by another or possibly attempting suicide because she is trans. Sue stated,

I think it's important to realize that no one chooses this life...As a parent, I live in constant fear of suicide or abuse from someone on the outside...This is not a life I would wish on anyone. Living in constant fear of being outed, bullied, etc. is certainly not a choice and it's a ridiculous notion to even suggest it.

Sue also illustrated feeling terrified about her child's future living in a conventional society and her concern about her child not having resources or supports if something were to happen to her. She indicated her child feels as though the "world is against her" and stated,

It's terrifying as they get older and you fear what will dating look like[.] Will someone get so mad and feel lied to that they take it out on your child and brutally beat or kill them?...It's hard on a parent to have a child who has so many emotional needs. I know how to deal with her and how to navigate her emotional outbursts, her crying, her self-hate. But what if something happens to me.

These beliefs Sue holds that induce fear for her are described as such,

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She will have no one...Her dad could never support her the way she needs, and I doubt she would ever make it out alive.

Other concerns and challenges that were spoken of by parents can be related to internalizing cisnormative beliefs. Such challenges were related to remaining stealth for safety reasons. Such barriers remaining stealth were identified by Carmen, Gabby, and Pam. Each of them indicated that remaining stealth was a safety measure and a challenge. Carmen and Gabby illustrated concerns around remaining stealth to keep people from discriminating against their child or their family. Carmen illustrated “navigating” relationships she has that may not be supportive and offers how she interpreted the necessity of remaining stealth in this excerpt.

[Transgender child] has a best friend and her mom, they’re very, very religious. And so, I haven’t told them yet. And I don’t know if I will or what, but it’s one of those things, like, if I do tell them and they’re not okay with it, then there’s, [Transgender child] just lost her best friend...

Carmen explored these relationships further and spoke to examining how she sees these friendships that may or may not be accepting of her child and her family who support her. She stated,

We’ve had to do some questioning of ourselves, like, do we really want someone as a friend who isn’t accepting of this community? But [Transgender child] and this person are such great friends that it’s, it would be a really tragic loss as a friendship. So, we’re still, we’re still navigating some of that...we have two sets of pretty close friends where, um, they’re both very religious. And I think one is accepting of at least, um, people who are gay and one isn’t.

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And the concern she feels if she were to lose these friends if they were to find out. Carmen stated, “We don’t have a lot of friends...we don’t want to lose them.”

Gabby, like Carmen, expressed safety and described her reason for implementing specific evaluative measures in varying cisnormative spaces, like school, where the child is “stealth.” She stated,

I also know who I can and can’t (or shouldn’t) reach out to when I need to talk about stresses and such related to others’ response to [TGE Child]’s gender identity. I’ve also learned how to evaluate if a person is safe to talk to about [TGE Child]. Most of the time I just introduce her as my daughter, then if someone seemed safe and it seemed pertinent for me to share then I’ll share that she’s trans – but I only share that she is gender fluid with people that I know are safe...we are technically “stealth” at school right now, only a couple of people know her as trans.

Pam too spoke about her reasons to remain stealth. Such reasons were similar to Gabby and Carmen, yet different because of the ambivalence Pam feels about putting her child’s face out into the community to create visibility and normalize TGE children. She stated that she is taking safety precautions about making her child’s identity visible to people and described it as such,

...I struggle with, too, as a parent, how open do I be that I have a trans kid? You know, and say, I mean, I don’t mind being open that I have a trans kid, but how open do I say, “Here is my trans kid, and here is her face, and here who, here’s what she looks like”... That’s something I struggle with quite often...in the presentation I did have her picture in it. Um, and I struggled with that, um, about whether to put that up there. But I did do it, I,

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because I thought it was important to show, you know, um, that these kids just look like normal kids.

In addition to speaking to remaining stealth, Carmen also spoke to the challenge of trying to make her TGE's child experience like that of a "regular kid." Besides protecting her child from the transprejudice of family and potential discrimination or loss of relationships with friends, Carmen also described shielding her daughter from stressful encounters related to socially transitioning. She stated trying to do the "right thing" from the beginning. She illustrated,

In the beginning, or for the first probably year or so, I tried to make it less about what [Transgender child] was experiencing...once she transitioned and we figured that was our next plan, um, she didn't really have any experiences, like, I tried to kind of shield her from the tumultuous time that we were going through with family and working through the court system...she kind of was just living her best life as a three-year-old...it was just a natural transition for her, and once she started wearing what she wanted to wear and having people call her what she wanted us to call her, she was just a regular kid and she didn't really have any different experiences than...a typical gender child.

Similar to Carmen, Sue wanted to meet her child's social transition needs, but struggled financially to do so. Sue spoke to not being able to afford getting her child's name changed on her birth certificate. Like Sue and Carmen, Jim illustrated normalizing their child's experience. Jim spoke to this differently than Carmen and Sue, Jim implied the importance of normalizing stereotypical gendered behaviors. In doing so, he may be trying to understand the gender spectrum as a cis-male raised in a cisnormative society or he might be educating his child to

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understand the gender spectrum. Normalizing stereotypical gendered behaviors could also be the way Jim affirms his gender creative child and her gender performativity. Jim stated,

I was like, boys have long hair also...it's not just a girl thing...he likes to paint his nails.

And I told him, you know, that's fine...I was like, guys can do it.

Laura seemed to interpret normalizing her child's experience different from engaging in normalizing stereotypical gender behaviors and illustrated language as being a barrier. It seemed growing up and living in a cishet society influenced her understanding of TGE people and experience. Laura had not been taught about gender fluidity, which created a barrier in communication and comprehension between her and her non-binary child. She stated,

They would sometimes say 'some people are boys and some people are girls and I am both' and I didn't disagree, but I didn't understand either...now we realize [this] had to do with gender identity...We hadn't [been] given any vocabulary for a gender identity that changes over time or for nonbinary gender identities.

Similar to Laura's experience with lacking language and vocabulary, Gabby and Sue both spoke to lacking language and understanding to support and affirm their TGE children. Gabby stated,

Neither she nor I had the language to describe what was happening in her mind, body, and spirit.

Sue's daughter began to socially transition as a toddler, and Sue describes her daughter as being unable to verbalize what she was experiencing and unaware of how to support. She spoke to overcoming the challenge of this barrier as being determined to learn more about trans people and experiences. She expressed,

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My daughter (AMAB) transitioned at 3 ½ years old. She is now 12 ½, so this was 9 years ago. At the time, there wasn't a lot of information out about being Transgender, so it was a new experience of having to find information.

Jenny too spoke to her child not being able to verbalize the complex experience of her own gender and expressed. Jenny, like Gabby, demonstrated a need to be kind to herself and the thoughts and feelings she was having related to cis-normed beliefs. While Jenny met her child where she was from the beginning of their process, Gabby seemed to be impacted by the cisnormative beliefs she once held and the influence of those beliefs on how she treated her child in the beginning. It seemed she felt guilt and shame about not meeting her child's needs sooner and recounted how she viewed the effect of her own rejecting behaviors toward her child to be able to find grace for herself. She stated,

Some days I feel a little down about just how long it took me to see that gender is more than blue and pink boxes, and that love is bigger than the cishet-monogamous norm I've always known...I often think that I should've been a better listener, that I should've heard what she was trying to tell us – but I try to have some compassion for myself.

With finding grace for themselves and honoring their own experiences, some parents found it necessary to engage in heartfelt conversations with their children. These, as Jenny stated “open and honest” conversations with her child was often painful. Both Carmen and Jenny's conversations with their children included a focus on how society may perceive them negatively. The two spoke about having conversations with their children on the importance of how they perceive themselves regardless of societal norms. Jenny described feeling sad and uncomfortable about having challenging conversations with her gender creative child about her gender. Here she spoke to one example of the significance of having these conversations. Jenny stated,

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Really talking to him about...it doesn't really matter what other people think...if you feel like a girl that day, then you are a girl that day...I want our relationship to be open and honest..."Some people might say mean things. People might say something or point to you or tell you can't go in the bathroom or whatever."

Here is one incident Jenny recounts as she spoke to this difficult conversation. She described how having dialogue around the negative experiences her gender creative child might face makes her feel. She stated,

One little girl in his class told him that he couldn't be something for Halloween because that was a girl costume or whatever. And I said, "Well, some kids believe that. Some families believe that, but our family doesn't"...It's sad that you have to teach your kid that they're gonna be picked on.

Comparable to Jenny, Carmen spoke to wanting her child to have a positive self-concept and recognizing how others can impact that. Here Carmen provided her experience conversing with her daughter about how others may respond to her if she discloses that she is transgender. This recount includes Carmen telling her potentially people may not be accepting of her for her internal gender. She stated,

I've been pretty open with her..."if you really want to tell somebody, you can." But I also let her know, here's what they might say. "They might say, 'Oh, okay,' and go on their way...they might not understand. They might be mean." Um, so I want her to be aware of that...I want her to be happy with herself, but I also want to prepare her.

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Other unique conversations Carmen has had with her daughter have related to future transitioning options affirming her child when she is older. She recounts one conversation with her daughter, which is future oriented rather than be presently focused. Carmen stated,

We've talked a little bit about transitioning physically recently...I will probably put her on puberty blockers, which I guess is kind of a decision I'm making for her, but she has let me know, like, "I don't want to look like Daddy. And I don't want, you know, things to get bigger and hair to be in-in places, and my voice to get lower"...she's understanding that as she grows older, she has options. She doesn't have to do all the medication and surgery if she doesn't want to, but I let her know what that means for her if she doesn't or if she does.

Jim too has been faced with having unique conversations with his gender creative child about gender. This conversation included how understanding gender is impacted by societal norms. Jim recounted a conversation with his child regarding concerns related to how he understood gender growing up and how he understands it now. He stated,

He's like, "Well, dad, why do you do that?" And I'm like, well, "I just do that. You know. That's-that's what I've known." And I'll tell him, I'll be honest with him and tell him straight up. You know, like, "Back then this is what girls were supposed to do and this is what guys were in a different time. And people are starting to think differently."

Other challenging conversations Jim has had with his gender creative child have been focused on her birth name. As Jim spoke about this it seemed apparent how important his child keeping her birth name is to him. Here he illustrated the conversations and the special meaning the name has to him. Jim stated,

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And I showed him, look, there's a football quarterback, [name]. And then there's an actress, she's a woman, that's [name]. There's two different people, genders, same name. He goes, "Whoa. Okay." So I think, I think that had a lot to do with, like, putting it together of, like, okay, well, I can still be okay with it... "We gave you this name, I would like you to have it." And that's just the way I feel.

Like Jim, Jenny felt challenged by the name change conversation with their child. She illustrated the significance of this conversation for her and her partner. She stated,

I think the name change thing was really impactful for us. We were like, ugh... That really opened the conversation to how important your name is. And before we had you, you know, we put a lot of thought and a lot of, you know, and your middle name is after daddy. And, you know, and so that conversation was really rich, too, that we never would have had.

Ali's experience relating to conversations with her transgender child encompassed her role as a stepparent, which she indicated can be challenging for her as someone who is not the biological parent. She stated "...as a stepparent, you are constantly, you know, walking this very thin line." She communicated that she does not feel as if she has a voice on some matters. Such matters included not being able to make decisions that benefit her stepchild and finding it difficult to discuss her experience as a stepparent of transgender child. She also illustrated feeling emotional distress about not having the ability to support her stepdaughter in ways that her biological parents do. Ali stated,

In many ways I am afraid to care as much as I am capable of feeling or even talk about it because I don't want to feel helpless about something important to me. This is where I

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start tearing up about stepparenthood in general and playing a role as a caregiver to a TGE child.

Although Ali's experience as a stepparent encompassed having restrictions, she also spoke of the having a unique bond with her stepchild. She spoke about this experience being when her stepdaughter first came out to as "Trans" to her rather than to the biological parents. Here she illustrated how she interpreted her role as a stepparent and how the role differs from biological parental roles. Ali stated,

I think I occupy this sort of parental unit/grownup friend space...I get to [have] that honor of being the one that she talked to first about it...I can do research, say my piece, express love and fear, and make recommendations to one parent only. It's just better that way since the coparenting relationship is tenuous...I don't want to start any fights and only want to help...It's not that I don't feel valued, but I don't know how to contribute as much as I'd like when I'm not the one in charge of schedules, legal aspects, etc.

Gabby also spoke to challenges she experiences as a parent to a TGE child. The challenges she spoke to related to her TGE child experiencing bullying at school as result of being out there. She exclaimed being out as school was a success but also illustrated the impact of being out at school for her child. She spoke to her daughter's school district continued efforts to follow cisnormed labels that built barriers for her child, specifying the bullying continued even after having the American Civil Liberties Union support her child at her school. She stated,

Despite these little conquests, [TGE Child] continues to struggle with unaddressed bullying at school, and we have been unsuccessful in advocating for change in the school

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district's requirement of 'medical documentation of sex reassignment surgery' prior to changing a student's gender marker.

Contrasting Gabby's experience with her daughter's school, other parents—Rhonda, Carmen, Terri, and Pam, all illustrated having positive experiences as school. Pam stated, “we’re in the-the victory stage of, like, there wasn’t a fight to use the bathroom in school.” She added the “principal at the elementary school is phenomenal.” Terri implied her child's school has been supportive toward her TGE child and helpful with accommodating her needs. Nonetheless, it seemed in being supportive, those working with her daughter had asked cisnormative, and perhaps discriminatory, questions to help support and affirm. Terri stated,

There [were] also the standard questions from teachers and school counselors, but most of those were really supportive to ensure that [TGE child's] needs were being properly accommodated.

Although Rhonda spoke to positive experiences she and her child experienced at school, she too illustrated challenges she had with her TGE child's school. One such experience that appeared to be significant to Rhonda included the way she felt about her child being in crisis, after they socially transitioned while attending a private school. She expressed how she observed her child during this time and interpreted the impact of being engulfed in cisnormative environments on her son. Rhonda stated,

[TGE child] was attending a private school at the time that was pretty homogenous, and he was becoming more aware that there was no one like him at the school (that he knew of)...it made me a nervous wreck. I'd never seen him like that, not wanting to go to

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school, coming home crying every day, stressed because he knew he was different, stressed because kids were staring when he went to the bathroom, etc.

Other cisnormative challenges and concerns were illustrated by Pam. They included having a child, AMAB, medically transitioning in the future. She voiced what she has learned from the research and from speaking to TGE people about the importance of early interventions for her child. Such interventions, as Pam described, are preventative measures. She stated,

When you're born male, you know, there are issues with once you go through a male puberty, there are things that structurally happen with height, with bone structure of the face that are very hard to change without mass, major, major surgeries. And if I can prevent that, then I'm gonna do that.

Cisnormative systems seemed to not only impact how these parents experience the various communities they were connected to, they appeared to also impact the way people think about, and the assumptions they make about, gender and sexual/affectional identities as a result of the socio-cultural-political climate they were raised in and live in.

Perceived Ideas and Assumptions They had About Sexual/affectional Identities and Gender Before Their Child Disclosed Being TGE. Many of the parents spoke to the socio-cultural-political belief systems that impacted how they understood gender and sexual/affectional identities before their child disclosed and began to socially transition. Many illustrated that their upbringing influenced these ideas and assumptions as well as implicit and explicit societal norms. Before having a more thorough understanding about gender diversity that fails to exist in a gender binary socio-cultural-political climate, Carmen related much of her knowledge of transgender people to what she learned from the media—i.e., any form of communication that

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disseminates information whether it be in movies, online, published material, social media platforms, etc. She stated,

My only real experience with trans people was the media...and a lot of the movies from, like, the '80's and '90's where you picture a man dressed up like a woman...it was really seen as a derogatory and, you know, the word 'tranny' was used pretty frequently when I was growing up...

Lee too spoke to learning about TGE people in the media and described taking binary gender norms "to heart." Lee described preconceived ideas he had about gender prior to unlearning cisnormative socially constructed views of gender. Lee stated,

I think that from day one, being a new parent, I bought into the "blue for boys, pink for girls" thing. I really created the mold by pushing what I saw as masculine from the time my first 2 children (1 cis[male] and 1 trans [female; close in age]) were born...I had a very limited knowledge of the trans experiences. The most exposure I had had was through very limited and inaccurate portrayals in the media. I always saw trans people as sexually deviant...

Pam's experiences related to preconceived ideas or assumptions about TGE people differed from both Lee and Carmen. She remembered growing up in a home with family who was open and affirming to those part of the LGBTQ+ community. She stated,

I grew up in a very loving, open, accepting family.

Pam illustrated her experience with recognizing her child's gender nonconformity and being accepting of it immediately. This acceptance and affirming of her child's gender could be related to how she was raised in a home that was open and affirming. She stated,

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At about two is when we started to notice [gender nonconformity... we were really onboard about, like, the kids can play with whatever they want to play with, they can wear whatever they want to play with...we never said no...it just never stopped [with Transgender child].

Jim's experience with his upbringing differed from Pam's. His experience was more like Lee's experience. He illustrated the impact of his upbringing on the way he labeled gender and expressed his need to unlearn gender binary labels. He spoke to his experiencing of learning non-binary gender from his child and exclaimed the necessity to do so in order to support and affirm effectively. Jim stated,

We got subjected to a whole lot of things when we were kids. I don't think I want to do that. I want him to be a kid. I want him to do what he would like...They said, "You need to do this, this, and this", instead of showing them, hey, well, what can I learn from you instead of you learning from me?...I want my kids to know that I don't know everything... I'm still learning every day.

It also seemed socio-cultural-political ideas around gender norms in this conventional society impacted the way Lee and Jim both saw their masculinity. Jim illustrated his own development related to defy gender norms and spoke to experiencing a shift in perspective from what he learned at a young age. He deemed making change as being necessary living in today's socio-cultural-political climate that is abrasive toward those underrepresented. Jim stated,

At first...I think it was really, really tough for me because, I mean, I'm the quintessential, you know, man, you know, football all that kinds of stuff, and I grew up that way...there's a few things that I'm pretty liberal on...nowadays you kind of have to be

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that way...I see myself doing that more and more, which is, it's opened my eyes a lot better.

Lee's experience with socio-cultural-political gender binary influences was also related to his upbringing. These influences were also reinforced in the military. Lee spoke to embracing masculinity as someone AMAB; an idea he believed accurate until his child, AMAB, taught him otherwise. Lee illustrated this as such,

I was raised with the idea that my job was to 'make my sons into men' and I took it to heart. I was raised only having access to very gendered toys and activities and thought that that was what I had to provide my kids...I joined the military and adopted a very 'caveman' tough guy persona. When I got out of the military...I kept up that conservative tough guy attitude until my kid rocked my world.

It seemed the love that both Lee and Jim have for their children combined with their own processes have changed the way they understand conventional views and ideas of gender binary. Because of their experience living within a conventional society, and having TGE children, they both spoke to being protectors. Each of them, both supporting and affirming of their TGE children. As Jim summarized his experience, he spoke to it metaphorically, "I've broadened my horizons a lot more with my child being transgender...I feel like I've broken down a lot of barriers that I've had previously. And this is, it's positive."

Similar to Jim and Lee, Sue delineated learning to not assume from her TGE child. Prior to understanding that her child is transgender, Sue perceived her daughter as being gay. Her preconceived notions of gender appear to come from being raised in a cishet-normed society that

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interpreted feminine people AMAB as being gay— “At first, I just thought my child was gay since (she) was so feminine.”

Ali also assumed her TGE child’s behavior was related to them being gay or bisexual and although she was aware of not making assumptions because of prior experiences with the LGBTQ+ community, she questioned if her stepdaughter’s transgender identity would “stick” because of her age. Here she stated,

I think that in my head I would say like, oh, well, maybe this kid’s gonna come out as non-binary someday, or bi, or just, um, gay or something...It’s funny because we monitor our children’s online presences and, like, my stepchild has an account on [social media platform] and we monitor what she posts and stuff. And I saw that she had left a comment, like, tra-, I don’t, and she had given herself a user flare of male to female and- and bi. And I thought, well, that’s interesting. I wonder if that’s gonna stick.

Unlearning the preconceived ideas about binary gender taught by her family of origin, society, and religion seemed to have been part of Gabby’s process. It appeared she has created a new awareness for how she sees subjective experiences of others and herself that do not include religion or socio-political-cultural ideas that are conventional. Gabby explained,

This idea that there is “one truth” is just one privileged groups way of reinforcing a specific power dynamic, where the group who knows the ‘truth’ needs to guide the behavior of the group who ‘needs to know the truth’ (for many folks, truth is synonymous with God). For me, the word truth has so many meanings – all of which are negative.

Perceived Judgment They Face. There is potential that this idea of “one truth” impacted judgement onto these parents of TGE children. Many of the parents described how they

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perceived being judged by community members and family alike. Jenny and Jim both expressed preconceived judgements they had encountered as parents of a gender creative child. Here Jenny illustrated how the binary gender normed society she lives in observes and judges her as a caregiver of a gender creative child in two diverging ways: 1) As a good mom affirming her child, or 2) As a bad mom or like she deserves to be pitied. She described both perspectives feeling peculiar to her. Jenny stated,

I get two looks, either good job mom, you know, and I'm like, for what? Like, you know, it's kind of, and then, or I get, oh, like, pity almost, you know, or under, you know, or look at that, you know, look, look, look, or whatever. And, um, it's bizarre to me.

Jenny also illustrated other perceived judgements from cisgender people. Jenny points out being validating of her gender creative child and explained how she perceived others seeing her as a parent. She stated,

So then I think people that look in are like, "Well, you're only offering him girl stuff." I'm like, "Hmm, not really." Like, we've done some work to get here. But from the outside it looks like, I think other people sometimes think that we're, are not strict enough or we're not, you know, offering him, you know, opportunities to be what they think is more appropriate.

Jim illustrated how people perceive him as a parent who is supportive and affirming of his child and expressed the statements that he has heard them say. He conveyed how he defies those judgements as such,

We get a lot more looks and a lot more judging... "Oh, you're a horrible dad," or, "You shouldn't be doing this." It's my choice. I'm going to raise my child the way I see fit.

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It seemed the judgement Jim's family has faced as a result of cisnormative views has developed into this need to be protective of his TGE child and conveyed the need for others to be more empathic. He stated,

I see myself as a protector just from all the things, society, all that kind of stuff...I'm here to, if we're somewhere and somebody makes a remark then, you know, that's my job to step in and be like, "Who are you to judge?" You know, I don't judge my son...they don't see what I see.

Like Jim, many other parents spoke to this need to be protective of their TGE child in a socio-cultural-political climate that seemed safer now than it did prior to the Trans Rights Movement. For instance, Laura saw having this representative support for her non-binary child as a protective measure. She has had learned from adult TGE folx that her child can have a bright future and look forward to living a positive life in this current climate held in a conventional society regardless of the data that is available on suicide if they are supported and affirmed by others, specifically those who are part of the "queer extended family." She stated,

Representation is one aspect of a having a queer extended family for my child. Without putting significant effort into providing representation for my child, my child might not otherwise have met or seen or heard of another gender fluid or nonbinary person until they were in high school...statistics about attempted suicide in trans youth being so high, the queer extended family also seemed like a way to extend a greatly needed safety net for our child.

Ali seemed to have developed an urgency to shield her family more after her stepchild's disclosure and social transition. She conveyed this sense of urgency made talking about and advocating for her stepdaughter more painful for her. Ali stated,

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I definitely feel more protective now and slightly more passionate than before. And I feel it's almost harder to talk about now...I mean, it was hard enough before...I just feel like crying more.

Lee's described how he assumed he was shielding his transgender child by preventing her from dressing feminine in public when she disclosed. He spoke to how he interpreted this experience—his going from displaying rejecting behaviors to accepting behaviors toward his daughter, and conveyed how he interpreted the impact his behaviors had on her. Lee stated,

After meeting/talking with folks at [Undisclosed resource center] I really started to get it [Being Transgender] and opened up to her transition. Prior to that we felt that we were protecting her by not allowing her to be her authentic self outside the home but I came to understand that this was actually pretty harmful.

Lee also spoke of being “on guard” often now that his TGE child has socially transitioned. Protecting her from conventional society, which he has come to experience people disagree with him affirming and supporting his daughter. He conveyed a need to be more protective because of his child's transition and stated,

I have become very protective of her (as well as all my kids). I always was but it changed with her transition. After seeing and hearing the ugliness that people can generate I have felt an intense need to shelter all of them from it.

Here Lee described specific incidents influencing his need to protect and illustrated the impact of this related to media influences. He stated,

Shortly after my child transitioned at school, I had a parent confront me and inform me that she is possessed by the enemy and that allowing it was child abuse. We also had a

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distant family member accuse us of child abuse...After my kiddo was on the news [talking about the undisclosed resource center]) I made the mistake of reading comments on social media.

Similar to Lee and Jim, part of Gabby's change making process in this conventional society with binary gender labels included making choices to defy the gender binary beliefs and raise her TGE child as she so chooses. She recounted her family of origin's response toward her regarding supporting and affirming her TGE child and interpreted the stage they were in, specifically regarding research with LGBTQ families. She stated,

When I came out to my parents and brother about [TGE Child], they weren't very receptive or willing to honor her name and pronouns. So, they finally became "ambivalent"...towards [TGE Child]'s transition and honored her name and pronouns after I set some boundaries and reinforced them when they crossed them. I let them know that if they wanted any of our family in their lives they needed to respect [TGE Child].

Similar to Gabby's experience with being judged by others, Carmen and Pam also spoke to how they experienced judgement as a parent raising a TGE child and both illustrated how they experience conscious conflict around their child's genitalia as a result of these prejudices and biases they have encountered living in a conventional society. Pam spoke to her fear and uncertainty about this conflict and how it is a unique concern for her. She stated,

It's overwhelming, this sounds silly, and I know I'm being recorded, so I hope it's taken correctly, but, um, I think about, you know, that she has a penis. I think about that a lot. And I think about if I could get her the gender surgery now, I would. She's totally a girl.

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That's the only thing that makes her not a girl right now, in society's eyes...Yep. It's the only thing. But it's something that nobody sees but her.

Carmen also illustrated her own conscious conflict about others finding out that her child's genitalia does not align with what cisnormative beliefs around her AMAB child's genitalia should. She communicated worry that her religious friends may not be accepting her transgender child or her and her immediate family for supporting and affirming her daughter. She spoke to one specific incident in particular,

I guess her swimsuit was a little small and some of her privates kind of were hanging out a little bit. I'm like, I kinda freaked out and internally I wondered if they saw it...I'm of the opinion that probably most people in the beginning would be pretty judgmental about it, and, um, and not accept it.

Rhonda's experience with perceived judgement differed from Carmen, Pam, Jim, and Jenny's experiences. She focused on the perceived judgement cisgender parents of TGE children faced by the TGE community. Rhonda interpreted parents of TGE children as being detested at times as advocates in TGE spaces. Here she described her views and expressed her feelings on this issue. She stated,

It feels like parents are the red-headed stepchildren in the trans world but it is ok to allow allies to actually DO stuff to help educate and inform. In some cases, parents are the best people to actually get out there and do the work, AND, not every trans person wants to advocate for their community, so we've got to rely on cishet allies to help do the work in order to create change and cultivate accepting environments much faster than one or two people can.

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Overall, these parents seemed to have experienced judgement and biases as a result of cisnormative systems that also influenced what they knew prior to their child disclosing or socially transitioning in a conventional society. Additionally, these cisgender parents spoke to what is interpreted as their own transitional experience to unlearn gender binary and grow through raising a TGE child. The next subtheme, **Parent's transition**, described their own transitional process including the meaning they have made through this experience.

Parent's transition. All parent's spoke about learning from their listening to or observing their TGE children disclose or socially transition, which can be interpreted as the **Parent's transition**. Carmen stated she's "grown a lot" and Terri called the transition she and her daughter experienced a "journey." Jenny illustrated how experiencing her gender creative child's reaction toward other children who do not understand gender fluidity has been educational for her and seemed to be an element of her own transition. Jenny appeared proud of the compassion and empathy her child shows toward peers. She stated,

It's always eye-opening, and it's always been a positive interaction with him because, um, he's just such a loving kid. And he's so kindhearted first. So it's always eye-opening to us that it's never taken as mean or hateful or that hurt my feelings or...one of the things he said was, "I just don't think they see a lot of girls in, boys in girls' dresses." End of discussion.

When her daughter began socially transitioning as a toddler, Sue, similar to Jenny, expressed being empathic toward her child. Sue also conveyed being unable to verbalize what she was experiencing. Like other parents, Sue did not have knowledge of language to understand. Sue spoke to the necessity of being determined to learn more about transgender

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people and illustrated her experience understanding that she had a transgender child nine years ago when information was dense. She stated,

My daughter (AMAB) transitioned at 3 ½ years old. She is now 12 ½, so this was 9 years ago. At the time, there wasn't a lot of information out about being transgender, so it was a new experience of having to find information.

Sue also illustrated how the two of them differ cognitively, affectively, and behaviorally, and exemplified the pride she has toward her daughter.

As soon as she was able to verbalize her desires, and felt comfortable in sharing them, she would insist on more female oriented things (e.g., clothes, toys, accessories, notebooks, school supplies, shoes, etc.). A toddlerhood preference for all things pink, transitioned to a preference for stereotypically girl-centered toys and activities... as she acquired more language ability and a sense of self... a greater proportion of female to male friends, and ultimately at age 10, a realization that she is a girl...

Terri, similar to Sue, began to experience her TGE child socially transitioning at a young age. She stated, "My daughter has been making a journey to discover her true identify since she was 18 months old."

Similar to Sue and Terri, Rhonda also spoke to her child beginning to desire socially transitioning at young age and stated her child was age 3 or 4. Rhonda, like the others, also illustrated how her child's social transition has impacted her experience as his mother. She conveyed believing the support she has shown to her TGE child is the most important thing she has done as a parent and demonstrated feeling pleased with the work she has done with being an affirming parent. Rhonda stated,

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I think I've been impacted as a caregiver because I always hoped I'd be a fantastic mom even though I didn't think I would be. But, now that I see I've gotten this right, I feel like, well, whatever else I messed up, at least I did this much right in his life and I can be proud of that!

Rhonda also spoke to feeling prideful because her child is living as their authentic self in a cisnormative society. This experience appeared to be related to, somewhat of a re-birthing of her child, when he got his name changed. This meaning making event revealed itself as a temporal experience she parallels to giving birth to her son. This seemed to be a large constituent to her transitional experience. Rhonda stated,

The day he received his court order for his legal name change, I couldn't have been happier and prouder watching him answer the judge's questions all by himself in his suit. I felt just as much joy in that moment as the day I gave birth to him in the hospital.

Similar to Rhonda's experience many of the parents spoke to moments of joy as part of their own growth processes as parents of TGE children. Such joy seemed to be illustrated in unlearning of conventional gender norms to make changes to their cisnormative beliefs. Gabby discussed how she recognized needing to change the ways she understood and knew gender, but also changing the vision she had of her TGE child. She stated,

Having [TGE Child] as a daughter has helped me to see the many beautiful colors and spectrums of identity that color this world...Changing my vision for [TGE Child] meant re-examining all of those beliefs, and learning new beliefs, behaviors, and ways of thinking...Since I came out to my family of origin about [TGE Child]'s gender identity, a

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lot has changed...She opened my eyes to a brave new world, and showed me that the reality I once believed to be so black and white is in fact colorful and dynamic.

Gabby also spoke to how she has transitioned through experiencing daughter throughout her own social transition. She illustrated the varying nuances of the transition and how she viewed her daughter currently. Gabby expressed,

The first time [TGE Child] tried to tell my partner and I that she was a girl on the inside was when she was 3 years old . During the beginning stages of [TGE Child's] transition, I held on to the idea that we simply assigned the wrong gender at birth, but that she still fit the male-female binary...Neither she nor I had the language to describe what was happening in her mind, body, and spirit...Now I think of her as a kind of gender-unicorn. She's unique and kind of magical – and still leaves a trail of glitter wherever she goes.

Laura, similar to Gabby, conveyed a sense of her own transition and described it as a “turning point.” Laura illustrated several changes her family made after their TGE child disclosed and socially transitioned and stated, “I realize I have also seen our child's social transition as being a significant turning point in our family's path.” She also confirmed such a transition as being difficult for her and something that was abnormal for her family. Laura stated,

Previously I thought we would live in our same house forever. I thought I would always run my same preschool program in a similar way as I had done for the last 8 years for my whole career. A few months after our child transitioned, we had suddenly decided to give up that business and stop teaching children (at least for now) and sell our house and move into a cohousing community and live a totally different lifestyle than we had previously. I

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don't think I would have made any of those decisions prior to this time in our lives when our child transitioned.

A constituent of Laura's transitional process also seemed to shift the way she normalized being transgender. She stated,

I never thought cisgender was a bad word. I didn't think about it much at all...Previously I saw children as cisgender until they identify otherwise. Now I would say that I am more likely to see all children as potentially transgender until they identify as definitely transgender. In a way, it's like there are no cisgender children for me anymore.

Ali, similar to Laura, normalized her transitional experience and views her life raising a transgender child is similar to people with cisgender children's lives. She stated the family is currently in a "nascent stage" and illustrated this stage as such,

We are still going to annoy each other and love each other and eat together and do things...slightly differently.

Jim's transitional experience seemed to differ from both Laura and Ali's experiences. He described his transition including coming to terms and "owning up" as a parent of a TGE child. Jim's development during these transitional phases seemed to have helped him to shift his perspective, which he deemed as being necessary living in today's socio-cultural-political climate that is abrasive toward those underrepresented. Jim stated,

I do feel like I have conservative views. But, you know, I mean, there's a few things that I'm pretty liberal on. And, you know, I think nowadays you kind of have to be that way...I see myself doing that more and more, which is, it's opened my eyes a lot better.

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Other elements of Jim's transition included a shift of perspective in the way he knew and understood his TGE child. The growth he spoke of during these transitions seemed to be transformational for Jim. Jim illustrated coming to terms of normalizing his child's gender creativity and he seemed to speak of overcoming his socio-cultural-politically held preconceived notions to get where he is— acknowledging and accepting his TGE child. He stated,

I've broadened my horizons a lot more with my child being a transgender. And, uh, I feel like I've broken down a lot of barriers that I've had previously. And this is, it's positive, you know, so...I think I have come to terms with me owning up to it [child being gender creative], you know, me being fine with it, and I'm fine with it. I think it's something that's normal for me now.

Like Jim, Lee's transition also included unlearning cishnorms to be able to acknowledge and accept his TGE child. A constituent to Lee's transitional experience included getting support from the TGE community and seemed to be significant for him. He stated,

Meeting the people at [undisclosed resource center] made me reassess my limited experiences and realize that I had it all wrong. Meeting and talking to [Two Transgender adults who direct the undisclosed resource center] really opened my eyes to how much I didn't know. I also learned how important it was for me to support my kid no matter what. I really changed who I thought I was and shifted most of my world views, I gave up the idea that my worth was defined by my masculinity. It was really a life altering process for me (in a good way).

Unlearning cishnormed/cishet norms appeared to come with the parents experiencing reflective processes, such experiences included seeing their TGE children differently as a result

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of their transition. Gabby illustrated celebrating her child's accomplishments and illustrated how she interpreted her daughter using her voice in the future to create change and give space for other TGE children to feel safe coming out. Gabby expressed,

[TGE child] is a fearless, courageous young lady with a powerful voice. She celebrates her identity, and hopes that by sharing her story, other kids might be brave enough to live as their authentic selves.

Many of the parents, similar to Gabby, spoke to experiencing a reflective process as part of their transition. These experiences appeared to come from experiencing their TGE children disclose and socially transition. Most of the parents reported a sexual/affectional orientation of heterosexual or straight, yet some stated they began to question their own sexual/affectional orientation or gender identity, or how they understood their gender identity, after their TGE child disclosed and socially transitioned. It seemed much of the way they understood their sexual/affectional and gendered self resonated from socio-cultural-political ideas that had influenced the cisnormative beliefs they held.

For instance, Lee seemed to reconnect to himself and recognize he had not thought of his sexuality being anything other than heterosexual until his TGE child socially transitioned. He now refers to himself as being "Bi or Pan" and elaborates on his comfort with discussing this. Lee expressed,

I am in a monogamous hetero relationship and don't really desire to anything else. I am comfortable saying that I can be attracted to any gender and that relationships for me are about the person that I'm with and not their genitalia.

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Rhonda's experience understanding her sexual/affectional orientation or attraction seemed similar to Lee. Rhonda specified she or they is Pansexual and conveyed this identity came with her understanding gender better. She spoke to viewing her gendered and sexual/affectional self differently with encouragement from her TGE child to use "They/Them" pronouns. This experience appeared have been liberating for her as a woman living in a cisnormative society. She stated,

Interestingly, learning about all of the terms, definitions, etc., has helped me sort through my own gender identity and sexuality a bit. I realized there are terms to describe me that I didn't know existed, like pansexual, and I realized I had a lot of unresolved issues around my own femininity and gender identity as a woman to sort out...encapsulated the scope of who I am which is feminine in some ways but also very masculine in others, and somewhere in between in even other ways...

Here Rhonda spoke to her own transitional process of using "they/them" pronouns. She illustrated this progress as being liberating for her and demonstrated it as such,

They/them gives me permission to be exactly who I am and not feel pressure to conform to societal expectations and "norms" of/for women. They/them feels like freedom from all of that and a hall pass to be me.

Ali's experience understanding her sexuality seemed to contrast from Lee and Rhonda, she indicated she is questioning her sexual/affectional orientation at this time. Nonetheless, each appeared to be processing parts of their sexual/affectional self as a result of their TGE child disclosing and socially transitioning, an entity they had not prior because of cisnormed societal influences. Gabby and Jenny spoke about experiencing a similar reflective process to Lee,

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Rhonda, and Ali and the two illustrated the way they viewed their gendered self after their TGE child disclosed and socially transitioned. This process seemed significant to their own transition; both Gabby and Jenny began to understand the gender spectrum that included a variety of femininity and masculinity entities. Through the growth of questioning where they fit on the gender spectrum as cisgender females both seemed to recognize the impact of conventional cisnormed gender roles on how they understood their gender selves. Gabby indicated she would have taken steps to be more masculine as a cis-woman, not because of her gender identity, but rather out of fear of being vulnerable. She stated,

I am a cisgender female, but I now question so many aspects of my own gender development and current identity. There was a time in my life where I would have given anything to shave my head, bind my breasts, and use male pronouns. In one way, I am a little more on the masculine end of the female spectrum in regards to gender identity (not presentation), but at the time in my life when I would have presented as male – I recognize now that I was trying to create safety around male peers, and that this was preceded by an assault.

There were parallels in Gabby and Jenny's experiences. Both found, as cis-women, they tip more to the masculinity side of the spectrum. Here Jenny illustrated how conventional ideas of gender have impacted her as a cis-woman and parent. She offered some suggestions to other parents and stated,

And I think it's really made me kind of, um, introspective about my own gender and really think, you know, kind of about some of the things that, you know, I felt I needed to do or I felt that I didn't need to do, or, and why...

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Laura's experience seemed to differ from the other parents who reflected on their sexual/affectional or gender self. Laura's introspection came with re-entering the queer community. She indicated identifying as bisexual and illustrated it was her TGE child who helped her to navigate back into the queer community. She expressed a renewed sense of self as part of her own transitional experience, particularly her sexuality. She stated,

Also, when my partner [inclusive term for significant other, spouse] and I were young adults, we were pretty secure and open about our sexuality, but 20 years of being straight-passing eats away at that and while we certainly don't want to use our child as a ticket back to the queer community, our child transitioning to their true self also has helped me begin the process of reconnecting to myself.

Pam did not speak of her own sexual/affectional self, yet she spoke to her experience with learning about the difference between sexuality and gender during her child's social transition. This seemed to be of great importance to her as it appeared to create a shift in the way she understood people. During this process Pam also began to reflectively understand her own gendered self, gaining a new perspective of her gendered and privileged self. She stated,

I can sit here as a woman and be completely content being a woman and not be attracted to anything going on around me and be okay, you know. And it's like, people don't get that...I think, it's not that I didn't get it, I just never stopped to think about it...

Similar to the noteworthy experience Pam had with learning the difference between sexual/affectional orientation or attraction and gender, it seemed a large constituent of all the parent's transition and making meaning of their experience came from getting educated and obtaining resources and supports. Such experiences seemed to be a significant factor to all

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parent's overall experience raising a TGE child in a conventional society. Not many of the parents were knowledgeable about TGE people, identities, and experiences prior to their child's disclosure. Many were not sure where to look or what information to look for and struggled with attempting to identify how to find education, resources, and supports. Sue spoke to the significance of having these elements and stated, "Having tools to navigate this could be life changing."

Each parent spoke to obtaining these things to help meet their needs differently, yet many indicated these elements were a necessity in the beginning of their process of supporting their child's social transition. Many of the parents provided insight into their interpretation of the importance of specific educational tools, resources, and supports like having TGE people to look to for guidance. Some parents spoke to having representation in media, in the community, and by attending the PLPSG. Many illustrated the PLPSG was a safe space that offered education to them. They spoke to the PLPSG being a resource and support to them and their child, which seemed significant to their experience as a parent raising a TGE child.

Some parents, like Laura, found the PLPSG immediately while others did not find the group for some time after their child socially transitioned because they were not certain what they were looking for. A few parents spoke to the play they saw occur in the PLPSG among the children, but none of them elaborated on this. Carmen, Jenny, Pam expressed observing the children within the group wanting to play and feeling safe to do so there. Sue's experience differed from the other parents in that her child was older and not interested in playing when they attended the one time. The parents focused what they found to be significant of their own experience within the group, which seemed to not include play.

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Many of the parents spoke to their experience with not being able to support because they did not understand what their child was telling them. Rhonda stated she did not know “gender was a thing” while Gabby was one of the parents who spoke to needing education so she could try to understand her child. As illustrated later in the third superordinate theme, **Advocacy and education as change agents**, Gabby found the PLPSG to be a significant moment for her educationally. She stated,

My partner and I realized we needed help, that we didn’t have the tools or knowledge we needed to help [TGE Child]...It took a whole lot of education, and expansion of my thinking before I realized that her gender identity is truly expansion. Her identity doesn’t fit in a box...

Gabby also recounted the impact of getting educated and supported in the beginning of the transition to help them meet their needs as a family. She illustrated how these necessities influenced her as a cisgender parent. She stated,

Our primary needs when [Transgender Child] first came out were: Normalization and validation (shifting your entire worldview and dealing with rejecting family and community members can feel crazy making!), and education (we needed to understand what [Transgender Child] was experiencing, that it was healthy and normal, and also needed to learn about how her identity fit within the greater context our of society and community).

Gabby also demonstrated how learning about the history of TGE people and their experiences helped her to grow as a cis-person to unlearn conventional cis het norms. She indicated,

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The more I learn about the history and realities of transgender and gender-expansive people, the more I feel like I understand her experience, and the more empowered I feel. I acknowledge that I'll never fully understand what it is like to be a gender-expansive child, or adult.

Laura, like Gabby, also struggled with knowing what information to look for regarding education, supports, and resources. She seemed to make many attempts to find education to help her understand and advocate for her non-binary child, but because she was unaware of what her gender fluid child was experiencing she did not have the language to search. Laura struggled to do so until she unintentionally came upon an unexpected educational opportunity. While attending a conference, Laura recounted meeting a speaker who specialized in working with children who are gender fluid. Learning terminology around the concept of gender fluidity was life changing for Laura—she was educated and now had language to help her child. This experience also increased her hope in helping her advocate for the family. She exclaimed,

Gender fluid! That was the word and the idea that was missing!...The term “gender fluid” was freedom for my partner and I...The revelation about the word, that breaking out of the binary, was intense...it allowed so many doors to open that were closed to us before then...Now we could find the support that we needed. Now I didn't have the feeling of trying so hard but feeling like we hadn't found the path.

Dissimilar to Gabby and Laura, who indicated they lacked knowledge about gender, Ali, Jenny, and Terri indicated they were informed of and knowledgeable about gender diversity and TGE experiences prior to their children disclosing. Jenny indicated she was trained on TGE people and experiences, which differed from Laura's experience as an early childhood educator. Terri reported attending trainings related to her work as a feminist scholar prior to her child's

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disclosure. Ali stated she was the individual who spoke with her stepdaughter about TGE people prior to her coming out. She also indicated a continuance of being self-determined at finding education, resources, and supports even though, as she conveyed, is at times is difficult. Such difficulty Ali stated is particularly with regard to finding developmentally appropriate literature for her young cis-child. Ali stated,

I felt like I knew a lot before, but I definitely know more now...I've definitely, like, been reading more and making more of an effort to, uh, teach [cisgender son] younger brother about this sort of stuff from an early age...I would try to find books to read to [cisgender son], the younger kid, and it's hard.

After discussing reading the literature for young people Ali later stated, "This doesn't make sense to almost even a grownup." Which she described as potentially having a substantial effect on the way young people learn and understand TGE people and experiences.

Terri illustrated other self-identified supports she has accessed as a both a scholar and a parent to a TGE child. All of these supports and resources seemed to have been readily available to Terri and were helpful when they were experiencing strain with family members. She stated,

Supportive people in our lives were always very encouraging of our efforts and [they] went out of their way to share how proud they were of us as parents. It was their way of showing their support for us. Sometimes friends shared with us web links, books, or articles they read about the topic. Other times they would talk to us about how we are doing and provided us with emotional support when we were facing difficulties with our parents.

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Unlike Terri, Laura had to search for education to help her support her child. To understand TGE people and experiences before and after learning about gender fluidity, Laura spoke to finding TGE people in the community to connect with. She associated this to using various online platforms to find representing AMAB people for her child to observe. She indicated,

I would like our child to meet more people like them in person. To me that seemed to be AMAB nonbinary femmes who love their bodies the way they are (no dysphoria). I have slowly been finding people on Instagram who seemed to fit that description or at least are AMAB femmes that I can prescreen posts of and show some to my child...It would be great for our child to meet more trans people and especially AMAB nonbinary femmes with normal bodies in a setting that is conducive to adults and children making a connection.

Similar to Laura's experience locating images for her child, Jenny too found representation to be significant for her gender creative child. Jenny deemed observing and being in spaces with other TGE people and experiences as being important for her gender creative child. She illustrated using resources as a tool to engage in dialect with her child about gender fluidity and how visibility has helped her to understand her gender creative child. Jenny shared having images of TGE people helps to normalize her child's experience for her. She stated,

When I come across resources or I come across a kid that identifies as transgender or a kid that identifies as gender creative or, um, gender fluid kids or anything like that, I try and show [TGE child], you know, that those are options. You know, then we kind of talk about it...I just think that those parts, um, kind of expanding our knowledge and having resources that we can say, you know, this is a boy that wears makeup.

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Similar to both Jenny and Laura, Pam also found representation and visibility of TGE people to be significant. Pam described visibility as being an important factor to create a less transphobic/transprejudice society, “The less scary it [TGE community] becomes...And the less foreign it becomes.” Carmen too spoke to representation and visibility, yet illustrated the consequences of media as a resource, educational tool, and support. Her and Lee both spoke about having learned stereotypical conventional ideas about TGE people in the media growing up, but Carmen also described using current media to enhance her understanding of and knowledge around TGE people and experiences so she can better support her child and other TGE people. She also conveyed this information as coming across as negative inaccurate information at times. Carmen reports,

We just [did] a lot of research on our end to making sure we were doing the right thing, I guess, to support her...When parents go out and trying to find resources, they may find that statement by the American Pediatric Association and then they find the other one...they’re the ones who put out these anti-trans articles talking about how dangerous it is to transition your child, and they’re shared all over [Social Media Platform]...identified as a hate group...that’s saying the exact opposite...the constant messages we get from the media or reading through comments on any article ever that talks about Transgender people. Um, just the extreme negativity, and it’s child abuse, and everything like that.

Although Carmen offered negative experiences of using online as a tool to get educated and obtain resources, she also interpreted it as being a positive outlet as well, specifically for supports. She indicated,

I’m part of a large group on [social media platform]...and they’re from all over the world, and there’s thousands of people in the group...you see a lot of success stories

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where their children are growing up and getting married and, um, graduating from college and having a great career and things like that...

Carmen also spoke to difficulties she faced when parents in her social media support group shared stories related to their children's death by suicide or hospitalization. It seemed she finds hearing about these realities as being both a pro and a con. She stated,

...probably on a weekly basis where the child has been admitted to a hospital for mental health issues or self-harm. I guess it's nice to be aware of the potentials out there, Um, but it doesn't make it any easier.

Similar to Carmen, Rhonda spoke to the using online platforms as a part of her experience in understanding and supporting her TGE child better. Here she illustrated the various resources she continued to use as a parent raising a TGE child, including how she interpreted some of the resources she continued to come across that seemed to have implicit cisnormative undertones. She exclaimed,

A lot of Google, still!...finding people in our community, connecting with people, listening to their stories. Attending the Gender Spectrum conference...[social media platform], online groups...Reading various books. And some of those books really help in a way because I read them and just think "Nope, we're not doing that, we're not going to try and correct or downplay anything!" So sometimes, I've gotten a lot of clarity from hearing wrong and backward ideas.

Rhonda and Sue indicated they use online platforms to find help for their TGE children. Sue stated, having supports available is "priceless", but unlike Rhonda's experience with finding it easy to identify local supports, Sue found this to be challenging. Sue indicated,

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I hope this part of finding a peer group is changing now that she's technically a teenager, I'm finding there may be more options available.

As noted, many of these parents described online resources as being valuable. Ali, to spoke of online resources as being pertinent to her experience raising her transgender step-child. Through her process, Ali stated she was knowledgeable of TGE people, experiences, and concerns yet she also conveyed having trouble finding support systems. She expressed, "It's like you have to know the right people [to find support systems]." Nonetheless, like searching for educational material, Ali was determined to find resources and supports for her stepdaughter and family. Like others, she indicated the need was pertinent in the beginning. Ali stated,

It just is happening all so quickly right now that I don't know what to latch onto for support...I cannot say enough about how important that has been for us at this stage right now.

To add onto Ali's comment of needing "...to know the right people" Pam too illustrated the requirement of searching to find the TGE community. She described engaging with the TGE community members so she can be educational, but also conveys the difficulty doing so as a cis-person. Pam expressed,

They're not gonna come find you and you don't know who is transgender in the community...unless you're actively seeking them out...so that can be scary when you're trying to find them to try to get support and to try to say, "Help me to do this right. Help me. Educate me. Tell me how to do this correctly so I don't mess it up as a parent."

Other areas related to engagement and education among the parent's experiences included a necessity to educate their own children about transitioning. Pam spoke about conversing with her daughter about medical interventions in a developmentally appropriate way. She also

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demonstrated why she believed having these engaging connections within the TGE community is valuable for both her and her child. Pam stated,

...she comes to me probably once a week and will say, “When” I get the surgery, is it gonna hurt?” Or, you know, “When I get a vagina is it gonna be, do, um, will I know when I have to pee?...they’re very age-appropriate, authentic questions, and I answer them. And most of the time I say, “I’m not really sure. Let’s, you know, we need to start writing these down so that when we do talk to a doctor...she talks about, you know, “wanting to be a mommy someday”...We don’t want until they’re eighteen and quote/unquote, “make these [medical intervention] decisions as an adult.” It’s too late... from my research...

Pam’s experience appeared to parallel Carmen’s experience with confronting the reality that her child may experience transprejudice by her friends, or society. She illustrated understanding the necessity of having exclusive conversations with her transgender child. Carmen spoke to wanting her child to have a positive self-concept, but also recognized how others can impact that. The education Carmen provided to her daughter about how others may respond to her if she disclosed being transgender included telling her that there are potentially people that may not be accepting of her for her internal gender. She recounted,

I’ve been pretty open with her...“if you really want to tell somebody, you can.” But I also let her know, here’s what they might say. They might say, “Oh, okay,” and go on their way...they might not understand. They might be mean. Um, so I want her to be aware of that...I want her to be happy with herself, but I also want to prepare her.

To prepare their children and themselves for the transitional process, the many parents expressed engaging in the LGBTQ community online and in person. One way these parents

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experienced engaging with TGE people was by attending the PLPSG, specifically. All the parents participating in this study had attended the PLPSG at least one time, each described the importance of having a group as such available for TGE children. Many illustrated the PLPSG as being a necessary safe haven, support, resource, and educational opportunity for parents. Each parent found the PLPSG beneficial for themselves, although Sue's experience attending the PLPSG differed from many of the other parents. Unlike the others, Sue's daughter was older than other children within the group; she was almost 13 years old when she attended the first time and would be transitioning to the older youth group soon. Nonetheless, Sue illustrated how she perceived the PLPSG for her as parent of a transgender child. She stated,

When we first started with this group, she was a little bit older than the other kids and just didn't connect to anyone, so we stopped going...Personally, I'm grateful for the group and completely support it because I lost my entire community due to this situation.

Similar to Sue's experience with the PLPSG, Laura spoke to the significant opportunities made possible for her and her partner within the group. She emphasized,

For my partner and me, we don't yet have many opportunities to interact with people we know are trans outside of the playgroup. I value our new friendships. I value practicing using correct pronouns with people who are not our child. I value seeing trans adults doing better than those in the news (murdered) or depicted in movies or on TV (the brunt of jokes or murdered) so that I can see a brighter future for my child. I value having people - trans or not - to vent to, to get advice from and know that they understand in a way that other people in my life may not...being able to share my experience with new families who come to the group...

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In addition to the valuable experience she encountered within the PLPSG, Laura also spoke to the group being her TGE child's "queer extended family" and conveyed how she interpreted the benefits of the group for her cis-child. She stated,

Going to the playgroup has helped [cis-sibling] continue to understand her sibling and to grow in her ability to be a strong support for them.

Similar to Laura's interpretation of seeing the group being a good support and resource for her cis-child, Lee also spoke to how he understood the benefits of the group for all of his children, (including his cis-children), himself, and his partner. He stated,

The play group has been a great experience for myself as well as my cis kids and partner. I feel that it has given [TGE child] a safe space to connect with peers without having to worry about other's reactions or negativity. It has provided a space for my partner and I to discuss and sometimes just vent about our experiences with others that understand and have been there...My other kids have become more loving and accepting of other kids that may be different from them in all areas of their lives.

Unlike Laura and Lee, Rhonda does not have any cis-children; nonetheless, they spoke to how they interpret their TGE child experiencing the PLPSG. This experience seemed to differ from other parents attending the group in that Rhonda did not reach out to the group when they found out about it in the beginning of their transitional process. Rather it took them approximately a year before attending, in fact Rhonda indicated specific feelings they had about not attending the PLPSG sooner. They stated,

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I knew something had to change, AND I felt guilty, because I had known about the playgroup for a year and hadn't taken him...He kept telling me he wanted to meet more kids like him...

Once she attended, Rhonda's experience attending the PLPSG for support, resources, and education was positive for both her and TGE child. She interpreted her TGE child's experience as such and emphasized the necessity of the group for her and her child. Rhonda stated,

The playgroup saved [TGE child]'s sanity and possibly life. He was in crisis mode when we began coming to the playgroup and after just one play group session, he was so happy, and I remember he got in the car and told me "I'm good mom, I don't need to see a counselor anymore." I really think he desperately needed to see other kids like him.

Rhonda illustrated taking their son to the PLPSG was a life changing moment for them. She used a metaphor to describe how she interpreted her child's experience prior to attending the first time and demonstrated the importance of being proactive. Rhonda offered how they will work to meet their TGE child's needs sooner in the future. They stated,

I think in the past I was more wary of tipping the boat; if everything seemed fine, I wasn't so likely to seek out something that 'wasn't needed' but of course it was, and thank god [TGE child] is the kid who will speak up. I learned my lesson, and now I'm more proactive with that kind of stuff [getting resources for TGE child].

Other significant experiences related to attending the PLPSG were demonstrated by Jim and Jenny. The two found the group to be more than a support or resource for them and their TGE child. Jenny depicted the first time in attendance at the PLPSG, and described it as being

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educational. She explained learning about pronouns in the group in addition to recognizing her cis-privilege through this process. Jenny expressed,

I think that was one of the first times that we had really talked about pronouns because you guys all ask, you know...so all of us were kind of like, I don't know what my pronouns are. I've never really thought of it...as a cisgender person or even as a parent, you know, but that importance, um, of allowing that you know, to kind of naturally happen, too. And kind of become part of our speech.

Although Jenny and Jim found the group to be beneficial for his family, Jim illustrated this experience for him did not come without feeling some apprehension about attending the first time. Jim stated he was particularly concerned about people within the group judging him as a “quintessential” cis-male or “...a horrible dad.” In addition to his concerns about how members of the group might judge him, it seemed cisnormative views of TGE people impacted how Jim perceived the PLPSG prior to attending the first time. He spoke to wrestling with biases while feeling the need to support and affirm his child by providing her with an inclusive space so she can be with other children like her. He stated,

I think at first I was scared because I didn't have any information...oh, I'm gonna be judged...I don't know if they're going to be, is this going to be, like, a dolled-up thing in dresses?...this is where [Gender Creative child] can be like, okay, I'm gonna do this...I think it's kind of nice just to, just for [Gender Creative child] to go there and be accepted.

Through their stories, it became apparent the education, resources, and supports parents were searching for came from a place of necessity. These parents seemed to be doing what they could to meet their child's needs regardless of how it was making them feel. To meet the needs

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of her TGE child, Laura spoke to being proactive by tailoring t-shirts prior to having the education to truly understand her child's diverse gender that defies conventional norms. She asked herself "who tailors' t-shirts for their 4-year-old?" Laura also illustrated having issues with finding education, resources, and supports and indicated these challenges derived from being uneducated on diverse genders even as an early education teacher. She indicated not uncertainty of where to look, what to look for, what she needed to know, or what supports her and her family needed. Again, she lacked knowledge or language to help her TGE child. Learning terminology around the concept of gender fluidity seemed to be liberating for Laura and her partner. This gave her language to help her child, which also increased her hope in finding supports and resources for the family. Laura stated,

The term "gender fluid" was freedom for my partner and I...The revelation about the word, that breaking out of the binary, was intense...it allowed so many doors to open that were closed to us before then...

While things were becoming easier for Laura after getting educated, it seemed she also continued to struggle with finding local supports. Here she illustrated the difficulties she experienced as part of this transition. Laura conveyed not understanding how local supports might be able to support her child who did not fit in the transgender binary. She expressed,

It was difficult finding a support system...I didn't think to look for a transgender resource center because I thought my child was GNC [Gender Nonconforming] not transgender and I didn't know a center like that could help with either.

Laura related having learned the term "gender fluid" to socio-political movements that have increased visibility, resources, and support for TGE people. She stated,

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If I had had my child earlier in life, there could easily have been (comparatively) nothing for them. Our experience would have been so different. I for one thing would not have heard the term “gender fluid” at an education conference, so we might still be stuck trying so hard to be supportive of what we thought was our cisgender gender non-conforming boy and getting it all wrong because that wasn’t what was going on at all.

Additionally, Laura spoke to having a queer friend on social media and finding out about the necessity of having a “queer extended family.” She illustrated why she found having this community available for her TGE child and described the PLPSG as being part of the “queer extended family.” She stated,

When we first understood that our child is nonbinary, a friend of mine who is a gay man posted on [social media] about the importance of ‘queer extended family’... he explained that it is your chosen family of queer people who can understand and empathize with you that your real cis-straight family will never be able to despite best intentions. And so, began my quest to figure out how to create that for a gender-fluid five-year-old. The play group has been part of this effort.

Having the PLPSG and other community to make up her child’s “queer extended family” created visibility and representation for Laura’s TGE child. She spoke to how she experiences having this resource and support available to her child and her immediate family. It seemed she understands having representation as breaking down barriers for TGE people created by socio-cultural-political influences in a cishet society that values binary genders. She stated,

I think this feels really important to me because we learn in education how important representation is to children from underrepresented groups...Representation is one aspect

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of a having a queer extended family for my child. Without putting significant effort into providing representation for my child, my child might not otherwise have met or seen or heard of another gender fluid or nonbinary person until they were in high school...

Similar to Laura, Sue spoke to the necessity of having representation of TGE people available as an educational tool. Sue described observing a trans-female in media helped her to understand her own TGE child better. In having this person visible assisted with Sue supporting and affirming her daughter regardless of losing her community. She expressed what this experience meant to her and her daughter. Sue stated,

When I first saw the video of Jazz, it was her at her birthday party, wearing a girl's bathing suit. [Their] personalities were so similar...I knew that I knew. I felt a peace wash over me, as I felt like I finally had the answers needed. I felt empowered to support my daughter, because I finally understood what was happening. I allowed her to dress fully as a girl...

Loss

As part of supporting and affirming their TGE child, these parent's experience seemed to come with empowerment as they became more open to allowing their children to identify and express as their authentic selves. They began to unlearn what they knew about conventional gender binary as they went through their own transitional phases. Nonetheless, their acceptance of their TGE child did not come without sacrifices. Parents' spoke to experiencing some form of **Loss** that impacted their experience raising their TGE child. This superordinate theme will examine two such forms of loss within the subthemes, *Ambiguous loss* and *Relationships*.

Ambiguous Loss. This subtheme *Ambiguous loss* seemed to resonate for many parent's experiences raising a TGE child. It seemed many of the parents who experienced ambiguous loss felt such feelings because of societal gender binary normed expectations. Ali and Jenny both spoke of gender reveal parties as being peculiar spectacles of celebrating their child before they have a say in who their authentic self is. Ali denies engaging in the Westernized celebration of assigned sex at birth, a phenomenon considered permanent throughout life, while Jenny questions why she hosted gender reveal parties prior to understanding gender creativity and fluidity. She seemed to realize cisnormative beliefs informed her choice of hosting the event prior to doing them. Jenny stated,

We're all taught, like, well, this is what you are. The doctor said so...we had the gender reveal parties and like, oh, that's so weird. That is a very weird thing to do.

Gabby reported confronting and coping with, what she called, "ambiguous loss" toward her transgender child. The feelings of loss she experienced seemed to have created varying feelings for her at various times in her child's transition. She related this loss to memories of her child and expectations she had of her daughter. Gabby also seemed to recognize these concerns were based on the same socially construed cishet norms that she grew up learning and knowing. She appeared to be focused on how she deemed their connection, mother to a child AMAB, and the loss of that connection. Gabby stated,

As a caregiver, there was this ambiguous sense of loss when we started using [TGE Child]'s new name and accurate pronouns. Even now, when I hear her old name, I have this little pang of sadness in my chest and stomach. I'm not entirely sure what I lost. I've spent a bit of time thinking about this, and I think that that sense of loss comes from having to change the dreams I had for my child.

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Gabby also spoke of situations intensifying the feelings of ambiguous loss for her. She recounted one situation she experienced ambivalent feelings about and how she is handling ambiguous loss. She expressed,

Then, each time we reach a new stage in her transition, there's a renewed sense of loss. For example, when we stopped calling her [name given at birth], I had to change all of my nick names for her...This sounds silly...but these nick names mean a lot. They were part of our little relationship, of that intimate exchange between child and parent, that started when she was an infant. So, I made it my goal to develop new nick names immediately...and this actually helped quite a bit.

Another significant moment regarding the ambiguous loss Gabby felt included a recent experience. She spoke to being concerned about her transgender child's inability to have children of her own due to side effects of being on hormone replacement therapy. The impact of hearing that information during the very moment the doctor informed her and how she has come to understand the need for new expectations or a shift in perspective is explained here,

I recently experienced a renewed sense of loss when we went to get [TGE Child]'s first puberty blocker. We had talked about all of the side effects, and long[-]term consequences of starting blockers – we did our research and knew that it would prevent her from being able to have children. But when the doctor said, “now you understand that this will prevent her from being able to produce sperm, meaning she will not be able to have children in the future”, I felt that pang in my heart and stomach again. It doesn't mean that she won't be able to adopt children or have them through other means...but as a parent, I have to change my vision for her.

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Pam, like Gabby described similar emotions experienced with ambiguous loss and the loss she felt seemed to be a painstakingly difficult process for her to work through. Such complications of finding closure with her TGE child's transition may suggest ambivalence for Pam—feeling as such does not appear to fit her values or morals as a caregiver. She distinguished her feelings of loss as not being her child's concern, but rather her own to acknowledge and work through. Being a mother is part of her experience, while being a mother to a transgender child is another part—both parts of being a mother impact her identity differently. She emphasized this being a minor hang up for her, yet she spoke to the pain she feels about the expectations she had for her transgender child. Pam described,

When I was growing up, I always wanted four kids and I thought the coolest combination was a girl and three boys, and that's what I ended up getting...now I have two girls and two boys. And that has been hard for my emotion, you know, like, I always thought that was so cool, a girl with three brothers...And so that's my issue, and that's something I have to get over. And that's nothing to do with her, I'm not mad at her because of that, you know. That's me...So it's, like, little things like that are my issue...

She recounted one such incident that has been difficult for her and conveyed taking responsibility for how she feels about the ambiguous loss. Pam stated,

Getting rid of all the boy clothes, the little boy clothes was hard, but that's about me.

That's my, you know, that's my issue. That's not her...

When Pam spoke to “society tells you it's something to be sad about”, it seemed she understood that such feelings of ambiguous loss fester from implicit and explicit social constructs influenced

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by cisnormative society belief systems. One specific instance Pam feels ambiguous loss included:

...the name, the name is hard, changing the name has been, you know...that's an issue that I have to deal with. And it's just little stuff...And they may always be a little, hurt my heart, my mommy heart.

The pain Pam felt from experiencing ambiguous loss appeared to coincide with her need to normalize attending to the expectations of what she envisioned for her TGE child. Although Pam recognized and acknowledged needing to work through the ambiguous loss she felt, it also seemed she understood such feelings fester from implicit and explicit social constructs influenced by cisnormative society belief systems. Pam emphasized supporting her child regardless of which path they choose because they deserve to be respected as their authentic self. Pam stated,

...I think we all have things with any kid, like, oh, we want, we see one of our kids who say they want to be a doctor and then they end up being a teacher...or they, you know, want to be a doctor and they end up being an artist, or they want to be an artist and they end being a Who knows?... it doesn't matter. Like, you have a vision for your kid and it's not, but you have to support your kids.

Her own process, with ambiguous loss might be influencing the difficulty she experiences while in attendance at the parent's group. Pam emphasized how she interpreted the group for her and for other parents. She seemed to recognize the value in having spaces as such for parents who need to speak their story, even if it impacts her negatively. She stated,

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The [parent] support group, um, I have a hard time with...because it's sad...I've been to three, I think, and they're just very sad. And I'm not to take away, people are clearly in pain. And I'm not in pain. And I don't, I don't want to be sad...I don't want to take away from their pain, but it's, it's almost too sad for me...

Rhonda's experience with ambiguous loss and grief seemed to differ from the other parents. Her interpretations of cisnormative societal influences on parental expectations were like the others, but it seemed she was intolerant of these expectations. Rhonda illustrated,

I have my child I've always had, and I am very lucky to have him. Whomever he is, is wonderful and the world will think so too...If I had grieved a loss of losing a child then that would mean I had placed my expectations on [TGE child] to be something specific AND it would also mean I only had a child to fulfill my own desires, or just to have a mini me, or just to fulfill some preconceived vision/idea in my head of what my child's going to be like...

Rhonda also spoke to how they see such expectations as being a disadvantage to both the parent and their TGE child. She stated,

That child is at a disadvantage before they're even born because that parent is setting themselves (and the child) up for disappointment and the child can never live up to preconceived expectations...

Here Rhonda expressed, what seemed to be, frustration with other parents who experience ambiguous loss. They delineate the positive impact having a TGE child has on them as a parent and being influenced by preconceived ideas of her child. Rhonda stated,

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Anyway, how could I grieve a loss, my child is still standing right there! I thought he was a girl, but I was wrong, he is a boy, ok great. If anything, I'm impressed with [TGE child], not sad he doesn't meet some preconceived ideas I have about who he's supposed to be. My child's alive, healthy, curious, bright, well-mannered, and a good person... I'm not grieving; I'm grateful.

Rhonda also expressed their perception of ambiguous grief and the impact ambiguous grief has on the TGE child and denying them the right to be their true authentic self. They exclaimed,

Parents don't see how "grieving" the "loss" of a child they thought was a different gender is just a backhanded form of rejection...Also I think to "grieve" the "loss" of a TGE child is just super devaluing and sends them a really depressing message. I was very committed from the beginning of never sending [TGE child] that message ever...To me, people should be who they are.

Rhonda adds ambiguous grief is selfishness by stating,

And unfortunately grieving contradicts that idea that the other person can be themselves. Grieving is a self-centered process. Grief is a projection of our feelings onto the situation and other person...And parents who "grieve" the "loss" of a child when their child says they're trans, that's what they're doing— they're putting themselves first, they're centering themselves in a situation and experience of which they are actually not the center, their child is. They get self-absorbed in that instead of celebrating that they have a wonderful and brave little kid.

Carmen and Rhonda seemed to be experiencing similar cognitions related to meeting their TGE children where they are, rather than having expectations for them Carmen's

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experience parenting her transgender child seemed to demonstrate contentment with her child's social transition rather than grief or loss. She illustrated having had no expectations of what her life would be like as a parent raising a child AMAB. Carmen stated,

I always say, like, I never had a boy really...there was never any question...Never have I ever seen her deviate from that.

Similar to Carmen, Jenny too spoke to experiencing contentment with her child's gender rather than ambiguous loss. Jenny demonstrated making no assumptions about her own child being gender fluid and illustrated how she sees being directed by her gender creative child as being significant. She expressed,

You can't assume that this is going to be forever, you can't assume that this is not going to be forever. You can't assume that this is going to be...a phase or not...

Loss of Relationships. Regardless of whether these parents were experiencing ambiguous loss or contentment with their child's social transition they all stepped up and out to support their TGE children either before or after getting educated on TGE people, concerns, and experiences. Because so many of them were willing to meet their TGE child where they were, and accept their true authentic self, the parents and families found themselves losing relationships with family and friends. The parents who spoke of this loss seemed to illustrate losing relationships came as a consequence of cis-normed socially constructed ideas of gender.

Lee was one parent who spoke to disconnecting from family members and losing close relationships with friends because of his support and acceptance toward his child. He expressed having a family member accuse he and his partner of abusing their transgender child by

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affirming and supporting her social transition. He also stated, “I lost a repetitively close friend and so did my older son” as a result of accepting of his transgender child.

Sue too explained the demise of close relationships with family because she affirmed her transgender child. She expressed her experience with this loss and explains the significance of allowing her child to be her authentic self regardless of having people in opposition of her. She stated,

Coming against my mom, my (ex)husband, even my entire community, I bought her girl clothes...Everyone was against me, but I knew in my heart that I had the right answer and my daughter was infinitely happier...I lost my entire community due to this situation...

The nuances of her daughter’s social transition appeared fraught with difficulties. Sue described being supportive and affirming of her daughter from the beginning and resisting the opposition of her doing so from community. She stated,

It was a very difficult transition for everyone around my daughter and I...I allowed her to dress fully as a girl, much to the dismay of my ex-husband, mother, in-laws, and the counselor we were seeing...I had come to terms with it, heartbroken when I realized that her Grandmother wouldn’t let her come into the house unless she was wearing boy clothes.

Sue added that her daughter’s social transition was life changing for her. She illustrated accepting that she would need to shield her daughter from transprejudice, even from family members. She also conveyed the importance of not implementing cisnormative parenting practices as her own. Sue expressed,

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...That moment changed my life forever, because I realized that it was only my job to protect my child's spirit. Not base my parenting on outside influences. From that moment on, she had my total support and I become her biggest ally.

Similar to Sue, Carmen lost relationships with her family in the beginning because she supported and affirmed her daughter's social transition. Carmen communicated what it has been like as an affirming parent to her transgender child and encountering transprejudice from family members. She also spoke to why she lost their support in the beginning and illustrated the family is now enhancing their relationship with family members. Carmen's experience of being discriminated against and judged is expressed as such,

We had so much pushback from family that, like, your child could not possibly know this...when we first transitioned her, I was getting emails and calls from people in my family who were just saying, like, "You're a horrible parent. I can't believe you're doing this." My [family member] even was going to draft a letter to get temporary custody of my kids...[extended family of origin] coming around now, but in the beginning the whole family was just like, "We're not gonna do that. That's ridiculous. Why would we?"

Ali too spoke to loss of relationships with family members as a result of supporting and affirming her stepdaughter. She, like Carmen, also illustrated confronting family members on this front. Unlike Carmen, Ali spoke to the confrontation as being both difficult and relieving. She stated,

The biggest change is dealing with my in-laws...I feel almost fortunate that's [issues with in-laws] the only hard thing we've really had to do up to this point...In a way, cutting them [in-laws] was kind of helpful to me personally, because it was hard to be near

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people who clearly, like, we're supposed to have this loving relationship with, but so much goes unsaid... It's sort of a relief for us to be like, "well, if you can't affirm our child, your grandchild, we can't have any contact, none of us can."

For Terri, the timing of losing relationships came at the beginning of her child's social transition; gaining supports came more recently. Some of those family members were "supportive" of her daughter now, but it seemed cisnormative ideas influenced them and strained the relationship for a long time, leaving Terri to fend for herself and identify supports alone. She stated not having support from family was significant on her and her immediate family. Terri expressed this experience as such,

The toughest part for us was dealing with our very old-fashioned parents. There was years of pain and stress until our parents ([Husband's] parents came around)... Her transition gave us some issues with my parents and in-laws, but they eventually came around to be supportive of their grandchild.

Gabby, like the others, recounted losing her family's support when she came out to them. She also demonstrated setting boundaries and challenging them when she deemed necessary. She stated,

When I came out to my parents and brother about [Transgender Child], they weren't very receptive or willing to honor her name and pronouns. So, they finally became "ambivalent" towards [Transgender Child]'s transition and honored her name and pronouns after I set some boundaries and reinforced them when they crossed them. I let them know that if they wanted any of our family in their lives they needed to respect [Transgender Child].

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Like Carmen, Gabby also spoke to experiencing having a good relationship with some family members while having others deem her support toward her transgender child as being abusive. She too spoke to disconnecting from many of them as a result of their discriminatory behavior and transprejudice beliefs. She expressed,

Although my immediate family shaped up, a good number of members of my extended family did not. Some even felt the need to email and message me letting me know that what I was doing was child abuse and against God. I've cut off all contact from...most of his [parent's father] family.

Advocacy and Education as Change Agents

Although many of the parent's expressed loss of relationships as being a significant aspect of their experience raising, supporting, and affirming their TGE children, it also seemed many felt losing such relationships was necessary to begin creating change for their own TGE children. The next superordinate theme, **Advocacy and education as change agents**, demonstrated how the parent's experience educational and advocacy agendas in ways that helped to create change for their own TGE children, other TGE people, and cisgender parent's with TGE children. Gabby focused on how she interpreted engagement in the community as being educational and a change agent. She stated,

Education is everything. And by education, I mean increasing your awareness of your own worldview, and being open to changing that shit. Really. We all have implicit biases that NEED CHANGING [Emphasized by participant]...Education is dropping that stuff at the curb, and allowing yourself to hear someone's experience without reservation, and truly accepting their reality as truth...all of the education I've received/engaged in,

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learning from LGBTQ community members lived experience has been the most impactful...

Gabby also spoke to the PLPSG being educational for her and her partner. She recounted the first time she attended and illustrated beginning to shift the way she saw her child and understood gender. She illustrated unlearning unconventional ideas around gender and realizing the importance of allowing her child to be her true authentic self. She stated,

At the playgroup, we met an amazing advocate...He let me say everything that was on my heart – even things I said out of ignorance, things I’m embarrassed to say I believed at that time. Then [He] very gently educated my partner and I. It was like our eyes were opened to a reality we hadn’t realized was there the entire time. After that first play group, we took [TGE Child] to the store and let her pick out a new wardrobe. Every piece of clothing had a combination of glitter, sequins, rainbows, neon leopard print, or pink and/or purple. We stopped censoring her altogether, and she went to school the next Monday in a dress, with a huge stripped purple flower in her hair.

Because of the education Gabby received attending the first PLPSG and understanding her transgender daughter’s needs, she began to recognize her role in advocating for her daughter at school. She illustrated needing to take legal measures to help ensure her child’s needs were being met at school. Such challenges she voiced occur in a state that now has affirming laws and policies for TGE people. Here Gabby reflected on seeking out legal support to help her advocate for her child in school and illustrated the oppressive language still used by her child’s school district toward TGE children. She stated,

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After receiving support from the American Civil Liberties Union, [TGE Child] is now able to use the school facilities of the gender with which she identifies, and after a legal name change the school now formally recognized her as [TGE Child].

Lee spoke to supports and his experience attending the PLPSG with Gabby for first time. He described reassessing how he knew, experienced, and understood gender to be a better advocate for his TGE child. He stated,

Meeting the people at [undisclosed resource center] made me reassess my limited experiences and realize that I had it all wrong. Meeting and talking to [Two Transgender adults who direct the undisclosed resource center] really opened my eyes to how much I didn't know. I also learned how important it was for me to support my kid no matter what. I really changed who I thought I was and shifted most of my world views, I gave up the idea that my worth was defined by my masculinity. It was really a life altering process for me (in a good way).

Comparable to Gabby and Lee, Carmen also began to collect and receive information that educated her so she could advocate for her transgender child and the TGE community—attempting to break down gender stereotypes and teaching affirming language and terminology. Here she normalized being TGE, communicated this advocacy effort, and described why she believes it is important to engage in doing so. She expressed,

I went out and I found articles here and there...then I could send them to people... the advocacy and things like that for transgender children, showing people that it's normal, it happens, it's okay, there's nothing wrong with it...you just hear so many horrible stories

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and, um, she's already kind of displaying some depression and anxiety herself. So, it has caused me to-to be a lot more vocal in standing up for her.

Jenny observed herself as an ally and desired others see her in that role as well. She explained the difficulties she has at pinpointing how she can be an ally and reported feeling like she can't get educated enough to become an ally. It seemed she frequently works toward being thoughtful of truly understanding her gender creative child, yet she interpreted herself falling short at times as a caregiver. She expressed this as such,

I think my hardest thing is that I want to, um, I want to be perceived as an ally, but I'm not sure how to do that. (laughs) You know, and I'm such an information person that I need all the information. I want to know...

Like others, Jenny also spoke to being concerned about TGE children coming out to their parents young ages and not getting support or having an ally because they lack knowledge and education of gender fluidity. She stated,

I do think that there are, um, for parents and for parents' extended family and for people on the outside of it, um, that have never experienced it, that worry, that, um, association with sexual orientation is so strong that I could see their aversion to taking their kid to therapy...

Similar to Jenny, Gabby viewed education as being an important element to advocacy for gender fluidity, particularly with regards to giving her transgender child space to voice her subjective experience. She spoke to her daughter participating in surveys and research projects to help educate people. She also conveyed the importance of allowing her daughter to participate in such change efforts to be a change agent for herself and for other TGE children. Gabby

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expressed her experience with giving her own transgender child opportunities to create visibility for her other TGE children. She stated,

In order to help [Transgender Child] express herself and feel heard, we participated in several studies and advocacy efforts whose primary aim was to elevate the voices of our gender-expansive youth...At the age of 8, [Transgender Child]'s visibility and desire to share her story have helped her to become an advocate for her community.

Rhonda, like Gabby felt her TGE child should have a voice in educating and advocating for himself and other TGE children. To Rhonda, being a responsible parent means advocating for your child, and explained the importance of advocacy for both her and her son. The two have teamed up to educate people and advocate for inclusive spaces that are accepting of TGE people. She stated how she interpreted working with her son,

We're just people who have the capacity to take on a lot, generate a lot of ideas, and get excited to see things get going.

Pam's experience with having her daughter be an advocate for her community differed from Gabby's and Rhonda's experiences. Pam expressed concerns and challenges she experiences while raising a TGE child. These barriers included feeling the need to protect her TGE and being the advocate for her family. She stated,

I'm going to keep her, um, identity very private from kind of this point...I decided I'm going to be, I can be the advocate for my family and I can be, but I'm not going to put her picture out there...

As part of her experience, it seemed Pam has come to understand that she can use her privilege to support the TGE community and create change. In sharing her story, it seemed Pam

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experienced some catharsis while being able to educate others. Pam expressed telling her narrative as being educational to other cis-parents and other community members, and a part of advocacy work that she does to inform and support both parents of TGE children and TGE children themselves. Pam stated,

[to say] it will be okay. So however I can help in that way...I don't know what that means yet, but that's how I see my information and my story helping other families or helping the community...I would love to be able to change people's minds...that would be amazing and if I can do that to one person, my work is done.

It seemed Pam deemed she can use her privilege to create systemic change for TGE people. Here she illustrated how she felt about advocacy work as a cis-person raising a transgender child to attempt to decrease marginalization that TGE people experience. She expressed,

I have a lot of privilege, and I want to use it for power. I want to use it for good. And I pride myself on that...there will always be that marginalized group in this society because this will never go away if people not supporting it, but if I can use my privilege for good and, you know, and for good power and to be able to say, "No, let's do this right. And tell me what I need to do to do it right."

Advocating seemed to be the essence of what Pam does as a parent raising a transgender child in a cisnormative society. She stated she advocated to support people like her child, AMAB in transition to female, and to assist cisgender parents who are struggling when their child discloses or transitions. She stated,

I want to be an advocate for other trans girls who were born male...if I can help parents, you know, yeah, if I can just help that and say, you know, this is okay...

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Ali, similar to Pam, also spoke to normalizing the experiences of TGE people. She illustrated matters of politics, while indicating avoiding getting political. Yet now that her child has come out she reported finding herself being more outspoken toward people with conventional ideas about gender. She demonstrated advocating and debating more about trans concerns such as transphobia or transprejudice than before her child disclosed. She spoke to one experience where she was protecting her transgender stepchild and found a need to advocate, with her “claws out”, to create awareness in an online space. This experience seemed pertinent on how she was attempting to create awareness and change as an advocate who is educated. She stated,

I don't share political stuff or news articles in general on social media, but I made, I make a few exceptions...Because I thought, well, this is not gonna get out to enough people. So and I got into a vicious debate with certain people about it [specific incident involving a transphobic social media post].

Ali seemed to have developed an urgency to advocate and shield her family, which made talking about and advocating for her stepdaughter more painful for her. She expressed this as such,

I definitely feel more protective now and slightly more passionate than before. And I feel it's almost harder to talk about now...I mean, it was hard enough before...I just feel like crying more.

Comparable to Ali, Jim also spoke to having an urgency to protect his child, which can be deemed as a form of advocacy. Jim also spoke to the judgement his family has faced because of cisnormative views and illustrated being protective because of such biases Western society has about gender diversity and about him affirming his child. Jim stated,

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I see myself as a protector just from all the things, society, all that kind of stuff...I'm here to, if we're somewhere and somebody makes a remark then, you know, that's my job to step in and be like, "Who are you to judge?" You know, I don't judge my son... they don't see what I see.

Rhonda, like the others, viewed parents of TGE children as being helpful. Nonetheless, she interpreted parents of TGE children as being detested as advocates in TGE spaces. Here she described her views and expressed her feelings on this issue. She stated,

It feels like parents are the red-headed stepchildren in the trans world but it is ok to allow allies to actually DO stuff to help educate and inform. In some cases, parents are the best people to actually get out there and do the work, AND [emphasized by participant], not every trans person wants to advocate for their community, so we've got to rely on cishet allies to help do the work in order to create change and cultivate accepting environments much faster than one or two people can.

Rhonda's concerns with feeling unwanted in TGE spaces resounded in her writing, yet she remained focused on doing advocacy work for her child's overall well-being. Here she delineated the impact of doing advocacy work to create an inclusive accepting environment for her son. She expressed advocacy is a parents responsibility and stated,

I've always been very happy to go out and do whatever needs to be done to pave the way for him so he experiences inclusivity and acceptance. I just believe if you have a child that's the responsibility you take on.

Summary

This chapter illustrated the idiographic experiences of each participant before demonstrating a case by case analysis and final results of this study. The results of this study included three group superordinate themes, **Impact of living in a conventional society**, **Loss**, and **Advocacy and education as change agents**. Two of the group superordinate themes had subthemes to help communicate the parent's experiences raising a TGE child. The superordinate theme, **Impact of living in a conventional society** had two subthemes, *Parent's transition*, *Socio-cultural-political influences on parent's experiences*. The superordinate theme **Loss** also had two subthemes, *Ambiguous loss* and *Loss of Relationships*. While **Advocacy and education as change agents** had no subthemes.

Chapter V

Discussion

This chapter will connect the findings with current literature by providing a summary of the interpretations identified in three superordinate themes across eleven cases. The three superordinate themes, **Impact of living in a conventional society**, **Loss**, and **Advocacy and education as change agents**, seemed to encompass the ways these parents experience their transgender and gender expansive (TGE) children in a cisnormed society. In challenging cisgender norms through the summary of the findings, this chapter illustrates the voices and lived experiences of parents supporting and affirming their TGE children who live in New Mexico and attending a monthly Peer led play support group (PLPSG). This chapter also offers recommendations that focus specifically on implications for professional counselors, counselor educators, and future research in counseling. The results of this study may potentially fill a gap in literature related to the experiences of parent's raising, supporting, and affirming their prepuberal TGE children.

Summary of The Findings Related to The Literature

Theme One: Impact of Living in Conventional Society

The first superordinate theme identified, **Impact of living in conventional society** (Butler, 1991; Singh et al., 2013), encompassed all participating parent's experience raising a TGE child in a cisnormative society. The impact of Westernized culture seemed to not only impact their TGE children (Hines, 2006; Hodges, 2008; Krieger, 2017), they themselves illustrated that they were also impacted by traditional societal and cultural expectations (Alegría, 2018; Capous-Desyllas & Barron, 2017; Moller et al., 2009) even in a state that upholds legal rights for TGE people in general. New Mexico offers residents with a gender affirming option on

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birth certificates that allows for amendments of birth certificates through self-confirmation.

Senate Bill 20 (2019), *Vital Record Sex Designation*, permits individuals born in the state of New Mexico to change the designated or assigned sex on their birth certificate to a gender neutral “X” without the prerequisite of gender confirmation surgery (New Mexico Department of Health [NMDOH], 2019; New Mexico Legislature, 2019). Nonetheless, during the data collection stage, all parents spoke of observing their child experience marginalization in addition to experiencing their own marginalization based on their child identifying as gender non-binary, gender fluid, gender creative, or transgender.

Similar to past research done by Capous-Desyllas and Barron (2017) many parents lacked the education or knowledge of diverse gender identities and as a result were unaware of where to find education, resources, or supports. This lack of education, knowledge, resources, and supports seemed to result from their living in a conventional society with dominating ciscentric beliefs that fail to recognize TGE identities. A dominating ciscentric society as such also lacks evidence-based literature regarding nonbinary genders (Capous-Desyllas & Barron, 2017), which created systemic barriers for these parents and impacted the ways they supported and affirmed their TGE children. Like the Capous-Desyllas and Barron’s (2017) study with families of transgender or gender diverse children, many of the parents in this study were unfamiliar with trans or gender expansive/nonbinary genders prior to their child’s disclosure or beginning to exhibit gender expression that defied binary gender. In fact, many of the narratives of both studies paralleled and showed similarities. Parents in both studies spoke to feeling conflicting and confusing feelings about their children and some experienced a barrier in language in addition to understanding of what their child was explaining to them about their gender. Many of the parents in both studies worked on preparing themselves to be supportive and affirming once

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they realized their child's concerns were related to gender identity. Recognizing their child was not going through a phase, as others encouraged them to believe.

During the findings analysis stage, the primary investigator began to understand these parent's experiences better and interpret (a) how various systems influenced parent's understanding of gender before their child disclosed (Capous-Desyllas & Barron, 2017), (b) how they experienced their TGE child's disclosure and social transition (Alegría, 2018; Capous-Desyllas & Barron, 2017), and (c) how they encountered unlearning binary gender (Capous-Desyllas & Barron, 2017). Analyzing the conceptual comments parents were making in their responses developed into a subtheme, *Socio-cultural-political influences on parent's experiences*. As emerging themes were identified, it seemed these parents were impacted and influenced by specific Westernized social, cultural, and political values (Capous-Desyllas & Barron, 2017; de Graaf & Carmichael, 2019; Nealy, 2017). They seemed to be unaware of just how impactful and influential these standards were on their biases, assumptions, thoughts, and behaviors about gender until their child disclosed and began to socially transition as a TGE person (Capous-Desyllas & Barron, 2017).

Nealy (2017) noted the importance of cisgender people creating an awareness on how they come to know gender and recognizing the lack of thought process that has gone into understanding their own socially constructed gender identity that matches their assigned sex at birth. Pam and Jenny both spoke specifically to this phenomenon. Because of their own upbringing and being engaged in ciscentric belief systems, many parents spoke to their own struggle with understanding their TGE child in the beginning. Laura even spoke to unintentionally coming across a presenter who spoke of "Gender fluidity" and expressed the

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significance of this. Learning this term seemed to be a critical point in her understanding her TGE child and beginning to learn about more diverse gender identities.

Working alongside their TGE child, many parents illustrated experiencing their own transition while obtaining knowledge and education of TGE people, experiences, and concerns and unlearning gender binary (Capous-Desyllas & Barron, 2017). Through processing case by case themes with committee members, recognition of the subtheme, *Parental Transition*, came about. Like Alegría (2018) illustrated, Jim spoke to his own reformation of gender stereotypes and “owning up” to his child being Gender Creative and seeing it as being “normal” for him (Alegría, 2018; Capous-Desyllas & Barron, 2017; Moller et al., 2009). Such a transition, for many parents, included engaging in their own reflective process and coming to terms with how cisnormed societal expectations influenced the way they understood gender as binary (Alegría, 2018; Capous-Desyllas & Barron, 2017). Many, like Rhonda, Gabby, Ali, Lee, Jim, and Jenny reflected on how they experienced and understood their own gender and sexuality as part of this reflective process. Lee even spoke to how he “bought into the ‘blue for boys, pink for girls’ thing” before beginning his own transition to normalizing varying genders (Alegría, 2018; Capous-Desyllas & Barron, 2017). Such processing did not appear uncommon for these parents and seemed to come from unlearning societal norms around binary gender to support and affirm their own TGE children (Capous-Desyllas & Barron, 2017). In fact, as part of their unlearning experience, most participants spoke of experiencing judgement from others and many indicated experiencing a loss of relationships as a result of these judgments (Capous-Desyllas & Barron, 2017).

Theme Two: Loss

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Because of their unconditional love (Martello-Gill, 2019) these parents held for their TGE children, they were willing to experience significant loss, internally and externally. Many of the parent's indicated they had experienced a *Loss of relationships* with friends and family for affirming their child's gender. This became a focal point of the findings. Parents spoke to the impact of their child's disclosure and social transition on close relationships (Alegría, 2018). Many of them illustrated having lost connection with others due to being judged by the ciscentric Westernized socio-cultural-political views they held about non-binary genders (Capous-Desyllas & Barron, 2017). Unlike Alegría (2018) no parent expressed loss of connection to their own church because of affirming their child's decision to socially transition, but some illustrated the significance religion played on their experience of losing relationships.

Gabby illustrated disconnecting with her family of origin because of their religious views while Ali demonstrated the loss of relations she experienced with her in-laws because of religion as well (Alegría, 2018; Capous-Desyllas & Barron, 2017). Carmen and Lee both spoke to the loss of relationships they experienced with family because they disapproved of them supporting their TGE child and viewed it as abuse (Alegría, 2018; Capous-Desyllas & Barron, 2017) although the 'World Professional Association for Transgender Health' (2019) deemed affirming approaches toward TGE people to be appropriate and not deviant or abusive. Similar to both Alegría (2018) and Capous-Desyllas & Barron's (2017) work on understanding various elements influenced by cishet normed systems on parent's experiences, Pam and Carmen illustrated their concerns about knowing people who are religious. They described the disapproval and transphobic messages connected to this fear and illustrate how they have responded to their family and friends. Pam stated a neighbor child told her TGE child that Jesus did not love her, while Carmen indicated being fearful of losing a relationship with friends who are religious if

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they found out her child was TGE. Pam and Carmen also spoke about their concerns related to potential loss of relationships with others because of the conscious conflict they experience in connection to others finding out about the genitalia their children have and the fear they experience that is related to safety concerns (Capous-Desyllas & Barron, 2017). Similar to the work done by Capous-Desyllas & Barron (2017), Jim and Jenny reported their family expressed disapproval they were not taking responsibility to deter their gender creative child's behavior. Sue stated, she lost her whole community as a result of supporting and affirming her TGE child, something she seems to be continuing to deal with. In addition to relational loss, many of the parents spoke to *Ambiguous Loss* or as Coolhart et al. (2018) describe this complex concept, "a shift in their understanding of their child" (p.31).

With regards to loss, many parents also faced their own emotional loss, which can also be defined as or ambiguous loss (Coolhart et al., 2018). Coolhart et al. (2018) noted ambiguous loss is related to these parents feeling various emotions connected to grief and sadness connected to their child transitioning. Similar to this study, such emotions defined in the Coolhart et al. study seemed to be connected to expectations parents had for their TGE child when they were assigned a sex at birth. One other characteristic that correlates these two studies is finding parent's experience of various levels of ambiguous loss. In conclusion of their study Coolhart et al. remarked on the significance of attunement and illustrated the importance of each person in the family system attuning to children's gender identity so that they can all genuinely live together and relate in a more authentic manner because they are themselves living authentically.

Rhonda's interpretation of ambiguous loss differed from the other parents in that they felt grieving the loss of a child who is still alive is selfish, a notion that seemed to be based on preconceived ideas influenced by ciscentric belief systems (Coolhart et al., 2018). Other parents,

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like Gabby and Pam, spoke to grief and loss as part of their own process as they began to accept their child in transition and go through the stages with their children (Alegría, 2018).

Specifically, Gabby illustrated how a recent intervention in support of her TGE child's medical transition caused her to realize she needed to continue to shift preconceived ideas she has of her, even as someone who is educated about TGE people and experiences and an advocate for necessary supports and resources for TGE people.

Theme Three: Advocacy and Education as Change Agents

These experiences led these parents to advocate for their TGE child, other TGE community members, and cis-parents of TGE children (Alegría, 2018). Such advocacy efforts came from their own transitional process, which included gaining knowledge to unlearn gender binary roles. Parents participating in the study advocated for their child differently and like Alegría's (2018) research many of these parents did so as a proactive approach to either set expectations that others show supportive behaviors toward them and their child or educating others on TGE people, concerns, and experiences. Differing from Alegría (2018), parents in this study did not focus on changing providers because of experiencing microaggressions and intolerant behaviors although Ali stated she would become frustrated when she would have to educate and repeat herself when trying to obtain a new provider to see her TGE stepchild.

Parents like Pam shared their own narratives with others to educate and advocate (Alegría, 2018), while others like Gabby and Rhonda, supported their child in sharing their own stories to inform others, similar to the work of Rahilly (2015). Rahilly (2015) found that as parents became more comfortable and familiar with gender-variant inclusive language, understandings, and practices they used their new knowledge to educate others. The parents of Rahilly's study as well as this study seemed to find significance in educating others to create

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change and break down systemic barriers impacting them, a notion outlined in Singh et al. (2013). Some parents, like Jim, Ali, Carmen, and Lee advocated for their child by being protective (Alegría, 2018; Capous-Desyllas & Barron, 2017). Parent's like Gabby and Lee experienced issues with their child's school and felt they needed legal help (Capous-Desyllas & Barron, 2017), whereas others, like Carmen and Pam, remained stealth at school because of safety concerns (Alegría, 2018; Capous-Desyllas & Barron, 2017). Similar to the findings of Capous-Desyllas & Barron (2017), some parents in this study explained the frustration they felt needing to maintain a level of secrecy about their child's gender or being expected to disclose over and over again. This could potentially be because these parents realize, as Olson et al. (2015) note, when their TGE children can live as their true authentic gendered self mental health risk factors decrease for them. Such advocacy efforts for parents appeared to be exhausting.

Other concerns related to their children needing to live as their authentic self were felt by parents like Sue who advocated for her child's well-being. Sue spoke to observing the "intense internal Hell" her child endured as a transgender child living in a cisnormative society (ALGBTIC, 2009; Capous-Desyllas & Barron, 2017). Others, like Carmen and Pam, expressed being concerned about preventing internal stress and self-hatred their child may experience later in life as someone who is TGE (ALGBTIC, 2009; Capous-Desyllas & Barron, 2017). Jenny talked about her child having a positive outlook on being gender fluid and wanting to be a good ally and having others acknowledge she is. She illustrated her child's ability to find peace with peers who did not understand her gender, nonetheless, she also expressed a desire to have her child be comfortable with themselves as an adult (Alegría, 2018; Capous-Desyllas & Barron, 2017), an effort Jenny appeared to be an advocate for all TGE children.

Relationship Between Themes

This study identified relationships between themes which seemed to encompass the notion, much like Sansfaçon et al. (2015), that all the parents participating in this study were affirming and supportive of their TGE child. While they all encountered such experiences leading them to provide inclusive spaces for their TGE children in similar and dissimilar ways, they all appeared to hold unconditional love for their child, a concept noted in Martell-Gill (2019). Each parent spoke to very specific examples of how they are supportive and affirming of their TGE child and it seemed the work they were doing was to maintain their child's overall well-being (Olson et al., 2015; Kuvalanka et al., 2014) now and in the future, an entity that Kuvalanka et al. (2014) and Olson et al. (2015) found to be of great necessity related to family support on the overall well-being of TGE children. In this study it was found participating parents hold the power to be supportive and affirming of their dually marginalized TGE children. They have the power and privilege to combat ciscentric standards that stigmatize and discriminate TGE children. Such oppressive standards, policies, and practices, as illustrated by Sue, that harm their children and increase negative mental health outcomes.

Ciscentric standards appeared to significantly influence relationships between each of the three superordinate themes, **Impact of living in conventional society**, **Loss**, and **Advocacy and education as change agents**. Many parents spoke to how they labeled gender, or misunderstood gender rather, prior to obtaining education after their child disclosed and socially transitioned. They illustrated how ciscentric ideals influenced their socio-cultural-political beliefs throughout the process of their child's disclosure and transition and reported the impact of dominating power hierarchies in various contexts like Singh et al. (2013). Such hegemonic influences existed

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within schools, community, and family systems and create spaces that intertwine sexual/affectional orientation or attraction with gender (Nealy, 2017).

Ciscentric standards also seemed to impact these parents need for education, resources, and supports and the lack of education, resources, and supports available for TGE children and families. This study supports the work done by researchers Baum et al. (2014) and Ryan (2010) who have determined having supports and resources, like the PLPSG, available to TGE children and their families as being protective factors (Nichols & Jenkinson, 2006; Seymour, 2015) that improve their quality of life (Katz-Wise et al., 2017; Kuvalanka et al., 2014; Nealy, 2017; Ryan et al., 2010; Sansfaçon et al., 2015). Each parent participating in this study had attended the PLPSG with their TGE child at least one time and all spoke to finding the group to be informative and supportive, necessary elements of group systems work outlined by Nichols and Jenkinson (2006) and Conners and Caple (2005).

When examining the PLPSG from a developmental perspective, it becomes apparent that many of the parents spoke to the intrapersonal, interpersonal, group-as-a-whole, and supra-group levels outlined by Kiweewa et al. (2013). For example, many parents indicated they experienced their own personal growth that seemed to come from being self-reflective and supported by others with similar values within the PLPSG and outside of it. Jenny, Gabby, Lee, and Rhonda spoke to their personal growth with understanding their gender identity and sexual/affectional attractions and Jim illustrated “owning up” to better support his TGE child. Carmen explicitly stated that she has “grown a lot” through her own intrapersonal process. Parents also illustrated the interpersonal development they experienced as cisgender people entering the TGE community. Carmen, Gabby, Laura and Pam illustrated improved relationships with people in the TGE community and spoke to being validated and accepted as affirming parents to TGE

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children. As for the group-as-a-whole level of development offered by Kiweewa and colleagues (2013) many of these parent's experience within the PLPSG was dominated by sharing their stories with others in attendance of the group. In having a safe space to share with people who are accepting and affirming of TGE people and experience similar phenomenon, it seemed they felt a sense of cohesiveness within the group. These parents spoke to feeling comfortable contributing to the group by giving a part of themselves and sharing related situations and encounters they experience as parents of TGE children living in a cisnet society that marginalizes them and their family. Such a society, according to Goodrich and Luke (2015) can be deemed the supra-group level, as it pertains to the impact of larger systems impacting members of in attendance of the PLPSG.

Other ciscentric values seemingly impeding on these parent's experiences raising a TGE child also included the impact cisnormed beliefs had on their intrapersonal (Alegría, 2018) and interpersonal relationships (Capous-Desyllas & Barron, 2017). Many of the parents spoke to growing as they learned and questioning the socially constructed labels (Goodrich et al., 2016) for sexuality and gender not only for their child, but for themselves as well. These parents spoke to the loss they encountered—relationships (Alegría, 2018; Nealy, 2017) and ambiguous, (Coolhart et al., 2018) as a result of ciscentric values, revealing an aspiration for advocacy and education, for self and others, to create socio-cultural-political change. Such change defies gender binaries, accommodates gender-variant behavior (Rahilly, 2005), and improves the future for their TGE child and other TGE people (Hodges, 2008).

Recommendations

Implications for Practice

The findings of this study extends on what little literature available on the lived experiences of parents of TGE children. The findings also add to empirical research that supports resources for these parents and their families. This section further clarifies implications of the findings of this study and offers specific recommendations connected to the counseling profession, counselor education, and future research in counseling.

Counseling Profession

The American Counseling Association ([ACA], 2014) Code of Ethics requires counseling professionals to uphold professional values that “enhance human development throughout the life span” (p. 3), honor diversity, embrace a multicultural approach, and promote social justice. These values include practicing in an ethical and culturally competent manner while ensuring the integrity of the therapeutic relationship with clients (ACA, 2014). The findings of this study provide a variety of implications for the counseling profession that fit the values outlined by both ACA and the Society for Sexual, Affectional, Intersex and Gender Expansive Identities ([SAIGE]; formerly known as the Association for Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Issues in Counseling). Values that note the importance of clinicians being competent to work effectively with these TGE people and challenge traditional ways of treatment that further marginalize them (ALGBTIC, 2009).

First, the findings obtained through hearing the lived experiences of parents raising TGE children can inform professional counselors on how to work with these families in a nonjudgmental manner and use assessment as a way to build rapport with and improve relational

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supports for these families. In assessing these families it might be beneficial to ensure the language used in the assessment process is inclusive. The practicing counselor may offer questions that include asking for pronouns of each individual and gather data about any feelings of ambiguous loss to start, what might be deemed, uncomfortable conversations. Professional counselors can also inquire about the parent's experiences with obtaining supports and be better prepared to offer local, national, and global resources that can help to support the parents and families.

Offering an inclusive space for parents to normalize their experience is pertinent to their own experience and gaining knowledge about the parent's experiences can help professional counselors to better understand and recognize the impact of conventional ciscentric norms on the parent's own transition and processing their TGE prepubescent child's disclosure and social transition as they come to, or fail to, support and affirm their TGE child. Professional counselors can be better prepared to intervene using affirming approaches in treatment to support these families as they process their own transitional phases. This can be seen in the experience of both Gabby and Jim and how they experienced their transgender child, AMAB, when she disclosed and began to exhibit feminine expression. The two of them found a local resource center supporting TGE people to help them be better able to support their child, and by reaching out to this support systems and attending the PLPSG for the first time, the two of them were educated about how their cismormed ideas of gender were impacting the way they treated their transgender child. They began to unlearn the ciscentric norms they had been taught and recognized they were rejecting their child's authentic self. The two of them began their own transitional process after attending the PLPSG for the first time and as part of this the two of them started their journey of accepting and affirming their child and her gendered self.

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The findings from this study can also improve both counseling professionals' and school counselors' awareness on this community to be better prepared to intervene using affirming methods. When professional counselors are informed they can better offer inclusive spaces for these parents to not feel like they have to explain themselves or their TGE child, as such feeling more comfortable to share their narrative. Also, professional counselors who are informed and knowledgeable can recognize these parent's needs to better assist them with processing the experiences they encounter in their community. With these results, school counselors will understand the impact school environments can have on these students and families and understand the concerns these parents and families are experiencing to better serve the TGE student at school. They will be better prepared to provide appropriate resources and referrals that fit the needs of these families.

The parents participating in this study spoke to using online resources to help them feel connected and engaged with other parents raising TGE children. While they spoke to the benefits of having these online platforms available to them, they too illustrated the challenges of having them available. Challenges like hearing the horror stories that other parents of TGE children and adults experience. Other challenges, such as those encountered by Sue, included observing her child's own internal process of being trans. Professional counselors and school counselors who are aware of how parents, like Sue, experience their child's "intense internal hell" might have a better understanding of the fear experienced by parents related to their child's emotional distress.

Additional challenges that might help professional counselors and school counselors to better intervene with parents include their exhibiting fear that others would find out about their child's genitalia or fear their child's safety might be endangered if someone were to find out about their child's genitalia. Professional counselors who have this knowledge and awareness will be

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better prepared to validate parent's experience and provide unconditional positive support to them whereas school counselors will understand the importance of the child remaining stealth at school. If a child is out at school, school counselors will be better prepared to ensure safety measures are in place for the child at school—i.e., collaborating with staff to stay alert of any bullying activity toward the student.

Additionally, professional counselors and school counselors will be better apt to recognize specific challenges these parents experience as they unlearn ciscentric ways of knowing to better support and affirm their TGE child, and they will understand the impact of losing relationships as a result of that. In recognizing these challenges, professional counselors will be better able to help these parents and their families process challenges related to the varying emotions—embarrassment, conflict, shame, guilt, etc., they may feel as they begin to defy socio-cultural-political systems that dominate, which can consequentially create loss—loss of relationships and ambiguous loss. School counselors can create supportive spaces for the student by adopting anti-discriminatory practices and policies such as the *Safe Schools for All Students Act* (SB288, 2019).

After reading the findings of this study, professional counselors will be informed on ways to create connections within families who are experiencing turmoil about the TGE child disclosing and socially transitioning. They will be able to provide psychoeducation and validation around these experiences for parents and provide them with knowledge about the ciscentric values they have been taught implicitly and explicitly. Both professional counselors and school counselors will have findings to refer to that support and validate parents as they support and affirm their TGE child. Professional counselors will have a better understanding of implementing and maintaining support groups, like the PLSPG, for these families. School

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counselors can better assess any socio-emotional needs TGE students have to ensure there are appropriate resources made available at the school—i.e., Safe Zone, Gay Straight Alliance (GSA; Henry & Grubbs, 2017). Professional counselors and school counselors will recognize the impact of having resources, education, and supports available for these parents since so many participating in this study struggled with finding such entities and reduce or prevent victimization against TGE children and family members.

Counseling practitioners will be able to offer ways for parents to understand the impact of pathologizing their children and offer a safe space for them to process this. Additionally, they will have knowledge that parents of TGE do not want to explain their situation to someone who does not understand. Professional counselors will understand the concern these families have about being discriminated against when the search for resources and supports whereas school counselors will recognize potential implicit and explicit discrimination from teachers, administration, and staff at schools.

Lastly, professional counselors and school counselors will understand the impact of education and advocacy efforts. They will recognize that not all parents engage in these tasks similarly. They themselves can utilize the findings to become advocates and allies toward systemic change that impacts these families. Professional counselors and school counselors will be better prepared to educate others in the field on ways to actively provide a supportive environment for these parents and their children to process the stigma and discrimination they experience while engaging them in accepting and affirming behaviors. They will have a better understanding of the demand for practitioners and school staff to be trained in providing affirmative care to these parents and their TGE children and families.

Counselor Education

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Counselor educators play an immensely influential role on counselors-in-training and must be prepared to recognize the impact of culture on student's learning process while upholding ethical procedures and multicultural implications outlined by the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision ([ACES], 2016). Such best practices, recognized by ACES include providing students with multiculturally competent training that "...maximize inclusivity" (2016, p. 16). Thus, findings from this study offers counselors educators methods to develop their own understanding of working with this community so they can offer andragogical approaches that educate counselors-in-training to work with parents competently and effectively, and families, with a TGE child. Counselor educators gain and awareness and understanding of the influence of ciscentric norms with the findings of this study so they can be better prepared to provide education to their students about the various systems that impact these families. They may offer case studies related to these parents and families experiences, providing practical application of the work they may be doing in their future careers as counselors with these families in relation to such systems. In providing assignments as such, students can be encouraged to reflect on how they might assess and treat these parents as future clinicians.

By reading the findings of this study, counselor educators will be better prepared to educate counselors-in-training to work with potential clients who are raising TGE children and the families impacted by dominated societal norms. They can offer education related to making parents part of the systems that can either hinder or facilitate growth for TGE children. The participants of this study spoke to normalizing their experience and counselor educators might take their lead with this to provide knowledge, awareness, and skills that normalize and validate experiences of parents raising TGE children to help ensure future counselors offer inclusive

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spaces. Normalizing familial experiences related to raising TGE children can also create inclusive spaces for TGE students or students' who are parents of TGE children in the program.

Counseling students might also come to understand why parents are resistant to support and recognize why they are struggling with varying emotions around supporting and affirming. This knowledge can help to educate students and provide competent supervision for students treating parents of TGE children or their families. Furthermore, counselor educators will have the knowledge to engage students in critical dialogue that influences counselors-in-training to recognize their biases against this community and challenge them. Counselor educators will be prepared to offer education to students who are potentially struggling with working with parents or family members of TGE children because of their own socio-cultural-political influences. By using the findings of this study in their andragogy, counselor educators set up a classroom resisting cisnormative values, confronting stigma and discrimination directed toward these parents and their TGE children. If such values, stigma, or discrimination comes into conversation, the findings of this study can prompt a teachable moment that gives space for students to challenge their own biases.

Future Research

Future qualitative research may examine various multiple identities across the world to understand how different regions influence cisnormative values in relation to how parents of TGE children experience their community. Studying parents and families who hold various intersecting identities—i.e., people of color, varying socioeconomic factors, a variety of sexual/affectional orientations or attractions and gender identities, that differ from the participants of this study might provide a better understanding of how parents of TGE children experience double, triple, etc. marginalization. Such inquiry might benefit from being guided by

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Singh et al.'s (2013) checklist on conducting feminist participatory action research with transgender communities. The first item these researchers offer on said checklist meant to foster ethical practice and empower research designs, included assessing intersecting identities of individuals within transgender communities. In assessing such social identities one can begin to understand how the participant's intersecting identities connect to privilege and oppression and afford the researcher space to recognize the power they hold in doing the research. It seems of great importance to adhere to this first step outlined by Singh et al. (2013), specifically when investigating parents of TGE children, since parents become, as illustrated by the participants in this study, a part of the TGE community because of the children. Continuing to engage in research on this community can influence policy makers to develop programs and services that can effectively support these parents and families. Such policies and practices also have potential to combat transphobic measures that continue to marginalize this community (Farmer & Byrd, 2015; Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2010) such as bathroom policies or "don't ask don't tell." Such measures that may influence parents to show rejecting behaviors, that they deem as protecting, toward their TGE child.

Also, it would be beneficial to investigate the differences and similarities of parents who are not affirming versus those who are affirming. In knowing this information practitioners may be better prepared to provide appropriate interventions to parents who are either unsupportive or supportive of their TGE child. Additionally, in understanding the differences between parents who are affirming and rejecting, there is potential to be better prepared to have critical dialogue around both facets without relying on findings simply focused on parents who are affirming. Such research might also provide a side by side analysis of both types of parents to educate and

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inform on both those who are supportive and affirming in an effort to determine their needs and the supports they require.

Future research could also examine parents who are not utilizing local support systems for TGE children and families. The focus of this inquiry might assist with offering a look into why cisgender parents don't reach out for local supports in queer communities. Investigating the various levels of group development might also assist with understanding how these parents experience intrapersonal, interpersonal, group-as-a-whole, or supra-group aspects of the group specifically. It might be beneficial to examine these levels in regard to how the parents experienced change to the group based on their own recommendations in addition to investigating how parents experience their recommended changes in relation to a support group they attend. In studying all these elements of group work specifically, future research might recognize the impact of not utilizing local resources available to families with TGE children in them and how developmental levels of the group impact parents raising TGE children.

Furthermore, future research might also be useful to study the difference between primary caregivers who are biological parents and those who are not to understand how they experience societal norms based on roles they play in raising TGE children. In researching the experiences of those who are not biological parents, the findings could assist practitioners working with other primary caregivers of TGE children to understand their experiences, specifically related to the lack of control they might experience. Ali, a participant in this study, illustrated a desire to do more to support and affirm her stepchild, but felt as a stepparent she did not have the power or agency to do so.

Other future qualitative research might investigate parental transition in more detail. This may be done to understand how they experience the varying transitional stages of their TGE

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child. In this types of inquiry, there is opportunity to provide a better understanding of how these parent's experience these stages specifically. Or this type of analysis might provide similarities or differences of the TGE child's transition and the parent's transition. It is important to understand the stages of parent's transition to recognize how to support and intervene appropriately during each phase and can be provided as a tool in clinical practice or counselor education.

Lastly, future studies may benefit from examining the loss parents experience more in-depth. To examine ambiguous loss and relational loss in more detail would provide richer findings around the impact of the loss on the emotional process parent's experience. Future qualitative research studies have potential to also explore the impact of loss of parent's willingness to educate and advocate. Likewise, such studies may investigate the impact of socio-cultural-political centric standards on parent's willingness to educate or advocate.

Trustworthiness and Credibility

To increase internal trustworthiness and credibility within this IPA study, the primary investigator remained sensitive to the context given by participants while keeping transparent and coherent of the IPA process. This included remaining appreciative of the caregiver's willingness to share their story and paying careful attention to the information unfolding in each account (Smith et al., 2009). In addition to the first interviews and written responses, follow up interviews were conducted, or written questions were provided to those who chose not to do face-to-face interviews. Each participant was given an opportunity to investigate their accounts further, clarifying first interview or response, and gathering rich findings (Jeong & Othman, 2016; Smith et al., 2009). This information was anticipated to be used to create effective change to the group and systemic change to improve the lives of TGE children and families (Shagoury &

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Power, 2012; Singh et al., 2013) although this process was interrupted due to the impact of COVID-19. Prior IPA qualitative research has indicated trustworthiness or validity includes triangulation, member-checking, and auditing (Alase, 2017). Other trustworthiness methods in qualitative work like IPA include theoretical triangulation, rapport building, and collaborating with colleagues (Yardley, 2015).

Triangulation of findings helps to manage the creative, yet rigorous, process of IPA (Smith et al., 2009) by utilizing theories (Yardley, 2015) and multiple findings sources (Creswell & Miller, 2000) to develop themes. For this study the various finding points used for triangulation included being an insider within the PLPSG, having a relationship with many of participants prior to engaging with them for this study can be deemed as being a trustworthiness method. Engaging in reflexivity and collaborating with the dissertation committee in addition to keeping a binder with data collection materials and analysis materials helped to ensure an audit trail was kept. Other important entities to ensuring an audit trail was keeping the research diary or journal (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Smith et al., 2009). To remain credible, each of the systematical IPA steps outlined in chapter three was conducted with each follow up interviews or written responses. The primary investigator remained committed to, sensitive of, and invested in actively listening to the various participants engaging in the in-person interviews. To show commitment, sensitivity, and investment to those who completed written responses, an email was sent immediately after reading the response regarding their willingness to share and empathizing with them. This primary investigator ensured participants were as comfortable as possible through the process (Smith et al., 2009; Yardley, 2015), checking in on them regularly if they were completing in writing and validating their experience and reading body language when in person.

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Other findings sources utilized for triangulation included attending to the findings collection methods guided by IPA, understanding the multiple perspectives obtained through the various participants subjective accounts (Smith et al., 2009), and recognizing the alternative interpretations the findings analysis provided (Yardley, 2015). The ultimate goal of IPA is to offer insight into how people experience a particular phenomenon, in this case how parents of TGE experience raising a TGE child and how they experience a PLPSG for TGE children and families. In conducting this study this investigator desired staying true to the narratives of these parents raising TGE children and creating a positive impact on their lives and it is anticipated that by doing so the delicate information provided by participating parents will be useful and informative to those who read it (Smith et al., 2009).

Strengths

Strengths of this study include the qualitative nature of the findings obtained through narratives of the participating parents to understand their experience as it related to raising a TGE child in a conventional society. Being that this is an area under studied, this research adds significantly to the literature in support of family support systems for TGE children, providing knowledge and awareness on the lack of supports and resources they engage in to better affirm their child. Supports like the PLPSG are lacking in evidence-based research, and while play was assumed to be an important element that was also a limitation to this study since parents did not appear to see it as an important element to the group, it seems beginning the discussion about the importance of play in assessing and intervening seems like a good start since there is lack of research on play with TGE children.

The findings of this study offer accounts of the processes these parents experienced when their child disclosed and socially transitioned. The narratives offered in this study also allowed

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for the elicitation of rich, contextualized subjective experiences that were individually intimate while also giving space for these narratives to be depicted as a group experience. Concentrating on the commonalities and exceptionalities of the individual experienced across the cases allowed for negotiating relationships between the participants while also ensuring the idiographic and hermeneutic nature of IPA.

The findings of this study provide counseling professionals, counselor educators, and future researchers in counseling information to support the work they do. By offering the findings those working in the counseling profession will be more aware and knowledgeable on these parents experiences to ensure they are getting their needs met. Plus, the findings of this study offer specific resources that cisgender parents can utilize to get educated and find supports.

Limitations

Limitations of the study can be assumed as the primary investigator is solely working with parents who are affirming, or supportive and accepting of, their TGE children currently. Some participants indicated difficulty supporting and affirming in the past, but currently they are in support of and affirming toward their TGE child. It might be beneficial to learn more about unsupportive parents to help identify the needs they have to better support them so they can affirm their TGE child.

Another limit of this study was that the participants of this study were living and raising their TGE child in New Mexico and in attendance, or had been in attendance, of the PLPSG at least one time within the last 6 months. Although parents experiencing similar phenomena are being investigated, other multidimensional sameness or similarities—i.e., gender, social class, ethnicity, race, political opinion, age, social life, etc. of group members (Block & Grund, 2014)

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could potentially be deemed a limit. Most of the participants identified as white and living on middle to upper middle class incomes. Only two of the 11 participants involved in this study were fathers and only one participant was a stepparent. Having more fathers and stepparents participate would have added to the richness of this study and provided a view into how they are impacted by ciscentric standards and the parental roles they play.

Another limitation of this study related to identity might also include the small number of parents raising female-to-male or non-binary TGE children. It is assumed that hearing from parents raising female-to-male or non-binary TGE children would have also added to the richness and depth of this study. This information might have provided a glimpse into perhaps why hegemonic ideas of gender are more accepting towards girls who express as boys and why binary expression of gender is acknowledged more so than nonbinary gender expression (Nealy, 2017).

Studies like Block & Grund (2014) and McPherson et al. (2001) have shown the impact on various characteristics within social networks. This research has identified specific group dynamics that can develop from homophily or the likeliness of engaging with people who share similar characteristics (Block & Grund, 2014; McPherson et al., 2001). These homophilious companionships that create connectedness can be assumed for this study as well and might also be a limitation to this study.

Other limitations may also include a flaw to only requiring the participants to engage in the written response two times like those completing face-to-face interviews. These written responses seemed to be lacking in that the ability to obtain clarification at the time of the response might have hindered the process for parents. There may also be a lack of findings from collecting responses in writing from some participants although it provided a space for the

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respondent to feel safer in answering questions without an interviewer present. Some of these confines can include the interviewer not being able to see how the respondents are responding to the questions and responding via email required internet access (Ratislavová & Ratislav, 2014). Also, another drawback from including written responses involved evidence of the written responses being brief and not in-depth. Perhaps this paucity of findings was because the participants needed reminders to complete their responses. It can be assumed that because of prompts by the primary investigator, these participants may have felt rushed to respond or perhaps they felt their written response offered adequate information about their experience. Another influence might have been that the participants who chose to participate in writing did not desire to share in detail. Many of those engaging in written responses did not know this primary investigator well.

As for limitations that may have impacted face-to-face interviews, there were a few. Smith et al. (2009) recommends the use of open-ended questions that facilitates a deeper conversation with participants. Having worked with these parents in the PLPSG prior to the interview the primary investigator may not have offered enough opportunities for them to go deeper. This lack of deepness seems to have been a potential because the primary investigator experienced feeling nervousness during the interview, possibly influencing her to not ask more thorough questions. Additionally, after reviewing the transcripts the primary investigator realized she offered some interpretations during the interview, which is deemed by Smith et al. (2009) as needing to occur later in the findings analysis not the data collection.

The aim of using IPA methodology, intertwined with queer theory, for this study was intended to provide a space for the participating parents to be heard, valued, and honored. The primary researcher desired to understand this underrepresented community and the phenomena

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they experience in an effort to celebrate their raising TGE children in a cishet society that values binary gender. She hopes to use the findings to create systemic change and improve equitable practices for these families and others like them. The understandings that many of these parents held prior to their child disclosing their non-binary gender was based on hegemonic socially constructed views of binary gender. Such preconceived notions of gender failed to embody fluidity or an understanding of what Nagoshi and Brzuzy (2010) identify as a “self-constructed social identity” (p. 437), yet each was willing to unlearn binary gender to support and affirm their TGE child (Brill & Pepper, 2008; Capous-Desyllas & Barron, 2017).

As de Graaf and Carmichael (2018) illustrated, TGE children are shaping the way gender is known, they are demonstrating that the socially constructed ways dominant cishet society defines gender is inaccurate. In shaping the context of gender that defies binary gender, the two authors noted the significance of affirming approaches on the overall well-being of TGE children and they encourage parents to show their TGE child unconditional love as a way to affirm them. Some parents participating in this study struggled with supporting and affirming their child’s gender identity in the beginning of the process, nonetheless all of them loved their children. The adoration for their TGE child compelled these parents to engage in unlearning what they knew about gender to meet their child where they are and understand how their own child knows gender. This unlearning advanced through the reformation of previous held ideas that defy gender norms (Alegría, 2018).

Having a minor child with agency to self-construct their own gender identity to be their true authentic self (Capous-Desyllas & Barron, 2017) created several barriers and challenges for the parents participating in this study. As Motmans et al., (2019) pointed out, parents and guardians are the decision makers and primary caretakers of minor TGE children and as such are

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impacted negatively by their actions that support and affirm their child. For practitioners who work with these families there is value in understanding distinct concerns that impact them (Chan et al., 2017), particularly when it puts strain on their attempt at raising healthy and happy TGE children in an institutionalized society stigmatizing non-binary genders (Capous-Desyllas & Barron, 2017).

Hearing and honoring the narratives of these parents raising a TGE child to gain insight into their subjective and collective experience was one goal of this study. Another objective of this study was to understand how the parents experienced the PLPSG they attended, specifically to discern how they experienced the play element of this group. Studying this facet of the group was important to the primary investigator due to the neglected research on incorporating play interventions into work done with TGE children and their families. To-date the primary investigator found no specific literature although it is featured by Ehrensaft (2017) and Thomas (2011) in connection with affirming assessment and interventions with TGE children.

When asked, many of the parents who spoke to the play they observed and experienced during the PLPSG did not elaborate on this specific component of the group. Rather the parents implied the children feel safe to engage in play during the group, and as Carmen stated, she sees attending the group as being important for the children so they can “go and have fun and play.” Lacking findings on this facet of play occurring within the PLPSG among the TGE children and their attending family members might be deemed as a limitation of this study. An assumption was made about the significance of the play occurring in the group and the importance of play for the group process on how parents experienced the group, which does not appear to be an important element for the parents participating in this study.

Lastly, creating policies that reinforce unconventional gender identities, increases access to affirming gender markers for TGE individuals. This investigation is being conducted in New Mexico, a state that is affirming, and recently New Mexico legalized recognizing TGE identities. Living in a state affirming all genders can create shortcomings, particularly when investigating states within the United States that are not affirming and can be a direction for future research.

Conclusion

As I conclude this experience, I am reminded of the unconditional love the participating parents of this study have shown to their TGE children. I am appreciative of their sharing their story with me and grateful they would take time to do so. Hearing the stories of these parents and taking in their words and experiences was humbling and heartbreaking, exhausting and exhilarating, nonetheless, I did my best to handle each parent's narrative with care. Although I went into the study with the assumption that I knew much about these parents having worked with them in the PLPSG, I learned quickly I hardly knew the significance of their experiences. Throughout this process I feared the parents participating in the study might not feel I honored them, their experience, and their story. I interpret this fear coming from a place of love since the parents were entrusting of me with the fragile contents of this life experience. After hearing from the few participants who did respond to the third optional response, I perceived that I created a space for them to feel honored, heard, and validated. I could also interpret that those who did not respond to the third optional response trusted that I was honoring them, their story, and their experience and felt no need to check the work I had done.

I feel honored the parents participating in this study believed I, a cisgender counselor with no TGE children of my own, was worthy of sharing this delicate material with. I am in awe of them and truly feel they are a gift to me. I admire their perseverance to support and affirm

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their children regardless of the barriers that are placed before them in a cisnormative society. I am inspired by their dedication at defying gender norms and respectful their rising against systems that impede on their TGE children to give them a promising future. The participants were educational and inspirational for me, cultivating more reflectivity of my practice (Shagoury & Power, 2012) as a licensed mental health counselor, volunteer/co-facilitator of the PLPSG, future counselor educator, and researcher. The dissemination of this investigations results, creates awareness around the experiences of parents of prebuscent TGE children and the importance of having supports like the PLPSG available to these families, as such awareness may have an impact on improving the future health outcomes of TGE children.

Appendix A

Informed Consent

Kristopher M. Goodrich, Ph.D. and Mary K. Brammer from the Department of Individual, Family, and Community Education are conducting a research study. The purpose of the research is to better understand caregiver's (parent or guardian) experiences having a child who identifies as Transgender or Gender Expansive (TGE) and to improve my practice as a counselor. You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a caregiver to a TGE child and attend the peer led play support group supported by TGRCNM.

Your participation will involve participating in 2 face-to-face interviews with Mary K. Brammer or 2 written responses via Word document. The face-to-face interviews or written responses should take about 45-90 minutes to complete. Participants who choose to complete written responses will have 2 weeks to complete and email to mbrammer@unm.edu. The face-to-face interviews or written responses includes questions such as 'How have you come to understand or your child's disclosure since they came out or began to transition? How has your child's social transition to their affirming gender impacted your life/ experience? How has it impacted your identity as a caregiver? How do you experience the Peer led play support group?' 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. There are no names or identifying information associated with your responses. There are no known risks in this research, but some individuals may experience discomfort as a result of sharing their experience

Data will be kept with the student researcher (Mary K. Brammer). The student researcher will provide pseudonyms to all participating caregiver's interviews and responses. The data will be kept on an encrypted and password protected computer and all identifiable information (e.g., your name, your children's name, your partner's name, personal email) will be removed from the information collected in this project. After all identifiers are removed, the information may be used for future research or shared with other researchers without your additional informed consent.

The findings from this project will provide information on the importance of evidence-based data regarding the impact of early social transition for TGE pre-pubertal children and the importance of interventions developed for TGE children and their families to improve health differences among TGE children. If published, results will be presented in summary form only and quotes will only identify participants with a blinded pseudonym. Once published, participants cannot opt out of the study. Participants will receive a \$25 gift card to Target or Amazon for their time, each time they participate. There is a maximum expectation of 2 face-to-face interviews or 2 written responses totaling a compensation of \$50 in gift cards to Target or Amazon unless there is an opt out during the first interview or response in which one \$25 gift card to Target or Amazon will be provided to the participant. If the participant decides prior to participating in the

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first face-to-face interview or written response they do not want to participate in the study no compensation will be provided.

If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints about the research, please feel free to call Kristopher M. Goodrich at 505-277-4063. 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. If you experience any adverse effects as a result of participating in this study, you can contact the New Mexico Crisis Line at 1-855-662-7474 or the Peer Warmline at 1-855-466-7100.

By providing your initials below you will be agreeing to participate in the above described research.

_____ I agree to participate in 2 45-60-minute interview related to this project

_____ I agree to participate in 2 45-60-minute written responses related to this project

Name of Adult Participant

Signature of Adult Participant

Date

Name of Research Team Member

Signature of Research Team Member

Date

Appendix B

Semi-Structured Protocol

You are a parent or guardian of a child who identifies as Transgender or Gender expansive and both you and your child attend the TGRCNM peer led play support group and I am interested in hearing your story.

Interview Protocol

-How have you come to understand or make sense of your child's disclosure and if at all, has your understanding or thoughts about it changed since your child disclosed (began to transition)?

-How has your child's social transition to their affirming gender impacted your life/experience? How has it impacted your identity as a caregiver? How has it impacted your identity as cisgender?

-How do you experience the Peer led play support group? How has it impacted you, your TGE child, partner, and cisgender children?

-What advice or recommendations can you make regarding support systems for the whole family including those similar to the Peer led play support group or TGRCNM?

-How do you see my role in the Peer led play support group?

-How can I benefit you and your family more within and outside of the group?

-How do you see the data from this study creating change or educating professional counselors?

Thank you so much for participating. I appreciate you taking time to complete this written response. I expect to complete the second round of interviews over the summer of 2020. Would you like your gift card to be to Target or Amazon?

Appendix C

Demographics Questionnaire

Demographic questions:

- (a) Caregiver Identity (i.e. mother, father, step-mother, step-father, guardian, other)
- (b) Pronouns or Gender Identity of Caregiver (they/them, she/her, he/him, zi/hir, etc.)
- (c) Partnered or Not
- (d) Sexual/affectional orientation
- (e) Race or Ethnicity of Caregiver and Other Family Members
- (f) Number of TGE Children Family
- (g) Number of Cisgender Children in Family
- (h) Age Range of Caregiver
- (i) Socioeconomic status of Caregiver
- (j) Spiritual or Religious Affiliation

Appendix D

Initial Idiographic Tables of Participants

Table 1

Laura's experience being a parent of a Transgender child

Experiential Themes and Micro-themes	Definitions	Participant's Descriptive Statements
"How ugly the world has always been"	Queer theory informed Superordinate theme-developed as a result of how conventional society norms of gender binary has impacted the parent's experience having a TGE child	"...we are forced to also see how ugly the world has always been, but that we could ignore before."
Parent's transitional phases of Transgender child's social transition	How mom's experience was impacted by understanding non-binary genders at varying phases because had been taught only conventional gender binaries and how she experienced in phases-Disclosure, Beginning of social transition, Social transition, Post-social transition; Parent did not have to think about cisgender privilege and Trans marginalization prior to having TGE child disclose, but was affirming of child's unconventional gender expressions prior to disclosure and advocating for TGE child	"When we thought our child was a cisgender boy with feminine gender expression, things were really hard for me as a parent... There were several months there where I was literally tailoring all their t-shirts because they wouldn't wear them. Who tailors' t-shirts for their 4-year-old!? It was difficult finding a support system during that time too... Our child's transition has impacted me greatly as a preschool teacher, another type of caregiver. I am not teaching children this year, but last year, after our child transitioned... I realize I have also seen our child's social transition as being a significant turning point in our family's path... Previously I saw children as cisgender until they identify otherwise. Now I would say that I am more likely to see all children as potentially transgender until they identify as definitely transgender. In a way, it's like there are no cisgender children for me anymore... I never thought cisgender was a bad word. I didn't think about it much at all... I

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Experiential Themes and Micro-themes	Definitions	Participant's Descriptive Statements
		initially didn't think my identity as a parent has changed because previous to the social transition, I already thought my child was gender-non-conforming and had already taken on the task of advocating for diverse gender expression, so taking on the role of also advocating for diverse gender identity didn't change much here."
How mom experiences Western society experiencing TGE child	Parent's experiential claims of experiences in public-relatable experience	"Many places we would go people, particularly white women, would comment on our child's freckles... I hated my own freckles when I was a kid and I also hated attention from strangers, so I assumed my own child showing obvious discomfort at being oohed and ahhed at by strangers because of the freckles was for the same reasons... A cashier would rave about the freckles and then go on to "his blue eyes" and "his dimples" and blonde hair. It was way over the top...I now think gender had a lot to do with it too both for the strangers and for our child. When our child began wearing more feminine choices in public, they got much fewer comments on their looks... once they started passing as a girl, then strangers began to comment more again, but now always on the clothes and not on the freckles, dimples, blue eyes and hair..."
How mom experiences TGE child experiencing society	Parent's experiential claims of how she interprets child experiencing public	"...I can see our child not identifying with their assigned gender when we were out in public... I do think our child didn't like that attention from strangers... Now they seem to like

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Experiential Themes and Micro-themes	Definitions	Participant's Descriptive Statements
		strangers commenting on how they look, and they don't seem to hate their freckles."
Emotional Distress during Social Transition and Uncertainty	Various distressing emotions parent experienced as a result of having a TGE child in conventional society-fear, uncertainty, sadness	"There is still fear... I didn't know what to do about kindergarten."
Fear of misgendering and other Challenges	Challenges or concerns that a parent of a cisgender child would not have to be concerned with-trying to understand language TGE child used when discussing gender; misgendering; identifying clothing that matched TGE child's authentic self; gift buying for gender fluid child	"They would sometimes say "some people are boys and some people are girls and I am both" and I didn't disagree but I didn't understand either; When we thought our child was a cisgender boy with feminine gender expression, things were really hard for me as a parent. I felt immense pressure to navigate finding clothing that they felt good in, that embodied their true self while at the same time allowed the outside world to see them in a way that wouldn't lead to them being misgendered (though I wasn't thinking about that term). I guess I knew not misgendering was important, but without all the understanding of what gender we were dealing with, my efforts were off base; For Christmas I didn't know what to advise the family to buy for them. I explained that they seem to like everything a stereotypical four-year-old girl would like. For the five-year-old birthday they wanted Barbie ballerina dolls and ballet classes."

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Experiential Themes and Micro-themes	Definitions	Participant's Descriptive Statements
Perceived positive experiences	Parent's perceptions of positive experiences regardless of challenges	"...so many challenges with the outside world and plenty of disappointment with people in that world, but we at least have a path that seems to fit, that makes sense, that flows for our child. And more and more we find ourselves surrounded by beauty and community..."
"Turning Point[s]"	Superordinate theme identified through abstraction	"I realize I have also seen our child's social transition as being a significant turning point in our family's path."
Parent out of comfort zone	Social transition of TGE child influenced parent and partner to make major life changes	"Previously I thought we would live in our same house forever. I thought I would always run my same preschool program in a similar way as I had done for the last 8 years for my whole career. A few months after our child transitioned, we had suddenly decided to give up that business and stop teaching children (at least for now) and sell our house and move into a cohousing community and live a totally different lifestyle than we had previously. I don't think I would have made any of those decisions prior to this time in our lives when our child transitioned."
Integration back into "Queer Community"	Parent's experience of processing own sexuality	"Also, when my partner and I were young adults, we were pretty secure and open about our sexuality, but 20 years of being straight-passing eats away at that and while we certainly don't want to use our child as a ticket back to the queer community, our child transitioning to their true self also has helped me begin the process of reconnecting to myself."

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Experiential Themes and Micro-themes	Definitions	Participant's Descriptive Statements
Self-identified Support Systems	Superordinate theme identified through abstraction	
Difficulty finding supports	Parent's experience identifying supports for family and TGE child	"It was difficult finding a support system.... I didn't think to look for a transgender resource center because I thought my child was GNC not transgender and I didn't know a center like that could help with either."
"Queer extended family"	Integration into to queer community as protective measure, support system, and "representation" for TGE child	"I think this feels really important to me because we learn in education how important representation is to children from underrepresented groups... Representation is one aspect of a having a queer extended family for my child. Without putting significant effort into providing representation for my child, my child might not otherwise have met or seen or heard of another gender fluid or nonbinary person until they were in high school... statistics about attempted suicide in trans youth being so high, the queer extended family also seems like a way to extend a greatly needed safety net for our child. When our child is older, we hope that they will feel like they are able to talk to us about anything, but the reality is that most teens don't feel that way about their parents. If there is something going on for them that they feel they can't talk to us about, we want to provide them with a large number of other people to choose from who they might think will understand and who they might

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Experiential Themes and Micro-themes	Definitions	Participant's Descriptive Statements
Importance of Co-housing community	Community that family lives in that includes queer community members to "represent" for TGE child	<p>feel comfortable talking about that with."</p> <p>"...the cohousing community opportunity now looked to me like another opportunity to extend the safety net we could provide for our child... While none of the other community members identify as transgender, my child would have the opportunity to grow up with three sets of lesbian grandmothers, as one example. Of course I wanted my child to have stronger ties to rainbow elders!"</p>
Peer led play support group as "queer extended family"	PLPSG is a support group that parent appreciates, and it is part of the "queer extended family"	<p>"When we first understood that our child is nonbinary, a friend of mine who is a gay man posted on [social media] about the importance of 'queer extended family'...he explained that it is your chosen family of queer people who can understand and empathize with you that your real cis-straight family will never be able to despite best intentions. And so began my quest to figure out how to create that for a gender-fluid five-year-old. The play group has been part of this effort... For my partner and me, we don't yet have many opportunities to interact with people we know are trans outside of the playgroup. I value our new friendships. I value practicing using correct pronouns with people who are not our child. I value seeing trans adults doing better than those in the news (murdered) or depicted in movies or on TV (the brunt of jokes or murdered) so that I can see a brighter future for my child. I value having people - trans or not -</p>

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Experiential Themes and Micro-themes	Definitions	Participant's Descriptive Statements
		to vent to, to get advice from and know that they understand in a way that other people in my life may not. I value being able to share my experience with new families who come to the group... Going to the playgroup has helped [cis-sibling] continue to understand her sibling and to grow in her ability to be a strong support for them. When they are adults, she will be comfortable around her sibling's chosen family. She will continue to be confident that anything transphobic peers might say is totally off-base and unacceptable."
"I do make meaning of my experience as a caregiver"	Superordinate theme identified through subsumption-	
Child's experience impacts parents experience	As a Reggio-inspired educator, parent speaks about TGE child's experience to explain own experience and help child search for own meaning in the world	"I have been a Reggio-inspired teacher for 12 years now, and this has highly influenced my experience as a parent as well. In the Reggio Emilia Approach, caregivers are researchers, constantly seeking to deepen their understanding of learning and child development through deeply listening to children's meaning not only through what they say, but through their body language, facial expressions, and gestures as well as through the graphical languages (drawing, painting, etc.) and more, otherwise known as the hundred languages of children. Alongside children we co-construct the world around us. So yes, I do make meaning of my experience as a caregiver through my child's experiences as well as through my child's search for meaning in the world... They draw

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Experiential Themes and Micro- themes	Definitions	Participant's Descriptive Statements
		self-portraits with their freckles now, self- portraits that match their gender identity...I suspect that they hated the attention before mostly because it was attention from people seeing them in a way (gender-wise) that was different from how they see themselves.”
Sociopolitical influence on experience	Shift in political matters (i.e. trans rights movement) that embody the parent’s experience and how parent makes meaning of child’s experience	“I wonder how I would have thought about my gender if I was born after the beginning of the visibility part of the trans rights movement rather than almost 3 decades before... If I had had my child earlier in life, there could easily have been (comparatively) nothing for them. Our experience would have been so different. I for one thing would not have heard the term “gender fluid” at an education conference, so we might still be stuck trying so hard to be supportive of what we thought was our cisgender gender non-conforming boy and getting it all wrong because that wasn’t what was going on at all.”
Education	Superordinate theme identified through subsumption-brought together by two levels of education to develop a complex theme	
Need for Education	Education was required because parent was educated in a conventional society, only understanding gender binary and lacking knowledge to understand their gender fluid child	“I think we were slowed down in our understanding a little because I am a preschool teacher but hadn’t been trained about gender inclusivity outside of cisgender girl/boy inclusion... we hadn’t given any vocabulary for a gender identity that changes over time or for nonbinary gender identities.”

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Experiential Themes and Micro-themes	Definitions	Participant's Descriptive Statements
Self-initiated Education	Parent actively pursued education about TGE people and experiences, and affirming terminology and language,	"As the interest in fashion and sparkles etc. continued, I sought out more and more books about boys who like dresses and transgender children (I only had binary resources)"
Missing component	Significant Experience for parent-Unexpected opportunity parent experienced and learned what Gender Fluidity	"Then I went to an early childhood conference and meet a speaker who specializes in gender fluid children in school. Gender fluid! That was the word and the idea that was missing!... The term "gender fluid" was freedom for my partner and I...The revelation about the word, that breaking out of the binary, was intense... it allowed so many doors to open that were closed to us before then. Now we could find the support that we needed. Now I didn't have the feeling of trying so hard but feeling like we hadn't found the path."
Educating TGE child	Education that parent provided to TGE child about how society may respond to them if they expressed as a stereotypical girl; included providing terminology to child	"We let our child make the choice about what to wear and what to wear in public, letting them know 'People might think you are a girl. Are you okay with that?'...I shared more terminology to help them find their way, like drag queen etc... I talked about gender fluid and what that means, and they told us that their real boy name and real girl name is _____. Because _____ can be either... or neither or both."

Table 2*Carmen's experience being a parent of a Transgender child*

Experiential Themes and Micro-themes	Definitions	Participant's Descriptive Statements
"Those conventional, normed gender roles"	Queer theory informed Superordinate theme-developed as a result of how conventional society norms of gender binary has impacted the parent's experience having a TGE child	
"Grown a lot"	How mom's experience was impacted by understanding gender at varying phases based on conventional gender binaries and how she experienced in phases-Pre-social transition, Beginning of social transition, Social transition, Post-social transition; Parent did not have to think about cisgender	"I've grown a lot"; "I was already kind of raising my kids a little gender neutral"; "...at about two-two or three, she was very verbal, um, understanding gender and saying things like, 'I'm not a boy. I'm a girl.' Um, we didn't really know what to do with that...at first we were very much like, 'You can have your own interests. That's okay... we didn't push it either way, but then it started causing some, um, frustration on her part...in school and things like that, very adamant about-about that. So we kind of just came to understand it as this is, she's probably transgender."; "I always say, like, I never had a boy really...there was never any question"; "...we got through it [the social transition].; 'mostly, mostly un-unscathed, I guess. But it's getting better now. It's took a while"

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Experiential Themes and Micro-themes	Definitions	Participant's Descriptive Statements
	privilege and Trans marginalization prior to having TGE child disclose	
"Tumultuous"	Various distressing emotions parent experienced as a result of having a TGE child in conventional society	"It's [people finding out child is TGE] always kind of a worry" "I still have a lot of anxiety and almost, like, PTSD..."; "I can lose composure when I'm trying to advocate for my kid."; "I, um, have a lot of anxiety and fear about the future"
Navigating the world	Challenges that a parent of a cisgender child would not have to be concerned with-disclosure of TGE identity, secrecy of TGE identity, allowing TGE child to live life as a "regular kid" name change, gender marker change, and making decisions and consenting to medical procedures that are affirming to TGE child; affirming TGE child's identity in a conventional society; fear of losing	"stealth"; "the transition on our end with navigating the world (laughs) was-was probably the hardest part in the beginning"; "telling people"; "I think a lot of the things that people run into when they first start to transition is, um, dealing with different relationships and telling people and things like that"; "in the beginning, or for the first probably year or so, I tried to make it less about what [name] was experiencing. So in other words, um, once-once she transitioned and we figured that was our next plan, um, she didn't really have any experiences, like, I tried to kind of shield her from the tumultuous time that we were going through with family and working through the court system and, um, just all the things that came with that, trying to find support, trying to find a therapist. And she kind of was just living her best life as a three-year-old...it was just a natural transition for her, and once she started wearing what she wanted to wear and having people call her what she wanted us to call her, she was just a regular kid and she didn't really have any different experiences than, you know, a typical

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Experiential Themes and Micro-themes	Definitions	Participant's Descriptive Statements
	relationships because friends have religious views that are not accepting of TGE people; having to question their relationships with friends who are not accepting of TGE people; mending relationships with extended family; uncertainty	gender child.”; “I will probably put her on puberty blockers, which I guess is kind of a decision I’m making for her, but she has let me know, like, ‘I don’t want to look like Daddy. And I don’t want, you know, things to get bigger and hair to be in-in places, and my voice to get lower.’; “just affirming her and being there for her is-is more than I could probably ever do activism-wise”; “[name] has a best friend and her mom, they’re very, very religious. And so, I haven’t told them yet. And I don’t know if I will or what, but it’s one of those things, like, if I do tell them and they’re not okay with it, then there’s, [name] just lost her best friend, you know.”; “we’ve had to do some questioning of ourselves, like, do we really want someone as a friend who isn’t accepting of this community? But [name] and this person are such great friends that it’s, it would be a really tragic loss as a friendship. So, we’re still, we’re still navigating some of that”; “we have two sets of pretty close friends where, um, they’re both very religious. And I think one is accepting of at least, um, people who are gay and one isn’t.”; “we don’t have a lot of friends... we don’t want to lose them”; “they’re [extended family] coming around now, but in the beginning the whole family was just like, ‘We’re not gonna do that. That’s ridiculous. Why would we?’”
Conscious conflict of others finding out about child’s genitalia	Parent’s continued concern about other people finding out about TGE child’s identity because of living in conventional society	“I guess her swimsuit was a little small and some of her privates kind of were hanging out a little bit. I’m like, I kinda freaked out and internally I wondered if they saw it...”; “I’m of the opinion that probably most people in the beginning would be pretty judgmental about it, and, um, and not accept it.”

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Experiential Themes and Micro-themes	Definitions	Participant's Descriptive Statements
"Good space"	Current shift in political matters (i.e. trans rights movement) has created a more positive environment for her TGE child	"I feel like we're kind of in a good space politically"
Consequences of Media (i.e. any form of communication that disseminates information—online, published material, social media platforms, movies, etc.)	Superordinate theme identified through abstraction-identified a cluster of themes that emerged into complex theme of media	
Conventional ideas of gender before child disclosure	Learned gender stereotypes in the media	"...my only real experience with trans people was the media... and a lot of the movies from, like, the '80's and '90's where you picture a man dressed up like a woman...it was really seen as a derogatory and, you know, the word "tranny" was used pretty frequently when I was growing up."
Understanding of unconventional views of gender	How parent came to have an accurate understanding of non-binary genders through media outlets	"I didn't know a whole lot about transgender people before this. Um, all I could really know, and I think that's what a lot people know, is what the media portrays them as. So that's my viewpoint, and, uh, like I said before, after doing a lot of research and discovering what it actually is and meeting so many different people that are just like everyone else, you know, um, it's changed the way I view it [gender] a lot."

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Experiential Themes and Micro-themes	Definitions	Participant's Descriptive Statements
Positive impact of media	Positive experiences of media outlets- to be accurately informed of TGE people or feel connected to other parents of TGE children and hear successful stories	"we just [did] a lot of research on our end to making sure we were doing the right thing, I guess, to support her"; "I'm part of a large group on [social media platform] called, um, parents of transgender children... Actually, I'm, like, part of a couple... and they're from all over the world, and there's thousands of people in the group, and a lot of them... you see a lot of success stories where their children are growing up and getting married and, um, graduating from college and having a great career and things like that."
Negative impact of media	Negative experiences of media outlets- misinformation from hate groups or uninformed people and hearing unsuccessful stories from other parents of TGE people; created feelings of uncertainty for TGE child's future	"And then there's a few, we've had a few in there [social media group] where their child committed suicide. And a few where they, you know, it's probably on a weekly basis where the child has been admitted to a hospital for mental health issues or self-harm. I guess it's nice to be aware of the potentials out-out there, Um, but it-it doesn't make it any easier."; "they're the ones who put out these anti-trans articles talking about how dangerous it is to transition your child, and they're shared all over [social media platform]. Like my [family member] shared one, and I was just like, this is hate...so it's almost like, you know, when parents go out and trying to find resources, they may find that statement by the American Pediatric Association and then they find the other one...identified as a hate group... that's saying the exact opposite"; "the constant messages we get from the media or reading through comments on any article ever that talks about transgender people. Um, just the extreme negativity, and it's child abuse, and-and everything like that."
Self-determined Education	Superordinate theme identified	

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Experiential Themes and Micro-themes	Definitions	Participant's Descriptive Statements
	through subsumption-brought together by series of related themes to develop complex theme including education	
Figuring it out	Parent had to actively pursue education on TGE people and experiences, and affirming terminology and language, because she was educated in a conventional society, only understanding gender binary	“We had to pretty much figure it out, or at least figure out where to get the resources all on our own”; “I think with some education on my part and some research and understanding that this can actually be a thing.”
Meeting TGE people	Hearing the stories from TGE people was educational for parent as a cisgender person living in conventional society—educated her on gender fluidity	“And then meeting actual, you know, gender non-conforming and-and transgender people was eye-opening and just seeing the different paths that they have taken”; “. Some of them transition, some of them partially transition, some of them don't transition at all, but they are still, you know, fluid in how they dress or how they identify. So just meeting the entire spectrum that I never knew existed and-and realizing that that's okay and that's that person's experience”
Educating TGE child		

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Experiential Themes and Micro-themes	Definitions	Participant's Descriptive Statements
	Required to educate TGE child about how society may respond to her if she disclosed she is Transgender and educating on options of future transitioning	"I've been pretty open with her... 'if you really want to tell somebody, you can.' But I also let her know, here's what they might say. They might say, 'Oh, okay,' and go on their way...they might not understand. They might be mean. Um, so I want her to be aware of that. Like, I don't want, I want her to be happy with herself, but I also want to prepare her"; "we've talked a little bit about transitioning physically recently."; "she's understanding that as she grows older, she has options. She doesn't have to do all the medication and surgery if she doesn't want to, but I let her know what that means for her if she doesn't or if she does."
Education to Advocacy	With the information parent received while actively pursuing education from online sources and within the Transgender community she began to advocate for her daughter and the TGE community-breaking down gender stereotypes and teaching affirming language and terminology	"I went out and I found articles here and there...then I could send them to people."; "the advocacy and things like that for transgender children, showing people that it's normal, it happens, it's okay, there's nothing wrong with it."; "you just hear so many horrible stories and, um, she's already kind of displaying some depression and anxiety herself. So, it has caused me to-to be a lot more vocal in standing up for her."
"Doing the right thing"	Superordinate theme	

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Experiential Themes and Micro-themes	Definitions	Participant's Descriptive Statements
	developed from abstraction	
Affirming Transgender child is affirmed by Transgender adults	Transgender adults in community supporting and affirming parent because she is affirming her TGE child	“just reinforces that we’re doing the right thing”; “knowing that talking to actual transgender people and knowing that we’re doing the right thing, um, it’s, it is affirming.”; I hear from [Trans adult] and people like that... if their parents had kind of maybe listened a little bit more or society allowed it a little bit more, um, they would have been right there, too, at that same age, you know, three to five, transitioning as well. Um, and the struggles that they’ve had to go through throughout their life, I’m hoping to avoid some of those for [name].”
“Not alone”	Actively sought out local and global supports for parents of TGE children	“then once we found the [undisclosed resource center] and actually met the people and-and saw other kids, we were like, wow, this is actually, we’re not alone.”
Self-initiated support to others	Desire to help others is intrinsic and from own experience and education of need to support other parents of TGE children	“we always want to help people and we always feel a lot of empathy for other people and, so it-it is such a hard transition that it feels, it feels good for us to be able to provide that to other people”; “...because a lot of us lose our family during that time, you know, you have to have somebody there and being able to provide that for other people when we had people who provided that for us, um, it’s fulfilling as a person”
“Pushback”	Due to living in a conventional society, parent and immediate family lost relationships	“we had so much pushback from family that, like, your child could not possibly know this”; “...when we first transitioned her, I was getting emails and calls from people in my family who were just saying, like, “You’re a horrible parent. I can’t believe

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Experiential Themes and Micro-themes	Definitions	Participant's Descriptive Statements
	with relatives as a result of affirming TGE child	you're doing this." My [family member] even was going to draft a letter to get temporary custody of my kids."
Chosen Family	TGE community became family	"the first year or two our family was, like, the [undisclosed resource center] and people who were, you know, supportive..."
"Therapeutic" support	Superordinate theme of specific support identified through subsumption	
Necessity in the beginning	Beginning of transition required finding support system that understood what parent was experiencing with TGE child	"...in the beginning it was, it was just kind of finding similar people in similar situations with kids who are similar and trying to figure out how they deal with everything."
Safe space for entire family	Environment where parent, TGE child, and family could be themselves-did not have to adhere to conflicts they deal with outside of group, conflicts or challenges from living in conventional society	"the playgroup is, um, kind of a place, like you said, where you can just have people that know what's going on and they're, like, they're totally accepting of it."; "I think she [TGE child] was also able to let her guard down a little bit."; "they [children of parent] go and have fun and play. But the parent, I think it's more for the parents to kind of get resources and talk about school and just kind of have that place where...it's not a thing we have to worry about."

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Experiential Themes and Micro-themes	Definitions	Participant's Descriptive Statements
Therapeutic	PLPSG is a healing space for parent	"It's a form of therapy in its own"
Meaning making experience	Superordinate theme developed through abstraction	
Child's experience impacts parents experience	Parent speaks about TGE child's experience to explain own experience	See excerpts of how she speaks about her child's experience from above
Child's experience causes emotional response	Child's experience as TGE causes emotional response for parent	Tearful when speaking about potential loss of friends if they find out child is TGE; "[name] has a lot of friends at school and none of them know. And so it's always kind of a worry"

Table 3*Ali's experience being a step-parent of a Transgender child*

Experiential themes and Micro-themes	Definitions	Participant's Descriptive Statements
"Awkward"	Queer theory informed Superordinate theme-developed as a result of how conventional society norms of gender binary has impacted the parent's experience having a TGE child	
"Constantly coming out" and other Unique Challenges	Challenges that stepparent has dealt with that a parent of a cisgender child would not have to be met with-ambivalence of disclosure of TGE child's identity, difficult decisions to cut people out of life, lack of educational resources for young children, inability of finding local support systems, inability to voice experiences, advocacy efforts, getting political, and loss or family and the ambivalent feelings that come with that loss	"I feel like I'm constantly coming out for [TGE child] to different people as it happen...I don't know what [TGE child] will want out in the world about her in the future, so I just don't talk about it; it's like you have to know the right people [to find support systems]; I would try to find books to read to [name 9:56], the younger kid, and it's hard... this is a very, this doesn't make sense to almost even a grownup; ... [at work] I don't feel comfortable mentioning it [child being Trans] and it's awkward because now sometimes they'll see me and be like, "How are your two boys doing?"... And I'll be like, how do I talk about this when they told me they don't want to get political with anyone?; I think that I've been slightly more outspoken about these types of issues in particular in front of her... I feel slightly more passionate than before. And I feel it's almost harder to talk about now; the biggest change is dealing with my in-laws... they're a part of [religion]... the kind who will ask their priest, like, "Can

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Experiential themes and Micro-themes	Definitions	Participant's Descriptive Statements
		<p>I go to [name 16:59] and [name] wedding? It's [name] second marriage...what decisions we were making as parents was going to, in the long run, be the best decision for our family. Not just for our first kid, but our second kid, too, because the older the kids get, the more the religious aspect of their grand-parenting gets in the way of them getting to actually know their actual kids and grandkids...In a way, cutting them [in-laws] was kind of helpful to me personally, because it was hard to be near people who clearly, like, we're supposed to have this loving relationship with, but so much goes unsaid. It's sort of a relief for us to be like, well, if you can't affirm our child, your grandchild, we can't have any contact, none of us can."</p>
Emotional Distress	Various distressing emotions parent experienced by parent as a result of having a TGE child in conventional society-frustration, anger, scared, fear, grief, helpless	<p>"Claws out... It was hard for me because I would just get up in arms. And that's not a good way to bring people to your side... now. There's so much about parenting in this situation and during the pandemic that makes me feel helpless but I'm trying to keep it mostly inside because feeling negative feelings in this household right now would potentially make me too depressed or anxious to be a good caregiver. Not that kids shouldn't see you feeling your feelings but I'm trying to be strong here and project stability. So I guess when I cry I am also experiencing repression! It's complicated. I mentioned previously that I cried when she came out as well...when I read your question I think about feeling a mixture of fear and grief over knowing this would cause a rift between us and certain family members... Sometimes I'm scared when</p>

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Experiential themes and Micro-themes	Definitions	Participant's Descriptive Statements
		I think about, you know, just imagining [name 12:47] born into some other family or raised by, for example, my in-laws, how awful that would have been... it's just heartbreaking to think about."
Self-initiated continued education	Parent was informed on TGE people prior to child's disclosure, but continued to educate self	"...I felt like I knew a lot before, but I definitely know more now... Just sort of out of necessity. How can you be supportive or an ally if you don't know what's going on?"
Education to others	Importance of educating cis-child	"...I've definitely, like, been reading more and making more of an effort to, uh, teach [name 9:13] younger brother about this sort of stuff from an early age ...And I'm having a hard time trying to figure out how to teach him [cis-child] pronouns in a really complex... It's funny because when we tried to explain this to him about his older sister, um, I sort of had to go with metaphors that I thought he might understand about Pokémon and Transformers and, like, superheroes. And it helped him, I don't know if it 100% got him, uh, on the right path. I mean, I guess it's helped him begin to get it..."
Debating	Self-determined necessity of parent advocating for TGE people online	"I don't share political stuff or news articles in general on social media, but I made, I make a few exceptions... Because I thought, well, this is not gonna get out to enough people. So and I got into a vicious debate with certain people about it [specific incident involving a transphobic social media post]."

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Experiential themes and Micro-themes	Definitions	Participant's Descriptive Statements
Desire for professionals to be aware and knowledgeable	Parent would like for professionals to be aware and knowledgeable and experienced working of TGE people	<p>“More people with experience is good. Because I don’t want... Well, I just wish it could somehow, like, spread to more people in general. Like, I don’t know how that would happen. (laughs) Because it’s-it’s definitely frustrating when trying to be, like, um, just trying to live your life and you don’t know if anyone’s gonna get it when you’re making phone calls to get, like, a dentist appointment or something. I just wish more professionals who deal with children were more aware, because I don’t want every phone call I make to be something where I have to, like, brace myself. Like, what am I gonna have to do in this conversation? Like, how far am I gonna have to go to explain myself and my family?... having more professionals give trainings or just try to get the word out that these people exist and are people...who just want to be treated as such”</p>
“Almost fortunate”	How parent experienced transitional phases and continues to experience as a result of child disclosing and socially transitioning to affirmed gender	<p>“It’s just been difficult. And I don’t talk about it much... I feel almost fortunate that’s [issues with in-laws] the only hard thing we’ve really had to do up to this point. I feel very lucky, and I like to think one day [name 22:11] is going to realize quite how lucky she is. ”</p>
Opening doors to come out	Parent was and advocate for queer community, had queer friends, preconceived notions of TGE child being gay or bisexual, and educated child on	<p>“I think that in my head I would say like, oh, well, maybe this kid’s gonna come out as non-binary someday, or bi, or just, um, gay or something ...It’s funny because we monitor our children’s online presences and, like, my stepchild has an account on [social media</p>

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Experiential themes and Micro-themes	Definitions	Participant's Descriptive Statements
	TGE people prior to her disclosure of being Trans	platform] and we monitor what she posts and stuff. And I saw that she had left a comment r/, like, tra-, I don't, and she had given herself a user flare of male to female and-and bi . And I thought, well, that's interesting. I wonder if that's gonna stick...Like, we're not gonna say anything because it's, it just didn't seem like something to come up at the time... I had been talking to her about stuff about transgender people... And I think that helped, and I don't know if she would, as part of her story think this, but I like to think it helped open the door a little bit, because in that same week is when she texted me saying, "I'm trans, by the way. My name is [name 4:38]"
"Honored"	Experience parent had when child disclosed-ambivalent feelings	"I felt really honored that she chose to text me"; "the moment [TGE child] came out to me via text followed by a week of her not replying to my texts. Those days sucked for me and my spouse. We didn't want to call her or her mom and potentially out her to her mom, so we waited and waited for her to reply to my texts. We just wanted to be there for her, but we had no good way of knowing how she was feeling or what she was doing. Was she sad? Was she doing just fine? Did she need support? Had she come out to anyone else? Everything was just unanswered questions..." "we have transgender family friends and stuff, so we know better than to assume...I think, less jarring than for some other families...I think because of what our family is like, it was easy for at least me and my spouse to get on board; Um, it [the disclosure] still surprised us..."

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Experiential themes and Micro-themes	Definitions	Participant's Descriptive Statements
Boom	Experience of parent when child discussed socially transitioning and her interpretation of how child's age impacts social transition	"...this is not something we were expecting to hear about with our ten-year-old...But, uh, it still, like, happened so suddenly, it felt. It was, like, just boom, out, want to be out entirely, completely. Want to socially transition. Want to get on, like, a doctor's list. Just, boom, boom, boom, boom. And it was like, whoa, whoa, whoa. You're-you're sure? You're, like, ten?...it took me, like, maybe a week to stop using the wrong pronouns or name. And then I had to teach [name 14:51]. Um, and of course we had all of these closed-doors conversations as parents, with each other. But after this, like, whirlwind of talking it out, it was, like, quickly, like, to this acceptance period of just, like, this is life."
Normalizing social transition	How parent views life with TGE child as typical to cisgender life	"We are still going to annoy each other and love each other and eat together and do things, um, just, uh, a little, slightly differently"
"Nascent stage"	How parent is experiencing child's social transition currently	"I think that we're still in, like, this nascent stage...I definitely feel more protective now " and "slightly more passionate than before. And I feel it's almost harder to talk about now"
Experience as a Stepparent	Unique experience to having a stepchild who is TGE-superordinate theme developed through abstraction	"Because as a stepparent, you are constantly, you know, walking this very thin line"
Positives of being a stepmom	Unique Benefits of being a stepparent	"I think I occupy this sort of parental unit/grownup friend space, and that

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Experiential themes and Micro-themes	Definitions	Participant's Descriptive Statements
		means I get to be the one that, you know, has that honor of being the one that she talked to first about it...I can do research, say my piece, express love and fear, and make recommendations to one parent only. It's just better that way since the coparenting relationship is tenuous."
Challenges of being a stepmom	Unique challenges being a stepparent	"I don't want to start any fights and only want to help. I feel kind of sidelined even when participating in things like the [resource center's] support groups because what power do I have? It's not that I don't feel valued, but I don't know how to contribute as much as I'd like when I'm not the one in charge of schedules, legal aspects, etc. In many ways I am afraid to care as much as I am capable of feeling or even talk about it because I don't want to feel helpless about something important to me. This is where I start tearing up about stepparenthood in general and playing a role as a caregiver to a TGE child."
Latching onto supports	Superordinate theme developed from abstraction	
Importance of resources and supports	Parent deems having supports available as being important	"It just is happening all so quickly right now that I don't know what to latch onto for support...I cannot say enough about how important that has been for us at this stage right now..."
Desire to support other parents	When have more experience parent	

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Experiential themes and Micro-themes	Definitions	Participant's Descriptive Statements
of TGE children in the future	would like reciprocate support	"...maybe someday we can do that for other people, um, just because it feels so crucial and time-sensitive"
Impact of in-person support groups	How experiences partner and self-attending in-person support groups	"...we went to the [parent] support group..., and that was good, too. We learned a lot there... the first time [name 19:02] went to the support group... he asked them like, "What do you do about your religious family members?" And it was very sobering when they talked about how at some point you just cut them off. And he didn't want to hear that. I didn't want to hear that. But I think hearing that from people who have been through it was a little helpful to know, like, what decisions we were making as parents was going to, in the long run, be the best decision for our family.
Online supports	Positive experiences of media outlets- feel connected to other parents of TGE children	"...we're a very online family, so I know how much we appreciate the online Facebook group... There's a social media account I started following [name of social media platform] because I am trying to be more conscious of the joy that can be found in people realizing things about themselves and living lives that let them express that. It's not all doom and gloom, particularly for our family."

Table 4

Jim's experience being a parent of a Transgender child

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Experiential Themes and Micro-themes	Definitions	Participant's Descriptive Statements
"It's society"	Queer theory informed Superordinate theme—developed as a result of how conventional society norms of gender binary has impacted the parent's experience having a TGE child	"And obviously because it's society, you know, that's why I'm trying to protect him..."
Upbringing	How parent's upbringing influenced the way understood gender to be binary prior to TGE child disclosing and how it influences him to bring up his TGE child in an affirming and supportive home	"I think the mothers are a lot more open-minded [to gender non-binary] than the fathers. I think my dad still has a hard time thinking about it and thinking that way... I don't feel like I got that gratification of something in my childhood where I had a very supportive parent. They said, 'You need to do this, this, and this, instead of showing them, hey, well, what can I learn from you instead of you learning from me?... I want my kids to know that I don't know everything...I'm still learning every day.'"
Normalizing stereotypical gendered behaviors	Parent's understanding of the gender spectrum	"And I was like, boys have long hair also. You know, I, it's not just a girl thing... You know, and I told him, you know, he likes to paint his nails. And I told him, you know, that's fine...I was like, guys can do it."
Unique Concerns having a gender creative child	Concern that parent has dealt with that a parent of a cisgender child would not have to be met with-observing child struggling with	"I still think he's adjusting to school. I still think that there's kids that he doesn't know how to play, interact with and stuff like that; Be strong, because, I mean, society, the way I see it, will eat you up if you're not, and just conform to whatever they want. And I think if you a strong partner then that makes a difference, too, because you have

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Experiential Themes and Micro-themes	Definitions	Participant's Descriptive Statements
	peers, need for support, need for information	somewhere you can kind of rely on. And I think that's the biggest thing is, you can look at them and they're like, okay, he has my back or she has my back; I'm just trying to find out all the information that I can to better help them figure out what I can do better, you know, what am I doing that they need help with? How can I help them transition into what they want to become? I need to find out more information."
Perceived judgement	Parent's subjection to judgement against unconventional ideas as a child and judgement for not conforming to conventional norms as a parent of a TGE child	"I think my dad still has a hard time thinking about it and thinking that way... Same thing with my brother-in-law is totally, you need to be this, this, and this. ...know, we get a lot more looks and a lot more judging...'Oh, you're a horrible dad,' or, 'You shouldn't be doing this.'"
Unique conversations with Gender creative child	Conversations parent has had with TGE child about gender, name change, and gender neutrality	"And I don't say it because I'm like, oh, well, you know. He's like, 'Well, dad, why do you do that?' And I'm like, well, 'I just do that.' You know. That's-that's what I've known. And I'll tell him, I'll be honest with him and tell him straight up. You know, like, 'Back then this is what girls were supposed to do and this is what guys were in a different time. And people are starting to think differently.'"
Difference in relationship with cisgender child	Parent observes the differences in relationship with both children assigned male at birth	"I feel like [partner] has more of a connection with [TGE child] because I feel like she's understood the information and everything of... She's taken it that much more with [TGE child] than I have. And me, I gravitate closer to [cisgender child]... maybe because he's more boy."
Coming to terms "Owning up"	Abstracted superordinate-How parent	"I think I have come to terms with me owning up to it [child being gender creative], you know, me being fine with it, and I'm fine

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Experiential Themes and Micro-themes	Definitions	Participant's Descriptive Statements
	experienced transitional phases and continues to experience as a result of child disclosing and socially transitioning to affirmed gender	with it. I think it's something that's normal for me now."
Influence of socio-cultural-political views and ideas of masculinity	Impact on conventional norms and parent's experience with TGE child's social transition in the beginning of social transition because of conventional conservative views on gender binary	"I think it was really, really tough for me... I'm the quintessential, you know, man, you know, football all that kinds of stuff, and I grew up that way... I do feel like I have conservative views. But, you know, I mean, there's a few things that I'm pretty liberal on. And, you know, I think nowadays you kind of have to be that way... I see myself doing that more and more, which is, it's opened my eyes a lot better..."
Parent's shifted view of gender	Parent's new understanding of gender as a result of social transition of TGE child	"You know, I'm, I've broadened my horizons a lot more with my child being a transgender. And, uh, I feel like I've broken down a lot of barriers that I've had previously. And this is, it's positive, you know, so...I think I have come to terms with me owning up to it [child being gender creative], you know, me being fine with it, and I'm fine with it. I think it's something that's normal for me now."
Understanding gender creative child's social transition	How parent understands child's social transition and need to be feminine	"I guess he was born to feel this way, maybe to wear the clothes that he or she, whichever he would like to, or she, would like to be [express] during that time ... I've noticed it a lot more recently, probably in the few months that, you know, we all of this stuff is happening [pandemic]... more and more I

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Experiential Themes and Micro- themes	Definitions	Participant's Descriptive Statements
		notice, uh, them going to more feminine, you know, things...And I notice that they are happier."
Affirming gender creative child's social transition	Ways parent supports and affirms TGE child's social transition and child 'owning up' to being authentic self	"So if he wants to wear a dress or he wants to wear this, he wears it regardless of what anybody says... being comfortable in the clothes regardless of what it is, um, whether it be, you know, dresses, leggings, high heels, makeup, uh, I'm glad that, um, my gender creative child is comfortable and able to stand up for themselves to be comfortable in their own skin. And that makes me happy because that makes them happy...that's owning up to their, what they're saying, you know, 'I-I want to be a girl.' Okay, if you want to be a girl, I'll-I'll support you 110%... I just support for him and that's, whatever that means...That's what I'm here for and that's what we're-we're trying to achieve. As long as you're happy, I'm-I'm happy... I think they were a little bit more feminine this winter... than they have been in the past... a lot of things have changed more so from when we last talked to now... I think it's-it's edging more towards the feminine more than the masculine."
"Question mark"	Uncertainty about TGE child's gender expression or behavior in the future because fluid	"I don't know about the summer, maybe it [gender expression/behavior] might be different...that's kind of a question mark"
Child's experience impacts parents experience	Superordinate theme identified through subsumption— important element to parent's experience-child's	"... if he's happy, I'm happy..."

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Experiential Themes and Micro-themes	Definitions	Participant's Descriptive Statements
	happiness is important to parent	
Parent believes affirming creates happiness	Parent affirms TGE child through complimenting them on their feminine expression and behavior	"I try to catch myself and, you know, try to, um, compliment that. You know, saying, 'Oh, hey, look at the girl.' Or you know, 'Look at she, she's beautiful.' And try to compliment, um, them that way. .. I would try to provide more things or show more things that would make, that seems like that could make them happier."
Peer led play support group (PLPSG) as an "outlet"	Superordinate theme of specific support identified through subsumption	"I think you guys have created something that's great because it [play group] is an outlet for kids and people, too"
Concerns attending PLPSG first time	Fear of being judged attending PLPSG first time	"I think at first I was scared because I didn't have any information... oh, I'm gonna be judged..."
Preconceived notions of entering support space for TGE children and families	How parent perceived PLPSG prior to attending	"I don't know if they're going to be, is this going to be, like, a dolled-up thing in dresses?..."
Attending PLPSG to support TGE child	Why parent attended PLPSG	"...this` is where [TGE child] can be like, okay, I'm gonna do this...I think it's kind of nice just to, just for [TGE child] to go there and be accepted..."
Safe space	Parent felt supported at PLPSG	"And at first they were, even when I first went, they were very accepting... They were just like, oh, they see me, you know There's no judgment regardless of anything. And I think that was, it was nice. It was nice not to be, like, judged as a parent... But I think that was kind of

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Experiential Themes and Micro- themes	Definitions	Participant's Descriptive Statements
		nice because I didn't feel like I was judged for being a manly man."

Table 5*Jenny's experience being a parent of a Transgender child*

Experiential Themes and Micro-themes	Definitions	Participant's Quotes
"It's more society"	Queer theory informed Superordinate theme—developed as a result of how conventional society norms of gender binary has impacted the parent's experience having a TGE child	"No, I think it's more, like, it sounds kind of bad, but it's more society..."
Perceived judgement	Conventional gender normed Society looks at you as a caregiver of a Gender creative child in two ways 1. As a good mom affirming her child 2. As a bad mom or like she deserves some pity	"I get two looks, either good job mom, you know, and I'm like, for what? Like, you know, it's kind of, and then, or I get, oh, like, pity almost, you know, or under, you know, or look at that, you know, look, look, look, or whatever. And, um, it's bizarre to me..."
"Open and honest" conversations with child	Mom being open and honest with TGE child about how people living in conventional society might look at their gender or gender expression/behavior; not generalizing gender; discussions with him about practicality—take a chance when you tell him he cannot wear something because he may perceive as you rejecting his gender identity; pronouns and name change	"...really talking to him about, you know, it doesn't really matter what other people think. You know, if you feel like a girl that day, then you are a girl that day... I want our relationship to be open and honest. And I want to say, 'Some people might say mean things. People might say something or point to you or tell you can't go in the bathroom or whatever.' One little girl in his class told him that he couldn't be something for Halloween because that was a girl costume or whatever. And I said, 'Well, some kids believe that. Some families believe that, but our family doesn't.' Um, so it's been, it's always sad. (laughs) It's sad that you have to teach your kid that they're gonna be

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Experiential Themes and Micro-themes	Definitions	Participant's Quotes
		<p>picked on; ...we didn't want... it to be this generalization or this negative, um, one thing or another. Um, all girls are this so I want to be this, or all boys are this so I want to be this. We've always been pretty open about, you know, girls can do that, too. Girls can be (laughs) aggressive, too... a big moment for us, too, is to understand that us saying no to things like that seem, you know, normal or, like, a boundary for us. But we really had to be careful that we weren't say, that he didn't assume we were saying no to that, um, expression. Which I think sometimes he felt...I think being at home and constantly having access to whatever they feel is appropriate has really helped understand that you can be your authentic self, but you also have to be practical; I think the name change thing was really impactful for us. We were like, ugh... That really opened the conversation to how important your name is. And before we had you, you know, we put a lot of thought and a lot of, you know, and your middle name is after daddy. And, you know, and so that conversation was really rich , too, that we never would have had."</p>
"Not use stereotypical language"	Parents experience with non-gendered language and recognition of use of language in discussion	<p>"I often feel that it's hard for us to not use stereotypical language. Because it's hard to describe without it; I try not to use gender... we always ask him what pronouns he wants; ...we've tried to be more careful with our language; And I was like, and it was a complete surprise for the boys. So, um, for the kids, I should say."</p>

PARENTS OF TGE CHILDREN

Experiential Themes and Micro-themes	Definitions	Participant's Quotes
"Like underwear"	Concerns and challenges that parent has experienced having a TGE child-gendered items, gendered ideas, traveling and holidays, school, buying items to affirm gender	<p>"Like underwear, that one's a big issue... they don't make Minnie Mouse boy underwear. And they need boy underwear...it was hard for him... we were like, why are they gendered?... that really doesn't need to be... we went on a family trip to Disneyland and we all had matching outfits... it was, like, I don't know how to pack because we never know what that morning is going to feel like [for TGE child]...So I just packed both [masculine and feminine clothing options]. And then every morning, you know, I would lay out both; Um, so those are the moments that it's been like, oh...or the moment that, I forget what he wore makeup for, but, and you see a physical change in who he is... And his kindergarten teacher is very, like, 'But, you know, I have these rules and da-da-da-da-da. No toys at school, da-da-da-da-da.' And I'm like, well, it's not really a toy, you know... And if he comes to school in a purple wig, you can't make him put it in his backpack. I think his teacher has always been, I wouldn't, uh, I wouldn't say that she was unsupportive, I would say, uh, you know, she's always been supportive, I just don't think knowledgeable"</p>
Change in way understand gender	How parent understands gender now that TGE child has disclosed and is socially transitioning	<p>"It's been interesting for us because there are so many things that are gendered ...we never noticed before... so there are things like that that have kind of changed our, you know, mindset. And so many things ask for gender..." "You can't wear that to school. But for him, that was such a blow because it wasn't a costume, it wasn't. It was definitely an identity. You know, and for us to</p>

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Experiential Themes and Micro-themes	Definitions	Participant's Quotes
		understand that, he has to articulate so much. You know, or one day he wanted to wear a hat with a ponytail out the back. Like, your hair's not long enough, I don't have anything to make that work...and for him, that was just heartbreaking. And it was one of those moments that you're like, oh, this is deeper. Yeah. And this is, I have something in my head that I had pictured and it's not possible."
Representation	Parent deems TGE child seeing and being subjected to TGE people and experiences	"...when I come across resources or I come across a kid that identifies as transgender or a kid that identifies as gender creative or, um, gender fluid kids or anything like that, I try and show [TGE child], you know, that those are options. You know, then we kind of talk about it."
Personal growth and understanding own gender and TGE genders	Mom's reflective of gender and how conventional societal norms have impacted her thoughts, feelings, and behaviors about hers and others gender	"And I think it's really made me kind of, um, introspective about my own gender and really think, you know, kind of about some of the things that, you know, I felt I needed to do or I felt that I didn't need to do, or, and why... it's important to understand what, you know, our assumptions could be...you know, to understand it. And validate your feelings as the caregiver, that that's okay, too. It's okay to be uncomfortable with it. It's okay to, you know, question, you know, should he wear a dress to church? You know, and kind of sit with that and deal with, um, how you feel about it first. Um, but I think being honest with them, even from when they're really young..."

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Experiential Themes and Micro-themes	Definitions	Participant's Quotes
Important moments that impacted parent	How mom experienced child not being affirmed for dressing like a feminine superhero	<p>"...he was all into PJ Masks because he wanted to be Owlette. And, but nobody knew who PJ Masks (laughs) were, and therefore they didn't know who Owlette was. And her costume is mostly red, um, with pink wings... So it was, and it was hard for us because he couldn't articulate that at the time, he had just turned four. And so I was, and so all of the sudden he didn't want to do that anymore. And he goes, 'Nobody knows that Owlette is a girl... Because you think, you know, it's, for us, we don't want you to wear an Elsa wig to school because that's a toy, that's a costume; You can't wear that to school. But for him, that was such a blow because it wasn't a costume, it wasn't. It was definitely an identity. You know, and for us... to understand that, he has to articulate so much. You know, or one day he wanted to wear a hat with a ponytail out the back. Like, your hair's not long enough, I don't have anything to make that work. Like...And for him, that was just heartbreaking."</p>
Perceived judgement from others and how she responds to it	Parent's subjection to judgement against unconventional ideas as a child and judgement for not conforming to conventional norms as a parent of a TGE child	<p>"So then I think people that look in are like, 'Well, you're only offering him girl stuff.' I'm like, 'Hmm, not really.' Like, we've done some work to get here. But from the outside it looks like, I think other people sometimes think that we're, are not strict enough or we're not, you know, offering him, you know, opportunities to be what they think is more appropriate."</p>
Extended familial relations	How mom has experienced her family	<p>"It took, I think, most on my side. It's always been, it's just a phase, he'll grow out of it. He's just, you know,</p>

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Experiential Themes and Micro-themes	Definitions	Participant's Quotes
	experiencing her TGE child	he's just, he's only two, he's only three, he's only four, he's only five...it's such a generational thing...You know, and so it was interesting that that was, that took a while. And she would still, you know, buy clothes and things like that, and like, but, not gonna wear 'em. So if you're okay with buying things that he's not gonna wear... "...it was interesting because my brother is engaged and her kid is the same exact age. And he, his favorite color is green. And so, um, my mom's Easter basket for him was green. And that was really the first thing that she bought him that was all pink...:So that's what they get...it was interesting that that was, that took a while."
"More obvious"	How parent has experienced the differences between both children she has that were assigned male at birth	"...Made it more obvious for [Gender creative child] that it's more than an interest, it's more than a costume, it's something deeper...is his identity..."
"Fluid"	Abstracted superordinate- How parent experienced transitional phases and continues to experience as a result of child disclosing and socially transitioning to affirmed gender	"... it's [gender] really fluid, it's really, um, we always ask him what pronouns he wants. ..sometimes he'll correct teachers... he's never corrected us... And he says that it's fine, we can call him whatever we want... yeah. And, um, but I think we've tried to be more careful with our language, um, when we, when I speak in emails and things like that, I try not to use gender."
"Can't assume"	How parent sees TGE child's gender fluidity	"You can't assume that this is going to be forever, you can't assume that this is not going to be forever. You can't assume that this is going to be... a

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Experiential Themes and Micro-themes	Definitions	Participant's Quotes
		phase or not... or even what we, you know, initially were like, okay, well, then choose one. (laughs) You know. Okay, are you wearing a dress every day? Is this what we're doing? You know, to simplify it...for us. But I think that more and more that we've really followed his lead, that it's like, he doesn't even know...we're gonna let him pick what he wants..."
"Affinity"	When parent recognized TGE child's gender fluidity	"Because even when he was, I mean, like, eighteen months old. We-we had an idea. (laughs) I mean, like, he just had an affinity for anything that was glittery... I have a picture of him as a baby almost, I mean, I think he was barely a year, wearing a Christmas bow... and it really started with tutus. He was, um, super attached to a tutu and, when he was two."
"Pressure" and "Hesitation"	How mom experienced beginning of TGE child's social transition	"And I think we felt some pressure early on to label it and to come to a distinct, you know, is he transgender?... we've really just said, you know, we're just going with it... we had some hesitation with him at first...can he wear a bow to church? Can he wear a dress to, you know, his parents...we made the decision as a family that we aren't going to tell you that you can only do this at home. We aren't going to tell you that you can only be you some places..., we were nervous about it. But it's always been kind of, we would take his lead."
"Hardest thing"	Mom's concern to be an ally for her TGE child	"um, I think my hardest thing is that I want to, um, I want to be perceived as an

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Experiential Themes and Micro-themes	Definitions	Participant's Quotes
	and concern for other TGE children	ally, but I'm not sure how to do that. (laughs) You know, and I'm such an information person that I need all the information. I want to know...but I do think that there are, um, for caregivers and for caregivers' extended family and for people on the outside of it, um, that have never experienced it, that worry, that, um, association with sexual orientation is so strong that I could see their aversion to taking their kid to therapy... And I think the population's getting younger and younger that feel more open to express it."
"Authentic and more meaningful"	Superordinate theme identified through subsumption— important element to parent's experience	"I think it's [child's social transition] made it more, obviously more authentic and more meaningful for us..."
"Taken his lead"	TGE child's taking the lead is important for parent	"we have really taken his lead... really taking that person's lead because you don't know what, there's no way to know what portion of their identity they feel needs to be addressed..." "I always try to really come from what [TGE child] is picking up. I try to understand what his questions are... and really try and understand what part of him he's trying to..."
Positive self- concept of child educational for parent	Experiencing TGE child's positive body image educates parent	..."it's always eye-opening, and it's always been a positive interaction with-with him because, um, he's just such a loving kid. And he's so kindhearted first. So it's always eye-opening to us that it's never taken as mean or hateful or that hurt my feelings or... Um, one of the things he said was, 'I just don't

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Experiential Themes and Micro-themes	Definitions	Participant's Quotes
		think they see a lot of girls in, boys in girls' dresses.' End of discussion..."
Positive impact of TGE child's social transition	Mom's interpretation of positive impact of TGE child's social transition	"I think it's impacted us in a lot of positive ways too, though. I mean, it's really given us a wider, um, perspective. And I think it's really given us so many chances to talk to, um, not only [TGE child], but everybody in our family about it, you know...give him options instead of, you know, you should be doing this or you should be doing that. Um, and so I think that's really, those options and those opportunities for learning for all of us has been one of the biggest ways that it's impacted us. Um, and conversations, it's open conversations with people we don't know...and relationships like the playgroup and things like that...I think just being more open and being aware that some kids don't identify as one or the other, and they don't see that you have to."
"Such a blow"	Mom's concern for TGE child and how cis- people don't understand their gender identity, expression, and behavior to create inclusive spaces for them	"You can't wear that to school. But for him, that was such a blow because it wasn't a costume, it wasn't. It was definitely an identity. You know, and for us to understand that, he has to articulate so much. You know, or one day he wanted to wear a hat with a ponytail out the back. Like, your hair's not long enough, I don't have anything to make that work...and for him, that was just heartbreaking. And it was one of those moments that you're like, oh, this is deeper. Yeah. And this is, I have something in my head that I had pictured and it's not possible."
Invitation to (PLPSG)	Superordinate theme of specific support	

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Experiential Themes and Micro-themes	Definitions	Participant's Quotes
	identified through abstraction	
Preconceived ideas about PLPSG	Assumptions parent had made about her TGE child attending the PLPSG	"It's funny because that in the beginning when [name 47:45] invited us, um, I was like, I don't really think he's transgender, you know, or he's not enough, you know. And-and so when we got there it was really nice that, um, and we tried to explain it to him, that it's just kids playing... We didn't really know what to expect."
Educational Experience	Parent learned importance of pronouns at first PLPSG	"...I think that was one of the first times that we had really talked about pronouns because you guys all ask, you know... so all of us were kind of like, I don't know what my pronouns are. I've never really thought of it...as a cisgender person or even as a parent, you know, but that importance, um, of allowing that you know, to kind of naturally happen, too. And kind of become part of our speech, you know."
"Comforting"	How mom experienced the first time she attended the PLPSG	"it was really nice, I think the most comforting for me was to hear kind of some of the parent conversations because it's so similar... with parents understanding that that's common helps."
Opportunity	How parent interprets TGE child experiencing PLPSG and visibility	"I think it's just been an opportunity for [name 53:20] to see other kids like him."

Table 6*Gabby's experience being a parent of a Transgender child*

Experiential Themes and Micro-themes	Definitions	Participant's Descriptive Statements
"We were socialized in a fucked-up society"	Queer theory informed Superordinate theme—developed as a result of how conventional society norms of gender binary has impacted the parent's experience having a TGE child	"We were socialized in a fucked-up society"
"Continue to experience new challenges"	Challenges parent has experienced having a TGE child and living in a conventional society-school, continued transition	"... we continue to experience new challenges (i.e. blockers = reality of fertility being compromised, [TGE Child] being "out" about gender fluidity with some friends = managing parent reactions), and the process begins again – but perhaps I do more to validate and normalize mine and [TGE Child]'s experience, to educate myself, and to have self-compassion and patience with myself... although she typically presents as more feminine, it's hard for me to imagine us as being "post transition", as we are continuously faced with some of the same and new challenges... [TGE Child]'s school was adamant that they could not change her name in the school computer system or records without a legal name change and would not change her gender marker without 'medical documentation of sex reassignment surgery'."
Advocacy for supports at school	Needed support to advocate for school to affirm TGE child	"After receiving support from the American Civil Liberties Union, [TGE Child] is now able to use the school facilities of the gender with which she identifies, and after a legal name change the school

		<p>now formally recognizes her as [TGE Child]. Despite these little victories , [TGE Child] continues to struggle with unaddressed bullying at school, and we have been unsuccessful in advocating for change in the school district’s requirement of ‘medical documentation of sex reassignment surgery’ prior to changing a student’s gender marker.”</p>
<p>“Education is everything.”</p>	<p>Parent’s need to be educated on TGE people and experiences to unlearn conventional gendered norms, affirm TGE child, educate others, and advocate for change</p>	<p>“Education is everything. And by education, I mean increasing your awareness of your own worldview, and being open to changing that shit. Really. We all have implicit biases that NEED CHANGING... Education is dropping that stuff at the curb, and allowing yourself to hear someone’s experience without reservation, and truly accepting their reality as truth... Of all of the education I’ve received/engaged in, learning from LGBTQ community members lived experience has been the most impactful... I often have to step up to either educate someone or advocate for a change in policy or approach.”</p>
<p>“Their voices” create change</p>	<p>Parent interpretation-hearing the stories of TGE people educates cis-people and creates systemic change</p>	<p>“It is their (LGBTQ community) voices that will change the world...It was the systems that perpetuate these harmful black-or-white beliefs that needed to change. It’s students and parents who continue to try to police [TGE Child]’s gender through hurtful words, that need changing.”</p>
<p>“Strong statement”</p>	<p>Distressing emotions parent experienced by parent as a result of having a TGE child in conventional society-guilt, fear, shame, anger, anxiety, regret</p>	<p>“I’m ashamed to say that in many ways, my behavior made me [TGE Child]’s first bully. If that sounds like a strong statement, it is...There’s still a sense of guilt when I think about what life was like for her before she transitioned (life before age 6)... I still feel ashamed for having set this boundary with her—because she should be able to be her</p>

authentic self in every space...fuck what everyone else thinks... I'm often fearful that someone will hurt or harass her for being her authentic self... I often worry that my fears guide my behavior– for example, I don't allow [TGE Child] to stand up to pee when we are in public restrooms... I find myself much less anxious about her going to school and extracurricular activities, although this might be less about the time since transition – and more about how we've managed to establish affirming community (school, colleagues, etc)... I often think that I should've been a better listener, that I should've heard what she was trying to tell us – but I try to have some compassion for myself.”

Ambiguous Loss

Parent's “ambiguous sense of loss” having a TGE child as a result of living in a conventional society

“As a caregiver, there was this ambiguous sense of loss when we started using [TGE Child]'s new name and accurate pronouns. Even now, when I hear her old name, I have this little pang of sadness in my chest and stomach. I'm not entirely sure what I lost. I've spent a bit of time thinking about this, and I think that that sense of loss comes from having to change the dreams I had for my child. Then, each time we reach a new stage in her transition, there's a renewed sense of loss. For example, when we stopped calling her [name given at birth], I had to change all of my nick names for her...This sounds silly...but these nick names mean a lot. They were part of our little relationship, of that intimate exchange between child and parent, that started when she was an infant. So I made it my goal to develop new nick names immediately...and this actually helped quite a bit. I recently experienced a renewed sense of loss when we went to get [TGE Child]'s first puberty blocker. We had talked about all

of the side effects, and long term consequences of starting blockers – we did our research and knew that it would prevent her from being able to have children. But when the doctor said, “now you understand that this will prevent her from being able to produce sperm, meaning she will not be able to have children in the future”, I felt that pang in my heart and stomach again. It doesn’t mean that she won’t be able to adopt children, or have them through other means...but as a parent, I have to change my vision for her.”

“Recovering Catholic” Impact of parent’s upbringing in religious home on their experience having a TGE child

“I was raised catholic , I now identify as a recovering catholic , and I grew up hearing ‘hate the sin, love the sinner’ , that tolerance of ‘other lifestyles’ is a ‘slippery slope’ into moral disintegration, and that people who are trans/gender-expansive are ‘perverse’. I can no longer tolerate that level of ignorance, and that type of speech – those words – they kill people. They stigmatize, isolate, and emotionally and psychologically wound our LGBTQ community members; they contribute to dysphoria, and dysphoria kills. So, [TGE Child]’s transition has shed light on so many parts of my life – such that I can no longer use my ignorance as an excuse for staying in the dark about the oppression LGBTQ folks experience... Changing my vision for [TGE Child] meant re-examining all of those beliefs, and learning new beliefs, behaviors, and ways of thinking.”

“They weren’t very receptive”

Parent’s experience with her blood relatives after disclosure of TGE child

“Since I came out to my family of origin about [TGE Child]’s gender identity, a lot has changed... When I came out to my parents and brother about [TGE Child], they weren’t very receptive or

willing to honor her name and pronouns. So, they finally became “ambivalent” (referring to Ryan’s categorization of family response) towards [TGE Child]’s transition and honored her name and pronouns after I set some boundaries and reinforced them when they crossed them. I let them know that if they wanted any of our family in their lives they needed to respect [TGE Child]. Although my immediate family shaped up, a good number of members of my extended family did not. Some even felt the need to email and message me letting me know that what I was doing was child abuse and against God. I’ve cut off all contact from...most of his [parent’s father] family.

Impact of “One truth” Parent interpretation
of religious “truth”
and how it has
impacted her

“I was raised in a ‘devout’ Roman Catholic household, where anything outside of the male female binary and prescribed gender roles was not only rejected, but seen as against the natural order, and would prevent one’s soul from entering heaven (well, purgatory if we should be so lucky). Changing my vision for [TGE Child] meant re-examining all of those beliefs, and learning new beliefs, behaviors, and ways of thinking... Maybe this is my own faith-based trauma, but I’ve heard the word “truth” used too often to justify acts of hate, and of rejecting members of the community. This idea that there is “one truth” is just one privileged groups way of reinforcing a specific power dynamic, where the group who knows the ‘truth’ needs to guide the behavior of the group who ‘needs to know the truth’ (for many folks, truth is synonymous with God). For me, the word truth has so many meanings – all of which are negative.”

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Questioning own identity and gender self	Reflective process of parent-Impact of TGE child's social transition on parent's view of gendered self as a cisperson	"I am a cisgender female , but I now question so many aspects of my own gender development and current identity . There was a time in my life where I would have given anything to shave my head, bind my breasts, and use male pronouns. In one way, I am a little more on the masculine end of the female spectrum in regards to gender identity (not presentation), but at the time in my life when I would have presented as male – I recognize now that I was trying to create safety around male peers, and that this was preceded by an assault."
"Stealth"	Safety concerns parent experiences having a TGE child and being out or not being out in spaces	"I also know who I can and can't (or shouldn't) reach out to when I need to talk about stresses and such related to others' response to [TGE Child]'s gender identity. I've also learned how to evaluate if a person is safe to talk to about [TGE Child]. Most of the time I just introduce her as my daughter, then if someone seems safe and it seems pertinent for me to share then I'll share that she's trans – but I only share that she is gender fluid with people that I know are safe...we are technically "stealth" at school right now, only a couple of people know her as trans."
Social Transition necessary supports	Superordinate theme from subsumption-Parent's need for supports at various aspects of child transitioning to affirmed gender	
Needs in beginning of transition and the impact of those needs	Parent's explanation of needs and how getting them met impacted her as a cisgender parent	"Our primary needs when [TGE Child] first came out were: Normalization and validation (shifting your entire worldview and dealing with rejecting family and community members can feel crazy making !), and education (we

needed to understand what [TGE Child] was experiencing, that it was healthy and normal, and also needed to learn about how her identity fit within the greater context of society and community)... it's important to validate caregivers, normalize their experience, and provide education (all while being patient!) – these are the things I needed at the beginning of [TGE Child]'s transition, and because I was provided these things, I was able to grow and stretch and transform as a parent.”

“A whole lot of education”

Impact of education on supporting TGE child

“It took a whole lot of education , and expansion of my thinking before I realized that her gender identity is truly expansion . Her identity doesn't fit in a box ... The more I learn about the history and realities of transgender and gender-expansive people, the more I feel like I understand her experience, and the more empowered I feel. I acknowledge that I'll never fully understand what it is like to be a gender-expansive child, or adult.”

“EVERYTHING”

How parent interprets the need for Visibility of LGBTQ+ community to support TGE child; TGE child's visibility is a voice for her and a way for parent to affirm

“Getting the families of trans/gender-expansive youth AND LGBTQ community members together is EVERYTHING . I learned so much from these community members – and when my partner and I's families rejected us – the LGBTQ community became our family . Events where we can meet and learn from each other, that was the most helpful for us...In order to help [TGE Child] express herself and feel heard, we participated in several studies and advocacy efforts whose primary aim was to elevate the voices of our gender-expansive youth... At the age of 8, [TGE Child]'s visibility and desire to share her story have helped her

to become an advocate for her community .”

LGBTQ+ community as family	Parents experience of LGBTQ+ community becoming family	“...When we started attending LGBTQ+ community events, I learned that family can be affirming, loving, respectful, genuine, and compassionate. These are things I had not known in my immediate family. The LGBTQ+ community welcomed our entire family with open arms. I learned that family is not blood, it’s community. As we met members of the community, and saw them at multiple events, and connected with them on social media, and started attending their family events (birthdays and such) – we started to feel connected to them in a way that was so much healthier than the connections I’ve had with blood relatives. These amazing people have changed how I view family, and the connections I chose to cultivate with others.”
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“Playgroup”	Impact of attending the PLPSG on parent’s experience and the importance of being an affirming parent	“My partner and I realized we needed help , that we didn’t have the tools or knowledge we needed to help [TGE Child] . We went to the [undisclosed resource center] and attended a Parents of Transgender and Gender-Expansive Kids Playgroup . At the playgroup, we met an amazing advocate and co-director of NMTGRC named [-]. He let me say everything that was on my heart – even things I said out of ignorance , things I’m embarrassed to say I believed at that time. Then [He] very gently educated my partner and I. It was like our eyes were opened to a reality we hadn’t realized was there the entire time. After that first play group, we took [TGE Child] to the store and let her pick out a new wardrobe. Every piece of clothing had a combination of glitter,
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sequins, rainbows, neon leopard print, or pink and/or purple. We stopped censoring her altogether, and she went to school the next Monday in a dress, with a huge stripped purple flower in her hair. [TGE Child]’s emotional melt downs stopped immediately, but the bullying at school had only just begun.”

“Beautiful colors and spectrums”

Superordinate theme developed through abstraction of data-parent’s speaking of how they interpret TGE child and TGE child’s experience and how it impacts them

“Having [TGE Child] as a daughter has helped me to see the many beautiful colors and spectrums of identity that color this world... he often talks about feeling like her gender identity is this “big secret” and that it’s “complicated”. I’m often fearful that someone will hurt or harass her for being her authentic self. Maybe there are some parallels in what we are both feeling”

New reality

How parent experiences transitional phases of child in transition to affirmed gender and the meaning of transition

“This transition is ongoing – I would say that we are more established, but we are constantly met with new challenges since there’s no real ‘end’ to the transition...[TGE child’s transition has impacted parent] In so many wonderful ways! She opened my eyes to a brave new world, and showed me that the reality I once believed to be so black and white is in fact colorful and dynamic . Some days I feel a little down about just how long it took me to see that gender is more than blue and pink boxes , and that love is bigger than the cishet-monogamous norm I’ve always known.”

“Incredibly Special”

How parent saw TGE child pre-disclosure

“We always knew that [TGE Child] was different, that there was something incredibly special about her... I’ve always called her my rainbow child – not as a reference to the LGBTQ community, but as a way of describing just how colorful her personality is.”

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“Gender Unicorn”	How parent experienced TGE child’s disclosure and the meaning of that on parent finding compassion for self	“The first time [TGE Child] tried to tell my partner and I that she was a girl on the inside was when she was 3 years old . During the beginning stages of [TGE Child’s] transition, I held on to the idea that we simply assigned the wrong gender at birth, but that she still fit the male-female binary... I often think that I should’ve been a better listener, that I should’ve heard what she was trying to tell us – but I try to have some compassion for myself. Neither she nor I had the language to describe what was happening in her mind, body, and spirit.”
Continued social transition	How parent sees TGE child now	“Now I think of her as a kind of gender-unicorn. She’s unique and kind of magical – and still leaves a trail of glitter wherever she goes.”
Parent’s language around Transition	The importance of language on the parent’s meaning making-How parent describes the various levels of transition for child	“Perhaps this could be framed as pre-coming out and social transition, being out and social acknowledgement as a transgender female, continued social transition – start of medical transition - and navigating self-disclosure of transgender identity”
Inspirational	How TGE child has inspired parent	“... [TGE child] is a fearless, courageous young lady with a powerful voice. She celebrates her identity, and hopes that by sharing her story, other kids might be brave enough to live as their authentic selves.”

Table 7*Pam's experience being a parent of a Transgender child*

Experiential Themes and Micro-themes	Definitions	Participant's Quotes
"Society tells you it's something to be sad about"	Queer theory informed Superordinate theme—developed as a result of how conventional society norms of gender binary has impacted the parent's experience having a TGE child	"...it's an easy thing to be sad about because society tells you it's something to be sad about. And I'm gonna tell society, 'F you, we're not being sad about this'."
"You've never met a real trans kid"	Concerns and challenges that parent experiences having a TGE child-cis-people questioning her affirming TGE child, need to protect TGE child, concerns about medical interventions navigating trans community as cis-person, need for support and education on how to raise healthy TGE person, conversations with TGE child, concern for TGE child's future, religious based negative experiences, school pushback in beginning, negative experiences from other cis-parents with TGE children	"...then you have people come and say, 'Well, they're too young to make these decisions. These kids are too young.' And it's like, well, that means you've never met a real trans kid"; "I've decided I'm keeping her, I'm going to keep her, um, identity very private from kind of this point... I decided I'm going to be, I can be the advocate for my family and I can be, but I'm not going to put her picture out there"; "it's overwhelming, this sounds silly, and I know I'm being recorded, so I hope it's taken correctly, but, um, I think about, you know, that she has a penis. I think about that a lot. And I think about if I could get her the gender surgery now, I would. She's totally a girl. That's the only thing that makes her not a girl right now, in society's eyes...Yep. It's the only thing. But it's something that nobody sees but her"; "They're not gonna come find you and you don't know who is transgender in the community... unless you're actively seeking them out, you're not gonna know who they are. And so that can be scary when you're trying to find them to try to get support and to try

Experiential Themes and Micro-themes	Definitions	Participant's Quotes
		<p>to say, 'Help me to do this right. Help me. Educate me. Tell me how to do this correctly so I don't mess it up as a parent'; "she comes to me probably once a week and will say, "When" I get the surgery, is it gonna hurt?" Or, you know, 'When I get a vagina is it gonna be, do, um, will I know when I have to pee?'...they're very age-appropriate, authentic questions, and I answer them. And most of the time I say, "I'm not really sure. Let's, you know, we need to start writing these down so that when we do talk to a doctor, um, we have your questions written down... she talks about, you know, wanting to be a mommy someday"; "We don't want until they're eighteen and quote/unquote, 'make these [medical intervention] decisions as an adult.' It's too late"; "...from my research... when you're born male, you know, there are issues with once you go through a male puberty, there are things that structurally happen with height, with bone structure of the face that are very hard to-to change without mass, major, major surgeries. And if I can prevent that, then I'm gonna do that"; "...my only struggle is, the only hiccups I've really experienced are related, it's-it's from a religious base"; "...I've had a few parents of teenagers tell me they're jealous. They're jealous of me and their gender and it almost makes them angry that I got on board earlier than they did and, you know, and I don't really know what to do with that."</p>

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Experiential Themes and Micro-themes	Definitions	Participant's Quotes
"Onboard"	Parent's experience with affirming and unconventional language; recognizing the use of pronouns as important to her story and her supporting and affirming TGE child	"...I'm gonna refer to her as him in the beginning just for, so you know when the transition took place... We're all pronouns, onboard with pronouns, clothes, all the gifts are exactly, you know, when birthdays come around, it's, everything is what she wants. Everything is, you know, there's, nobody's trying to change anything about her"; "We're all on the spectrum'."
Ambivalent Emotions	Conflicting emotions parent experienced as a result of having a TGE child in a conventional society-fear, sadness, scared, happiness, pride	"These kids need... procedures and these medical needs done earlier and earlier... my child is really getting to be in these first, you know, decade, two decades of this happening, and that's so great... it's still new... it's hard because it's new... this is all new so it's hard"; "I don't want to be sad in a situation that's not a sad situation... I refuse to be sad. (laugh)...I have a healthy, happy, loving, good person on my hands, so how could I be sad? How could I be mad? How could I be unhappy with my situation? I'm going to be happy, and I'm going to look at this as a gift. And I'm going to educate myself. And I'm going to align myself with people like you and like [TGE adult co-facilitator]. And I'm going to raise a really healthy transgender adult, and so that she can go out in the world and align herself with other healthy transgender adults and hopefully help other transgender adults who aren't getting wrapped up in their mothers' arms right now, you know, and-and then change the world.

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Experiential Themes and Micro-themes	Definitions	Participant's Quotes
		Hopefully she can go change the world"
"On the fence"	Parent interpretation of socio-political change in conventional society that supports and affirms TGE people and how she experiences future changes that are affirming to TGE people	"This isn't the end of the world. This isn't religiously tied... it's a new day. I keep saying that, it's a new day. We live in an amazing time with medical intervention... we live in a time where people are more open and more understanding, we just have to find those people. And then the people that are on the fence will eventually, they'll eventually come over. And, yeah. I'm very, very hopeful, um, and very optimistic."
"My issue"	Parent's experience of grieving loss of TGE child pre-disclosure as a result of living in a conventional society	"when I was growing up, I always wanted four kids and I thought the coolest combination was a girl and three boys, and that's what I ended up getting... now I have two girls and two boys. And-and that has been hard for my emotion, you know, like, I always thought that was so cool, a girl with three brothers, that's so cool, right? And then, but that's about me. That has nothing to do with her. And so that's my issue, and that's something I have to get over. And that's nothing to do with her, I'm not mad at her because of that, you know. That's me and that's... So it's, like, little things like that are my issue. It's little things like that. And, um, getting rid of all the boy clothes, the little boy clothes was hard, but that's about me. That's my, you know, that's my issue. That's not her... You know, the name, the name is

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Experiential Themes and Micro-themes	Definitions	Participant's Quotes
		hard, changing the name has been, you know. But that's-that's me, that's, like I said, that's a, that's an issue that I have to deal with. And it's just little stuff. I still think they're little things. And they may always be a little, hurt my heart, my mommy heart."
Normalizing TGE kids-struggle because of safety measures	Struggle parent experiences with putting TGE child's picture out community to normalize TGE kids in conventional society	"...that is something I struggle with, too, as a parent, how open do I be that I have a trans kid? You know, and say, I mean, I don't mind being open that I have a trans kid, but how open do I say, 'Here is my trans kid, and here is her face, and here who, here's what she looks like'... That's something I struggle with quite often... I did do a talk... And in the, in the presentation I did have her picture in it. Um, and I struggled with that, um, about whether to put that up there. But I did do it, I, because I thought it was important to show, you know, um, that these kids just look like normal kids."
"So many worse things"	Parents interpretation of how she experiences having a TGE child in a conventional society	"I think there's so many worse things in this world than having a trans kid... I feel lucky because, um, well, I'm, my whole life all I ever wanted was to be a mom. Um, and I got very lucky in that I have four children, four very healthy children, and, um, and so I feel very lucky in that way. But I feel lucky that I got who I got. And I think there are so many worse things in the entire world to have other than a trans kid. (laughs) Like, to me, I just think it's not, while there are challenges and

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Experiential Themes and Micro-themes	Definitions	Participant's Quotes
		there are, I mean, there's challenges with just being a mom. There's challenges with any kid. You could have the quote/unquote, "most perfect kid in the world," and there's still gonna be challenges."
Positive experiences in conventional society	Parent's positive experiences as a parent of TGE child in conventional society with systems-pediatrician and school	"... our pediatrician's on board, the school is on board... we're in the-the victory stage of, like, there wasn't a fight to use the bathroom in school... principal at the elementary school is phenomenal... my pediatrician, he is totally for learning how to, what-what drugs are needed."
Negative experiences in conventional society	Parent's negative experience as a parent of TGE child in conventional society with systems	"we went to Disneyland on Halloween and he wore a Supergirl outfit...the shuttle driver was like, uh, "Super, he's a boy." And I'm like, I was like, I'm looking at a grown man dressed as a bunny. Like, I'm looking at a whole family of M&M's walking by. It's Halloween, leave him alone."
"People don't get that"	Reflective process of parent-new perspective of gender non-binary and privileged self-impacted by TGE child's social transition	"...I can sit here as a woman and be completely content being a woman and not be attracted to anything going on around me and be okay, you know. And it's like, people don't get that. And I think, I think, it's not that I didn't get it, I just never stopped to think about it..."
"Lucky"	Superordinate theme emerged through abstraction-how parent experienced TGE	"...I feel really lucky in that I'm, um, from what research I've done is I'm kind of in one of the groups of really being on board, at a very early, early age."

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Experiential Themes and Micro-themes	Definitions	Participant's Quotes
	child's social transition at various stages	
Pre-disclosure	Parent's narrative about experience with her own family upbringing and TGE child pre-disclosure	"I grew up in a very loving, open, accepting family... at about two is when we started to notice [gender nonconformity... we were really onboard about, like, the kids can play with whatever they want to play with, they can wear whatever they want to play with...e never said no to any, you know... it just never stopped... I thought, okay, well, we'll see, you know...then at three, um, he was Elsa for Halloween, obsessed with Frozen... my mom knitted him...a long, a yarn, um, wig... then at four, he was Supergirl for Halloween, um, at preschool."
Parent's experience with TGE child pre-disclosure and pre-social transition	Parent's description of how she saw child before she disclosed she's a girl	"She was a tough little kid... There was a frustration there that came out in her behavior"
The journal	Parent's experience finding out her child is a girl	"...in first grade, I, um, found a journal. And in it, it is a pink sparkle journal... it had a picture of a girl... a stick figure... and then a picture of a stick figure little boy with the eyes crossed out...and it said 'I have a secret. I want to be a girl. But I don't tell very many people.'"
		"Dear [TGE child], I love you so much as a boy and I will still love you so much... as a girl"
Parent's response to TGE child disclosing	Parent's experience responding to TGE child	"The beginning was probably the most overwhelming... She's just got this really funny pers-, you know, she's funny and wild and silly. But, and I

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Experiential Themes and Micro-themes	Definitions	Participant's Quotes
"Adventure"	How parent experiences TGE child's social transition and makes meaning of it	just look at her, and I think, like, I'm sorry, if you don't love that... she's a cool kid. She's a cool cat... if you don't, there's just so many other things in this world to worry about than whether this kid looks like a girl and wasn't born technically a girl. (laughs)... I think there's so many worse things in this world than having a trans kid... it's humbling and, uh, emotional and, you know, I have very much enjoyed meeting so many people in the community and, um, yeah. It's been, it's an adventure."
"Blossomed"	How parent experiences TGE child post-social transition	"She's 100% girl now... passing... happy... the last few years she's just blossomed."
Advocacy Agenda	Superordinate theme that emerged from subsumption-parent's experience with advocacy work to ensure overall well- being of her TGE child and other TGE people and to create change	
Telling narrative as advocacy	How parent experiences telling her story to create change	"[to say] it will be okay. So however- however I can help in that way... I don't know what that means yet, but that's how I see my information and my story helping other families or helping the community..."; "I would love to be able to change people's minds... that would be amazing and I, if I can do that to one person, my work is done."

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Experiential Themes and Micro-themes	Definitions	Participant's Quotes
Using privilege as a cis-person for advocacy	Parent's experience using privilege to advocate for TGE people	"I have a lot of privilege, and I want to use it for power. I want to use it for good. And-and I-I pride myself on that, and I want to continue to do that... And there will always be that marginalized group in this society because this will never go away of people not supporting it, but if I can use my privilege for good and-and, you know, and for good power and to be able to say, 'No, let's do this right. And tell me what I need to do to do it right'."
Parent's Reasons to advocate	Importance of advocacy work in parent's experience	"I want to be an advocate for other trans girls who were born male... if I can help parents, you know, yeah, if I can just help that and-and say, you know, this is okay"
Normalizing	Superordinate theme developed through subsumption-Parent's explanation of experience using examples cis-people can relate to	
Normalizing ambiguous loss	How parent normalizes her experience with ambiguous loss	"...I think we all have things with any kid, like, oh, we want, we see one of our kids who say they want to be a doctor and then they end up being a teacher... or they, you know, want to be a doctor and they end up being an artist, or they want to be an artist and they end being a Who knows?... it doesn't matter. Like, you have a vision for your kid and it's not, but you have to support your kids."

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Experiential Themes and Micro-themes	Definitions	Participant's Quotes
Socio-political shift	How parent experiences socio-political movements for TGE people and the resemblance of paradigm shift for gay and lesbian community	"I feel like where we were twenty-plus years in the gay community where we are now in the transgender community. That is my limit, you know, what little bit of me diving into the community in the last couple years is where I, that's where I feel it is now. Um, and so-so you have to still, I feel like, as parents, as family members, you have to really seek out the information still. And you have to, and it's scary because so many people are not welcoming and not okay with it. And I'm hoping within the next decade it will be like where we are now with the gay community where it's not a big deal."
Supports for other cis-parents	How parent interprets the need for supports and resources for other cis-parents	"So my biggest thing that I have found for my calling to be, is to help other families' parents not be scared. That's, so that's my biggest thing, is to not be scared and not be sad."
Sharing	Parent's interpretation of helpful for cis-parents based on own experience	"...how can I use that to help the next parent who maybe might have a little bit of a fight?...It's more about sharing that kind of information... kids are just a couple years older than her are starting the hormones and, like, what's that like? And tell us how that's going. And how's insurance going?"
Showing grace to new cis-parents of TGE children	Reassurance that feelings new cis-parent has about TGE child's disclosure and social transition are normal	"I keep going back to offering each other that grace and that space to be upset.... or it is okay if your religious views are creating conflict for you. It's okay to have the space to discuss that... giving everybody the grace and the room to have their,

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Experiential Themes and Micro-themes	Definitions	Participant's Quotes
"I know that I don't know anything"	Superordinate theme that emerged from subsumption-Parent's experience with lack of education, need for education, and educating others on TGE persons and experiences	have their emotions and their feelings... it's okay to be mad or it's okay to be sad... We just need to be able to offer each other that grace to get through it."
Humble	Parent's experience to learning about TGE people	"I think so, to be super humble. And I- I hope I live that way. I try to be humble and I try to say, I-I know that I don't know anything. I know a little bit right now, and I'm open to learning as much as I possibly can about this community."
Actively pursued education	Parent's experience with needing to be educated about TGE people to support and affirm TGE child because is cisgender and brought up in conventional society	"Is it tough? Yes. Things are tough and there's a lot of education that I have to teach myself and I have to actively pursue."
"Education is not readily available yet"	Lack of education on TGE people and experiences as a result of living in conventional society	"...it can still be difficult even under the best of circumstances because...the education is not readily available yet."
Educating others with her story	Her experience using her narrative as a cis-parent with a TGE child to	"I would love to be able to change people's minds. I would love to be able to say, for somebody to say,

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Experiential Themes and Micro-themes	Definitions	Participant's Quotes
	educate cis-people to improve overall well-being for all TGE people living in conventional society	'This is totally against everything I believe in.' And then just talk to me and then say, 'Oh, you've totally changed my mind. Yeah. Let's go for it.'"; "...don't make it harder for them, don't put up roadblocks in front of them when-these are life-saving, the research shows this is suicide preventions or life-saving things"
Impact of Education on difference between sexual identity and gender	Parent's experience of learning different between sexuality and gender and her interpretation of why it is important to know	"they [gender and sexuality] have nothing to do with each other... It's so different. They're completely separate buckets. And, like, if we could, yeah, if more people could really conceptualize that, I think it would make life and this situation, the transition so much easier for everybody, yeah... And grasping that was a huge eye-opener for me. And it helps, and I wish more people would really take the time to learn that because it really puts stuff into perspective. And it real, I mean, it-it really is a, uh, it really will, I think that will help with, really help people who are struggling."
"Less scary. Less foreign."	How parent experiences the importance of TGE visibility and interprets the importance of visibility for cis-people	"...the less scary it [TGE community] becomes...And the less foreign it becomes... I've met amazing people in the community and I hope to meet more... So, yeah, it's a, it's a really cool community. And it's made up of all different walks of life."

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Experiential Themes and Micro-themes	Definitions	Participant's Quotes
Self-determined Resources and supports	Superordinate theme emerged from abstraction-resources and supports parent has found beneficial and disadvantageous	
"Kid play"	Positive impact of attending the PLPSG on parent's experience and how she interprets the group for kids you attend	"I think the playgroup, the kid play, the one for the little kids is amazing. And I think that, that's for the, that was a, really for me, it's-it's to meet the parents, right? It's to meet people like you. It's to get to talk to [Trans co-facilitator] one-on-one. It's to meet people like [name], [name] mom. Like, it's, you know, she and I have got a really nice connection. It's to meet, it's to have that, the kids could care, like, they just want to play, right? They just want to play with each other."
Parent support group	Negative impact of attending the parent support group on parent's experience and why	"The [parent] support group, um, I have a hard time with... Because it's sad. And I don't, and, uh, you know, the few, I've been to three, I think, and they're just very sad. And I'm not-not to take away, people are clearly in pain. And I'm not in pain. And I-I don't, I don't want to be sad... I don't want to take away from their pain, but it's, it-it's almost too sad for me... that was hard for me to hear the parents being sad, but that was their journey and, you know, and part of my journey in this is really, really giving everybody the grace and the-the room to have their, have their emotions and their feelings and-and choosing what I want to be around, you know... I

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Experiential Themes and Micro-themes	Definitions	Participant's Quotes
		would have much rather have met, I would have much rather have been around a room full of healthy transgender adults and heard their stories and positivity than the sadness. That was really hard for me, but, and we've talked about that."

Table 8*Lee's experience being a parent of a Transgender child*

Experiential Theme and Micro-themes	Definitions	Participant's Descriptive Statements
"Ugliness"	Queer theory informed Superordinate theme— developed as a result of how conventional society norms of gender binary has impacted the parent's experience having a TGE child	"After seeing and hearing the ugliness that people can generate I have felt an intense need to shelter all of them from it."
"Bought into gender stereotypes"	Parent's experiences that impacted how he understood gender before child's disclosure	"I think that from day one, being a new parent, I bought into the "blue for boys, pink for girls" thing. I really created the mold by pushing what I saw as masculine from the time my first 2 children (1 cis and 1 trans) were born...I had a very limited knowledge of the trans experiences. The most exposure I had had was through very limited and inaccurate portrayals in the media. I always saw trans people as sexually deviant... I saw her try to fit the 'mold' that we had set forth but I really didn't know what it meant or how to process it."
"To heart"	Influence of Parent's upbringing and military on how he understood gender as binary before child disclosed	"I was raised with the idea that my job was to 'make my sons into men' and I took it to heart. I was raised only having access to very gendered toys and activities and thought that that was what I had to provide my kids... I joined the military and adopted a very 'caveman' tough guy persona. When I got out of the military... I kept up that conservative tough guy attitude until my kid rocked my world."

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Experiential Theme and Micro-themes	Definitions	Participant's Descriptive Statements
"Fitting the mold"	Parent's observation of differences in gendered behaviors and expression of both children AMAB and how he experienced coming to understand his child's experience before social transition	"I knew pretty early that my kiddo was different because of her likes and interests. At 3 years old, she wanted to dress up as a female monster for Halloween...She always gravitated towards shiny/glittery toys and crafts while my cis child preferred things like GI Joes and superheroes. I could always tell that she didn't really like the clothes that we picked for her but I didn't make the connection until after her transition that she was going along with what she thought she wanted but that she wasn't really happy."
Observing TGE child trying to fit conventional gender norms before disclosure	How parent experienced TGE child trying to fit into ideas around conventional gender norms before social transition	"I saw her try to fit the 'mold'."
Reassessing	Parent's experience being educated on TGE people and experiences	"Meeting the people at [undisclosed resource center] made me reassess my limited experiences and realize that I had it all wrong. Meeting and talking to [Two Transgender adults who direct the undisclosed resource center] really opened my eyes to how much I didn't know. I also learned how important it was for me to support my kid no matter what. I really changed who I thought I was and shifted most of my world views, I gave up the idea that my worth was defined by my masculinity. It was really a life altering process for me (in a good way)."
Rejecting to Accepting	Unlearning conventional gender norms helped parent	"After meeting/talking with folks at [Undisclosed resource center] I really started to get it [Being Transgender] and opened up to her transition. Prior to that we felt that we

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Experiential Theme and Micro-themes	Definitions	Participant's Descriptive Statements
	to be more accepting of TGE child	were protecting her by not allowing her to be her authentic self outside the home but I came to understand that this was actually pretty harmful.”
Language of parent	How parent refers to child's transition	“Pre-transgenderational; Transgenderition; post-social transgenderition”
Protective	Parent's need to protect TGE child and cis-children from discrimination in conventional society and the loss that has come from protecting	“I have become very protective of her (as well as all my kids). I always was but it changed with her transition. After seeing and hearing the ugliness that people can generate I have felt an intense need to shelter all of them from it...Shortly after my child transitioned at school, I had a parent confront me and inform me that she is possessed by the enemy and that allowing it was child abuse. We also had a distant family member accuse us of child abuse. I lost a repetitively close friend and so did my older son. After my kiddo was on the news (for TCRCNM) I made the mistake of reading comments on social media. These experiences have really caused me to go through life wearing ‘armor’.”
“On guard”	How parent experiences conventional society	“I am constantly on guard and ready to not just educate but fight with negative people. I have really had to watch myself so that I don't teach this kind of reaction to my kids...“Anytime I go anywhere, I am watching everyone. I am diagnosed with PTSD related to military combat so I have had that since I was active duty but now, I constantly am looking for a threat towards my kids. I try to hide this from them, I don't want them going through life looking for the threat around every corner like I do. I do try to educate my kids about basic stuff like being aware of their surroundings but I try to

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Experiential Theme and Micro-themes	Definitions	Participant's Descriptive Statements
Parent's reflective process on sexual/affectional self	Reflective process of parent-Impact of TGE child's social transition on parent's view of sexual/affectional identity	hide how distrustful I am of just about everyone around me." "I haven't put a lot of thought into what I would label it as but I guess if I had to, I would say that I am either Bi or Pan... I am in a monogamous hetero relationship and don't really desire anything else. I am comfortable saying that I can be attracted to any gender and that relationships for me are about the person that I'm with and not their genitalia."
Words of advice for other cis-parents of TGE children	Words parent believes to be important to tell and beneficial for other cis-parents based on own experience having a TGE child in conventional society	"I'd like other caregivers to know that supporting a trans kid is the most important thing they can do. You may not always get it right but support and acceptance are number one."
Peer led play support group (PLPSG)		
"Safe space"	Impact of attending the PLPSG on parent's experience and how he interprets the group for his children	"The play group has been a great experience for myself as well as my cis kids and partner. I feel that it has given [TGE child] a safe space to connect with peers without having to worry about others reactions or negativity. It has provided a space for my partner and I to discuss and sometimes just vent about our experiences with others that understand and have been there...My other kids have become more loving and accepting of other kids that may be different from them in all areas of their lives... I have had a hard time finding an understanding ear for these issues outside of this group"

Table 9*Terri's experience being a parent of a Transgender child*

Experiential Themes and Micro-themes	Definitions	Participant's Descriptive Statements
Supporting and Affirming TGE child	Queer theory informed Superordinate theme-developed as a result of living in a Westernized ciscentric-conventional society that norms binary gender and how it has impacted the parent's experience having a TGE child	
Clarification	<p>Parent's use of language that is affirming and unconventional is a part of her experience</p> <p>Parents experience with creating a supportive and affirming environment for TGE child living in conventional society</p>	<p>"Daughter... To clarify, it wasn't until she was 10 that she picked to be a girl. For a few years before this she would be fluid and vary between girl and boy as she desired in different situations."</p> <p>"My husband and I tried to encourage her voicing her needs and concerns and provided her a safe space in which to make her needs known."</p>
"Interesting" Challenges	Challenges that parent experiences having a TGE child-passport, Coordinating TGE child attending camp, and school, lack of extended family support	"Getting a passport for her was interesting because we had to get attestation letter from her pediatrician. But then our travel plans were cancelled due to COVID. Coordinating sleep-away camp bunking was also unique, but then camp was cancelled due to COVID, which sucked after the year-long of work we did with the camp to ensure appropriate bunking for her. There was also the standard questions from teachers and school counselors, but most of those were really supportive to ensure that [TGE child's] needs were being properly accommodated... The toughest

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Experiential Themes and Micro-themes	Definitions	Participant's Descriptive Statements
		part for us was dealing with our very old-fashioned parents. There was years of pain and stress until our parents ([Husband's] parents came around)."
Pride	Parent feeling proud of TGE child for living as authentic self in conventional society	"So, as her caregiver, I am frequently amazed at her sense of self, because I had very poor self-esteem compared to her."
"Journey"	Superordinate theme identified through abstraction	"My daughter has been making a journey to discover her true identify since she was 18 months old"
"Realization"	Parent speaks about TGE child's experience to explain own experience	"As soon as she was able to verbalize her desires, and felt comfortable in sharing them, she would insist on more female oriented things (e.g., clothes, toys, accessories, notebooks, school supplies, shoes, etc.). A toddlerhood preference for all things pink, transitioned to a preference for stereotypically girl-centered toys and activities... as she acquired more language ability and a sense of self... a greater proportion of female to male friends, and ultimately at age 10, a realization that she is a girl..."
Unlike Her	How parent experiences TGE child's experience and how it differs from her own as a youth	"No, I don't think I was like her at this age, at all. The reason I am very proud of her is because I don't think that I could be as strong and self-sufficient when I was her age. I was much more worried about fitting in and not calling any attention to myself."

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Experiential Themes and Micro-themes	Definitions	Participant's Descriptive Statements
Support Systems	Superordinate theme identified through abstraction	"My friends and other family members have been very supportive, so that has been really great."
Supportive preconceived notions of TGE people	Preconceived ideas of TGE people positive because of college education and employment in specified field before child disclosed	"I have always had access to learning tools about TGE. Once I was a faculty member... I accessed medical literature and attended trainings and conferences as they became available."
Support Received throughout process	How parent observes support systems supporting her	"Supportive people in our lives were always very encouraging of our efforts and went out of their way to share how proud they were of us as parents. It was their way of showing their support for us. Sometimes friends shared with us web links, books, or articles they read about the topic. Other times they would talk to us about how we are doing and provided us with emotional support when we were facing difficulties with our parents."
Timing of support	Parent's experience with having own parent's and in-laws become supportive	"Her transition gave us some issues with my parents and in-laws, but they eventually came around to be supportive of their grandchild."

Table 10*Rhonda's experience being a parent of a Transgender child*

Experiential Themes and Micro-themes	Definitions	Participant's Descriptive Statements
"He's just a tomboy"	Queer theory informed Superordinate theme—developed as a result of how conventional society norms of gender binary and how they have impacted the parent's experience having a TGE child	"... when others tried to tell me oh he's just a tomboy, I always told them no, it's more than that, because I was a tomboy, and I never had a boy name or asked my mom to call me her son. I never calmly explained I was a boy to my preschool classmates."
Lack of awareness	Reason parent had preconceived ideas about gender binary	"... my generation really didn't grow up with any awareness around gender identity."
Communication	Impact of parent's upbringing and how it has influenced how she interprets communication as being necessary to raising TGE child to be genuine and authentic self	"... I teach children the concept of communicating who they are in genuine, authentic ways, not in ways to conform to what the expectations of them are. And that's how I raise [TGE child] too. Speak your truth and I will listen and learn. I was not parented that way and I always knew if I had a child, I wanted to parent differently than how I was raised."
Understanding of Trans and Non-binary people before TGE child disclosed/socially transitioned	Parent experienced Trans and Non-binary people but lacked knowledge	"Well, growing up in California and having traveled quite a bit, it wasn't like I never met a trans or nonbinary person, but what I didn't have was all the terms and definitions, the lexicon per se, the history, the understanding of the culture, and the reasons why things like pronouns, gender expression,

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Experiential Themes and Micro-themes	Definitions	Participant's Descriptive Statements
		etc. are so important in regards to respect.”
Happy and Proud	Parent feeling proud of TGE child for living as authentic self in conventional society and parallels to giving birth to him	“The day he received his court order for his legal name change, I couldn't have been happier and prouder watching him answer the judge's questions all by himself in his suit. I felt just as much joy in that moment as the day I gave birth to him in the hospital. I think I've been impacted as a caregiver because I always hoped I'd be a fantastic mom even though I didn't think I would be. But, now that I see I've gotten this right, I feel like, well, whatever else I messed up, at least I did this much right in his life and I can be proud of that!”
How other parent's perceived TGE child before disclosure	Parent's experiencing other parents perceptions of TGE child pre-disclosure	“Other parents could see [TGE child] was different too and commented on it all the time (in a positive way).”
Parent's reaction to TGE child's disclosure	How parent experienced TGE child's disclosure and how she felt about it	“I wasn't shocked or anything, but honestly I just had never really mapped any expectations onto [TGE child]... In the beginning I was scared of being alone and isolated... I think at first, I wasn't sure what to think. I just knew [TGE child] was different than other kids, but I don't know that I automatically jumped to thinking about 'gender'... I had no idea it was a thing.”

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Experiential Themes and Micro-themes	Definitions	Participant's Descriptive Statements
Parent's process of gendered and sexual self through learning	Reflective process of parent-Impact of TGE child's social transition on parent's view of gendered and sexual self	<p>"Interestingly , learning about all of the terms, definitions, etc., has helped me sort through my own gender identity and sexuality a bit. I realized there are terms to describe me that I didn't know existed, like pansexual, and I realized I had a lot of unresolved issues around my own femininity and gender identity as a woman to sort out...</p> <p>encapsulated the scope of who I am which is feminine in some ways but also very masculine in others, and somewhere in between in even other ways... They/them gives me permission to be exactly who I am and not feel pressure to conform to societal expectations and "norms" of/for women. They/them feels like freedom from all of that and a hall pass to be me."</p>
Surprised but not surprised	How parent experienced TGE child coming out at school and conversations with teachers	<p>"... heard from the teachers that he DID calmly explain to the other kids he was a boy, I was surprised, because... he had only said that at home and in public places where people didn't know him. But I was also not surprised, because, it was kind of the natural next step to tell his friends which I figured he would at some point... we all kind of stood there not sure what to do. But back then, I always kind of made it more casual, and I would just say things like, so, is it cool if he just writes [preferred name] instead of [birth name] on his papers? Things like that. At that age, many educators are willing to just kind of roll with things."</p>

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Experiential Themes and Micro-themes	Definitions	Participant's Descriptive Statements
Parent's experience with TGE child in crisis	How parent experienced and felt about TGE child being in crisis because of living in conventional society	"[TGE child] was attending a private school at the time that was pretty homogenous, and he was becoming more aware that there was no one like him at the school (that he knew of)... it made me a nervous wreck. I'd never seen him like that, not wanting to go to school, coming home crying every day, stressed because he knew he was different, stressed because kids were staring when he went to the bathroom, etc. I knew something had to change, AND I felt guilty, because I had known about the playgroup for a year and hadn't taken him... He kept telling me he wanted to meet more kids like him."
Parent observations during TGE child social transition	How parent saw TGE child during continuous social transitioned	"He was obsessed with "boy" clothes, colors, toys, mannerisms, how to be a gentleman, how to be a daddy, etc., in a way that other kids didn't seem to be at 3 and 4 years old. He insisted on using his boy name... insisted we refer to him as a boy, our son, and male, only shop in the boys section, etc. All of that seemed way different than most other kids."
Process of allowing TGE child to be authentic self	Parent's experience providing opportunities to TGE child and impact of this in her understanding and becoming more knowledgeable about TGE child and	"My understanding and thoughts about gender have definitely expanded over the past several years as [TGE child] has continued to transition socially. [TGE child] has had lots of room to think about being nonbinary and transgender, experiment with pronouns, names, and gender expression, and I've learned a lot by watching him , and

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Experiential Themes and Micro-themes	Definitions	Participant's Descriptive Statements
	nonbinary and Trans people	also researching for him and helping him try out different things... Hair, clothes, underwear, toys, friends, pronouns, packer, costumes, bathrooms, names, talking about different things, books, conferences, presentations, legal name change, name and gender change on his legal documents, discussing blockers and hormones with doctors, learning about puberty, helping him learn to be a gentleman, [TGE child]'s really done it all, and all of it has helped him feel confident and explore his gender so he can figure out who he is."
Interpretation of impact of expectations on ambiguous loss	How parent interprets expectations conventional gender binary norms have on parents and how they see their children and how that relates to the grieving process of TGE child	"I have my child I've always had, and I am very lucky to have him. Whomever he is, is wonderful and the world will think so too... If I had grieved a loss of losing a child then that would mean I had placed my expectations on [TGE child] to be something specific AND it would also mean I only had a child to fulfill my own desires, or just to have a mini me, or just to fulfill some preconceived vision/idea in my head of what my child's going to be like... that child is at a disadvantage before they're even born because that parent is setting themselves (and the child) up for disappointment and the child can never live up to preconceived expectations... Anyway, how could I grieve a loss, my child is still standing right there! I thought he was a girl, but I was wrong, he is a boy, ok great. If anything, I'm

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Experiential Themes and Micro- themes	Definitions	Participant's Descriptive Statements
		impressed with [TGE child], not sad he doesn't meet some preconceived ideas I have about who he's supposed to be. My child's alive, healthy, curious, bright, well-mannered, and a good person... I'm not grieving; I'm grateful."
How parent interprets grief process	How parent interprets ambiguous grief based on conventional gender binary norms	"Parents don't see how "grieving" the "loss" of a child they thought was a different gender is just a backhanded form of rejection... Also I think to "grieve" the "loss" of a TGE child is just super devaluing and sends them a really depressing message. I was very committed from the beginning of never sending [TGE child] that message ever... To me, people should be who they are... And unfortunately grieving contradicts that idea that the other person can be themselves. Grieving is a self-centered process. Grief is a projection of our feelings onto the situation and other person... And parents who "grieve" the "loss" of a child when their child says they're trans, that's what they're doing – they're putting themselves first, they're centering themselves in a situation and experience of which they are actually not the center, their child is. They get self-absorbed in that instead of celebrating that they have a wonderful and brave little kid."
"Relief"	Superordinate theme developed through	"I am very proud of [TGE child], watching him be exactly who he is,

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Experiential Themes and Micro-themes	Definitions	Participant's Descriptive Statements
	abstraction of data-parent's speaking about how TGE child's experience has impacted them	and educate and inspire others while being himself. Watching him socially transition was such a relief."
"Space to be himself"	How parent experiences TGE child's transitional phases to affirmed gender and the meaning of transition	"All of that [masculine behaviors from AFAB child] seemed way different than most other kids but for a long time I continued to wonder if it might possibly be a 'phase' although deep down I always knew it wasn't... But still, it didn't matter to me either way, I just wanted to give him the space to be himself. It [TGE's experience] was always super positive... I guess one thing about raising a TGE child is I get to see the beginning of everything. I see how his gender is a part of who he is and always has been. I observe how he's navigating it. I see how it's an intimate aspect of who we are because I'm observing my child learn who they are"
Passion	Parent's passion drives her to ensure TGE child is getting needs met	"I'm a very passionate person. I'm very passionate about [TGE child]. I believe [TGE child] deserves every good thing in life because he projects so much positivity out into the world. Do I think I'm doing a good job? Yeah I do, but I do make a ton of mistakes, and I do get scared for what lies ahead for him. However, I'm going to make sure he gets what he needs and gets the best."

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Experiential Themes and Micro-themes	Definitions	Participant's Descriptive Statements
Advocacy and Education equal change	Superordinate theme developed through abstraction of data-parent's speaking about the importance of both parental advocacy and education	"We've got a new generation coming up with parents who are OUT there. Don't be afraid to use them!"
Parent's interpretation of how parents of TGE children are viewed	How parent experiences and interprets how parents of TGE children are viewed	"It feels like parents are the red-headed step children in the trans world but it is ok to allow allies to actually DO stuff to help educate and inform. In some cases, parents are the best people to actually get out there and do the work, AND, not every trans person wants to advocate for their community, so we've got to rely on cishet allies to help do the work in order to create change and cultivate accepting environments much faster than one or two people can."
Experiences with advocacy work as a parent	How parent experiences advocacy work as a parent	"I've always been very happy to go out and do whatever needs to be done to pave the way for him so he experiences inclusivity and acceptance. I just believe if you have a child that's the responsibility you take on."
Advocacy is teamwork	Why parent believes her and TGE child advocate and educate	"We're just people who have the capacity to take on a lot, generate a lot of ideas, and get excited to see things get going."
Need for Self-identified Resources and Supports	Superordinate theme identified through abstraction	

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Experiential Themes and Micro-themes	Definitions	Participant's Descriptive Statements
Need for change	How and why parent needed to reach out for support	"I'd never seen him like that, not wanting to go to school, coming home crying every day, stressed because he knew he was different, stressed because kids were staring when he went to the bathroom, etc. I knew something had to change, AND I felt guilty, because I had known about the playgroup for a year, and hadn't taken him... I think in the past I was more wary of tipping the boat; if everything seemed fine, I wasn't so likely to seek out something that 'wasn't needed' but of course it was, and thank god [TGE child] is the kid who will speak up. I learned my lesson, and now I'm more proactive with that kind of stuff [getting resources for TGE child]."
Resources parent uses	The parent's self-identified resources and how she experiences using them	"A lot of Google, still!... finding people in our community, connecting with people, listening to their stories. Attending the Gender Spectrum conference... [social media platform], online groups... Reading various books. And some of those books really help in a way because I read them and just think "nope, we're not doing that, we're not going to try and correct or downplay anything!" So sometimes, I've gotten a lot of clarity from hearing wrong and backward ideas."
Learning from TGE child	How parent experiences TGE child and Trans community being educational for her	"I believe children are wonderful teachers... So, [TGE child]'s taught me a lot about those things [importance of pronouns, culture, definitions, terminology, history,

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Experiential Themes and Micro- themes	Definitions	Participant's Descriptive Statements
		etc.], and so has everyone else I've met in this community."
PLPSG Needed	How parent experienced attending the first PLPSG and the importance of visibility	"I didn't realize how badly I needed the playgroup either; but that first session was so therapeutic for me. Being able to talk to other parents but especially folx from the community was incredibly reassuring and beneficial to me. I felt relieved, like, thank god, I'm getting most of it right already. And then there was stuff we were both exposed to that helped us gain momentum and make even more rapid strides in his gender expression, identity, and how we handled it socially"
PLPSG as life saver for child	How parent interprets TGE child experiencing PLPSG	"The playgroup saved [TGE child]'s sanity and possibly life. He was in crisis mode when we began coming to the playgroup and after just one play group session, he was so happy, and I remember he got in the car and told me 'I'm good mom, I don't need to see a counselor anymore.' I really think he desperately needed to see other kids like him."

Table 11*Sue's experience being a parent of a Transgender child*

Experiential Themes and Micro-themes	Definitions	Participant's Descriptive Statements
"Not a choice"	Queer theory informed Superordinate theme—developed as a result of how conventional society norms of gender binary have impacted the parent's experience having a TGE child	
Fear and devastation	How parent experiences concern for her TGE child because live in conventional society-TGE child is not accepting of self always because of socially constructed idea of gender binary	"It's terrifying as they get older and you fear what will dating look like? Will someone get so mad and feel lied to that they take it out on your child and brutally beat or kill them?... It's devastating to know... that they [TGE child] wish they [TGE child] were dead; You never know when their mood will shift dramatically for a few days as they internalize the self-hate; You never know if they will shift from just wanting to die to actually creating a plan."
Being TGE is NOT a choice	Parent's experience with people in conventional society who deem being TGE is a choice	"I think it's important to realize that no one chooses this life... As a parent, I live in constant fear of suicide or abuse from someone on the outside. It's very difficult... This is not a life I would wish on

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Experiential Themes and Micro-themes	Definitions	Participant's Descriptive Statements
		anyone. Living in constant fear of being outed, bullied, etc. is certainly not a choice and it's a ridiculous notion to even suggest it."
Uncertainty and doubt.	Parent's experience trying to meet child's emotional needs yet meet own emotional/physical needs-being concerned something bad will happen to self and there will be no one knowledgeable to support TGE child like parent	"It's hard on a parent to have a child who has so many emotional needs. I know how to deal with her and how to navigate her emotional outbursts, her crying, her self-hate. But what if something happens to me. She will have no one. I'm feeling this even more with COVID. We are completely isolated; I won't take any chances at all. I've decided that 100% I must stay alive and cannot risk getting sick. Her dad could never support her the way she needs, and I doubt she would ever make it out alive."
Unique Concerns and challenges having a Transgender child	Concerns and challenges that parent has experienced having a TGE child-lack of resources, lack of contact with cis-son, lack of trust toward others, need to be TGE child's counselor because of her lack of trust, worry not meeting TGE child's needs, negative experiences with counselors in past,	"I would love to change my daughter's name and birth certificate, but just don't have the funds... It would be nice if there was a scholarship fund that we could apply for; I won't allow anyone in our lives who isn't fully supporting; We separated the kids (I have a 15 yo son as well) because her anger was so extreme; I

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Experiential Themes and Micro-themes	Definitions	Participant's Descriptive Statements
	observes 'internal hell' TGE child experiences	am her counselor. She won't open up to anyone, even though we have seen quite a few people. It's a lot of pressure, especially since I am not educated as a professional in psychology. I worry about doing something wrong, not giving her what she needs, etc.; "I had gone to several counselors, and even they seemed to want to find blame with me. I had one lady who asked me if deep down I just really wanted a little girl. :::rolling eyes:::; they [TGE child] live in their own internal hell and you have no idea how to get them through life or offer hope."
Assumption around TGE child's sexuality	Parent's preconceived ideas about TGE child and assuming she was gay-gay is feminine in conventional society	"At first, I just thought my child was gay since (she) was so feminine.
Parent's experience with TGE visibility	Visibility was educational for parent and an important part of her process/experience as a parent of a TGE child living in a conventional society with little education	"When I first saw the video of Jazz, it was her at her birthday party, wearing a girl's bathing suit. They personalities were so similar, as well as the description her mother gave in the video. It's been a while since I watched it, but I knew that I knew. I felt a peace wash over me, as I felt like I finally had the

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Experiential Themes and Micro-themes	Definitions	Participant's Descriptive Statements
		answers needed. I felt empowered to support my daughter, because I finally understood what was happening. I allowed her to dress fully as a girl..."
Loss of relationships with family and community	Parent's experience with affirming TGE child caused a loss of relationships	"Coming against my mom, my (ex)husband, even my entire community, I bought her girl clothes... Everyone was against me, but I knew in my heart that I had the right answer and my daughter was infinitely happier... ; I lost my entire community due to this situation..."
Search for Resources and Supports	Superordinate theme identified through abstraction	
Internet searches	Parent's experience utilizing online resources	"I searched the internet again and again..."
Peer led play support group (PLPSG)-child's experience	How parent interprets how her TGE child experienced the PLPSG	"When we first started with this group, she was a little bit older than the other kids and just didn't connect to anyone, so we stopped going."
PLPSG-parent's experience	How parent experienced attending the PLPSG	"Personally, I'm grateful for the group and completely support it because I lost my entire community due to this situation"

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Experiential Themes and Micro-themes	Definitions	Participant's Descriptive Statements
"Priceless"	Parent's interpretation of support groups for TGE children and parents	"...having the support system to navigate parenting is priceless."
Hopeful	Parent's response to finding more groups for her TGE child that are age appropriate	"I hope this part of finding a peer group is changing now that she's technically a teenager, I'm finding there may be more options available."
Continue learning of new age appropriate local supports for TGE child	Parent's experience with continuing to search for age appropriate groups to help support TGE child	"I just found out yesterday that the trans group we joined a few years ago also has a teen group... Now that she's almost 13, she can join the teen group so I am definitely hoping to get my daughter involved with this group once COVID is over. I have a contact information and plan on reaching out very soon to get us in the loop."
"Intense internal Hell"	Superordinate theme identified through abstraction—important element to parent's experience	
	Current concern of parent that is meaningful	"As we navigate this further into the teen years, I'd have to say that understanding the intense internal trauma is probably the most important thing now. Having tools to navigate

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Experiential Themes and Micro-themes	Definitions	Participant's Descriptive Statements
		this could be life changing."
Survival	Parent's experience having a TGE child and things she has identified as being meaningful to her TGE child's survival	"It's devastating to know: how sad your child is ALL THE TIME; that your child hates their body ferociously; They are always in fear of being "outed" - to the point of panic attacks; That they live in their own internal hell and you have no idea how to get them through life or offer hope. Life with a trans youth is survival, rather than thriving."
"World against her"	Parent's observations of how TGE child perceives world and the meaning she makes of this experience with daughter	"She doesn't always see her experiences realistically. She has this lens through which the world is against her. Her personal experiences attest to that, even though on the outside I can see that it isn't the 'truth'. When I try talking to her about it, she thinks I'm taking their side against her."
Importance of TGE child accepting self	Meaning parent makes of her child being accepting of self	"While there is an underlying fear always present, I want to be clear that life isn't horrible. I love my daughter and hope beyond anything else that she can learn to accept her body and maybe even be proud of who she is. I'd love for her to enjoy life again, to find joy and figure out

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Experiential Themes and Micro-themes	Definitions	Participant's Descriptive Statements
		how to give back to the world. I look forward to getting to the point where she isn't just surviving but actually thriving."
Parent's experience with Transition	How parent experienced TGE child's transition-developed through abstraction	
Beginning phases of TGE child's transition	Parent's experience when TGE child was young and unable to verbalize what she was experiencing	"My daughter (AMAB) transitioned at 3 ½ years old. She is now 12 ½, so this was 9 years ago. At the time, there wasn't a lot of information out about being transgender, so it was a new experience of having to find information."
"Difficult transition"	Parent's experience with TGE child's social transition	"It was a very difficult transition for everyone around my daughter and I... I allowed her to dress fully as a girl, much to the dismay of my ex-husband, mother, in-laws, and the counselor we were seeing... I had come to terms with it, heartbroken when I realized that her Grandmother wouldn't let her come into the house unless she was wearing boy clothes. That moment changed my life forever, because I realized that it was only my job to protect my child's spirit.

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Experiential Themes and Micro-themes	Definitions	Participant's Descriptive Statements
		Not base my parenting on outside influences. From that moment on, she had my total support and I become her biggest ally."
TGE child's experience with being affirmed by parent during social transition	Parent's observations of affirming TGE child's gender identity- creating change in emotional and behavioral concerns in the beginning	"The meltdowns stopped, she had no issues getting dressed, she smiled a smile that reached from ear to ear. I could see the pride and joy emanating from her whole being. So, I accepted the bullying from my family and community, knowing she was healthy and happy finally..."
Supporting and affirming family members-after social transition	Parent's experience with ex-husband and mother now supporting	"He loves his daughter, finally has used her preferred name, and has used the correct pronouns almost from the beginning. He supports her in his way. My mom has since come around as well and is fully supportive."

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Appendix E

Case by Case Superordinate Themes and Subthemes Master Table

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