GENDER EXPRESSION: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF THE
REFLECTIONS OF RECENT LGBT HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES’
EXPERIENCES

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to Dr. Paul Sargent for introducing me to the study of Gender, for his mentorship and his friendship.
Girls can wear jeans and cut their hair short and wear shirts and boots because it's okay to be a boy; for girls it's like promotion. But for a boy to look like a girl is degrading, according to you, because secretly you believe that being a girl is degrading.

--Ian McEwan  
The Cement Garden
ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Gender Expression: A Qualitative Study of the Reflections of Recent LGBT High School Graduates’ Experiences
by
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The purpose of this qualitative research was to inquire about Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered and Queer (LGBTQ) individual’s experiences in junior and senior high school. Due to the recent increase of media coverage, there have been reports of LGBTQ teenagers’ completed suicides in the news. LGBTQ teenagers are at a higher risk for being bullied, and at a higher risk for attempting or completing suicide. Additionally, research has illustrated that teachers participate in the bullying. I want to determine why this trend is not decreasing even though it has been brought to the public’s attention. I asked interviewees if they were bullied or know of others who were bullied. I asked them for their opinions as to why they think they were targeted. I wanted to determine if LGBTQ atypical gender expression increases their risk of being bullied. I hope to add valuable information in understanding gender expression in hopes of lessening society’s expectations based on biological sex.
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I would like to acknowledge Dr. Jung Choi for his guidance as my chair. I would also acknowledge him for his enthusiasm of teaching and his love of mankind. Dr. Michael Roberts for volunteering to be on my committee and for instilling in me the importance and benefit of social theory. Dr. Edith Benkov for providing the history of homosexuality and her generous help.

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And to my wife Lori, who makes my life happy and for her never ending support in my long education journey.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Did you know that in the past masculinity was associated with pink because it was a derivative of red and red represented power? And blue represented femininity? That was the case until World War II according to recent research by JeongMee Yoon, reported by Popova (2009). Yoon found that after World War II blue switched to representing masculinity and pink switched to representing femininity across many cultures. If the colors associated with gender can change, is it possible to change other societal expectations of gender?

I graduated with my Bachelor’s degree in 2007 at the age of 47. After working full time and taking classes for eight years, I was able to shift my attention to the current social issues that related to my love of Sociology. Bullying first caught my attention when Charles “Andy” Williams walked into Santana High School in Santee, California and killed two students and wounded several other students and adults (Harris and Petrie 2003). I wondered why a shy fifteen-year-old boy would resort to violence? He lived around guns all his life and next to a shooting range, but was never known to touch guns. I read all the information in the news surrounding this case but never read why he was bullied. I believed that he was bullied because his peers thought he was gay, which caused so much distressed that he resorted to violence. Harris and Petrie confirmed my belief of the reason Andy was bullied in their book, Bullying: The Bullies, the Victims, the Bystanders. They stated Andy was bullied in Maryland and it worsened in California. He was accused of being gay and they made fun of him for being from the country or because he had big ears (2003:53). Another issue that I found disturbing was the media reports of the increasing number of teenagers who commit suicide because they were bullied. Many of the teenagers that completed suicide were gay and lesbian students who were ridiculed and harassed by fellow students and teachers.

These issues are extremely close to my heart. I was accused of being a lesbian when I was in junior high school and later in my life. I did not understand why, but I had always thought I should have been a boy. I was a “tomboy” and I was happy when adults mistook me for a boy. I knew that I wanted to have girl friends but pretended to like boys to fit in with
my peers. I knew nothing about homosexuality and was hurt by the accusations of being a lesbian. I was raised in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS), Mormon religion and at the age of 33 came out of the closet as a lesbian to my family and friends. My Mormon family was disappointed that I chose to leave the church because it was not supportive and accepting of homosexuals. I was fortunate that they continued to have a relationship with me although it was strained for many years.

I read about several events that both inspired me and sadden me. One of the sad events I discovered was finding out that many teachers and adults participate in bullying student they perceived to be homosexual (Aviv and Shneer 2006; Varjas et al. 2007). Some even believe that homosexuality is a sin. When a teen acts against gender norms, teachers and peers use negative sanctions to convey that their actions are unacceptable. Nevertheless, I was encouraged when I discovered a website called “It Gets Better,” created by Dan Savage. “It Gets Better” is a place where celebrities and teenagers can talk about their experiences of being bullied and give encouragement. A city councilman in Texas, Joel Burns, gave a speech to fellow councilmen about being bullied as a teen and told of his suicidal feelings. His advice to teenagers being bullied was, “It gets better.” He said that although you may feel despair now; adult life brings you much happiness. His speech was viewed by over a million viewers on the Internet. Jamey Rodemeyer, a fourteen-year-old, who lived in Buffalo, New York, was bullied on social networking sites. He talked to his parents and was receiving counseling. He felt better and released a video to encourage students who were experiencing bullying to fight back and get help. He posted his video to teenagers on the “It Gets Better Project” website. He then killed himself weeks later. He was one of many young adults who ended their life because his peers accused and bullied him for being gay.

In addition to the “It Gets Better” website, another encouraging event was the Second Annual Bullying Summit, which was held in Washington, DC on September 21, 2011 sponsored by the US Department of Education. Those in attendance included teachers, parents, students, members of national organizations and federal agencies. The summit’s goals were to create awareness of bullying and to discuss the negative effects caused by bullying. Students may be bullied for many different reasons. I have chosen to discuss bullying in regards as a negative sanction against individuals who are or are perceived to be
homosexual. Education Secretary Arne Duncan stressed the need for students to feel safe in schools. He also asked for the schools to work with the community members in order to end bullying. These examples show that society is aware of the problem of bullying and its effects and is attempting to stop bullying. Adults and teens are reaching out to bullied teens to help and encourage them. During my research I have learned that many states and schools are making changes to prevent bullying and teen suicides and some school boards have implemented rules and consequences pertaining to bullying by students and teachers.

My initial interest in doing research on bullying came about when I took Sex and Gender in Contemporary Society as an undergraduate. It was a class that changed my life and I knew that I wanted to learn more. I wanted to advocate for change in society’s expectations of the need to fit into the strict binary categories of being feminine and masculine. As I continued to read everything I saw on bullying and gay teens suicides I knew that if I went to graduate school I would do my thesis on this topic. During my first semester, I took a graduate seminar class called Gender and Media and realized that I also wanted to use gender as a part of my thesis. During my qualitative methods class, the late Dr. Paul Sargent helped me focus my broad interests of bullying, teen suicides and gender into a thesis project. I wanted to research why gay, lesbians and straight students, perceived to be homosexual, were bullied. Was it because of their gender expression. In other words, were teenagers bullied because a boy or a girl did not act masculine or feminine enough to fit in with their peers? Ultimately, this question became the centerpiece of my thesis.
CHAPTER 2

BACKGROUND

Masculine and feminine characteristics can be traced back to antiquity according to Williams (1999). He described masculinity as possessing “strength, dominion, valor, virtue, uncultivated roughness, military discipline, pertinacity, endurance, bravery and hard workers” (127,130, 138, 139). Conversely, feminine characteristics are the opposite of masculinity that include “softness, submissive, playing the receptive role in sexual intercourse, delicate, broken, excessive displays of pain or grief, idleness, luxurious, hedonistic, self-indulgent and avaricious” (128, 138, 139). The fact that femininity is the opposite of masculinity is attributed to the dualistic nature of society. Connell (2012) confirmed that these are the same characteristics of masculinity and femininity that society uses to judge men and women today. He stated that European cultures and medicine take the “common-sense essentialist” view that, “…where masculinity and femininity are seen as natural opposites, expressing the contrast of male and female bodies” (2012:1675,1676). Patriarchy was prevalent in this early era and would remind a dominant concept throughout many cultures and into current time.

One advancement of women’s standing in society occurred during the medieval era. Wemple (1981) describing women stated, “However oppressed they appear in the light of modern criteria, medieval women were far more visible, vocal, and powerful than their sisters in antiquity” (189). She explained during medieval times that women were able to take ownership of property which in turn gave them power in society. Women were allowed to work with their husbands in their family business and manage the estate when their husbands were away. They were permitted to participate in society, which gave them power (190). Although their status in society changed, the expectations of feminine characteristics were not advanced. Accordingly, unless these outdated gender expectations are altered drastically to reflect equitable social relationships, strides toward gender equality should not be expected.
It is important to understand gender development in order to determine the possibility of changing society’s expectations of gender. Goffman’s (1979) groundbreaking research on gender illustrated that gender roles and expectations are socially constructed. He discussed the nature of gender and stated, “…one of the most deeply seated traits of man, it is felt, is gender; femininity and masculinity are in a sense the prototypes of essential expression…” (7). He goes on to discuss an individual’s ability to give off fake expressions that give the individual an advantage in a social situation. Goffman explained an individual’s “…expression in the main is not instinctive but socially learned and socially patterned; it is a socially defined category which employs a particular expression, and a socially established schedule which determines when these expressions will occur” (1979:7). Goffman continued to explain that an individual might feel that their expression is a part of them but he theorized that the expression is a socialized response of the individual. His opinion was that gender is a way of conveying “one’s true nature” but is portrayed in a specific presentation. “Gender expressions are by way of being a mere show; but a considerable amount of the substance of society is enrolled in the staging of it” (1979:8). Goffman believed that individuals’ expressions are not “natural” but socially constructed to be used in specific situations to gain an advantage.

West and Zimmerman (1987) agreed with Goffman’s concept of gender. In their article “Doing Gender,” they stated,

Placement in a sex category is achieved through application of the sex criteria, but in everyday life, categorization is established and sustained by the socially required identificatory displays that proclaim one's membership in one or the other category. In this sense, one's sex category presumes one's sex and stands as proxy for it in many situations, but sex and sex category can vary independently; that is, it is possible to claim membership in a sex category even when the sex criteria are lacking. Gender, in contrast, is the activity of managing situated conduct in light of normative conceptions of attitudes and activities appropriate for one's sex category. Gender activities emerge from and bolster claims to membership in a sex category. (1987:127)

Society predicates the behavior of male and females to act in ways that reflect their biological sex. West and Zimmerman explained why the majority of individuals in society participate in the construction of gender. They stated,

Competent adult members of these societies see differences between the two as fundamental and enduring… Things are the way they are by virtue of the fact that men are men and women are women—a division perceived to be natural and rooted

Most individuals believe very strongly that men and women are inherently different therefore they behave differently. West and Zimmerman detailed society’s expectations of feminine and masculine behavior and it’s belief that females and males biological differences are the reason gendered behavior exists. They also demonstrated that all of us participate in “doing gender” knowing that we will be judged according to the expectations of others in society (1978:136-137). But West and Zimmerman explained that males and females are not biologically different, their bodies work in the same way to keep them alive. An example that demonstrates this theory is that men will cry when they are in severe pain just like women. But there is a requirement in society to create the differences between males and females to establish different statues for each. They explained, “Doing gender means creating differences between girls and boys and women and men, differences that are not natural, essential, or biological” (1987:137). An example that West and Zimmerman used in describing how we participate in “doing gender” even though it is not natural is the use of public restrooms. Even though males and females use the same toilet and space in their homes for the elimination of waste, in public it is expected that females and males use different facilities because of their biological differences (1987:137). This practice of separate restrooms is “doing gender.”

Barrie Thorne (1993) observed children in school and during their playtime. She contended that children participate in gender socialization and provided many examples to illustrate her theory (1993:3). Kalbfleisch and Cody (1995) confirmed that children learn at an early age the difference between genders. They also learn that each gender has expected ways to act. They stated,

> From the time they are born, males and females are treated differently in both obvious and subtle ways and are expected to behave differently. With this emphasis on gender, children learn to identify their own biological sex and the sex of others at a very early age and gender quickly becomes a central feature of children’s emerging concept of self. (1995:105).

Thorne, Kalbfleisch and Cody provided valuable information about how early children develop their comprehension of gender. Solebello and Elliot (2011) interviewed men to understand their ideas and concerns about their children’s sexual orientation. Their research illustrated the opinion among a large percentage of the men that gender roles are taught by
parents. These researchers provide evidence that many individuals in society believe, that gender roles based on masculinity and femininity are socially constructed.

Gender roles and gender development are important for understanding how crucial it is for children to be able to act upon their gender identity. Gender does not always coincide with an individual’s biological sex. Developmental and social problems may arise when the discrepancy occurs. It is important to establish that many children do not pick their gender identities. Parents may allow “gender bending” or acting as “Tomboys” and allow atypical gender expression in their young children such as playing with atypical toys. Kalbfleisch and Cody said, “Gender constancy, or the tendency to view oneself dependably as a male or female, is achieved between the ages of 5 and 7” (1995:333). So imagine a child that has been allowed atypical gender expression throughout childhood. Then as that child advances through puberty the parents and or society force the child to act against his or her inner feelings of gender. According to Kalbfleisch and Cody, this can be extremely traumatic and sometimes damaging since the child’s gender identity is already formed by puberty. Pipher (1994) demonstrated this when she wrote *Reviving Ophelia*. She was a counselor to young female teenagers and described their conflicts after puberty. She stated,

*Reviving Ophelia* suggests that adolescent girls experience a similar pressure to split into true and false selves, but this time the pressure comes not from parents but from the culture. Adolescence is when girls experience social pressure to out aside their authentic selves and to display only a small portion of their gifts. (1994:22).

Pipher details the struggles of adolescence females to discontinue their independence of childhood and love of athletics to adapt to societal expectations of young women. Kalbfleisch and Cody (1995) related that according to Bem (1974), there is not an either or in masculinity and femininity. An individual can have both characteristics of masculinity and femininity. Equal masculine and feminine characteristics are known as androgyny.

Bernstein (2008) understood Bem’s (1974) concept and related her experience of raising her daughter, Nora. Bernstein wanted Nora to develop her own gender identity and allowed the exploration of multiple gender identities. She explained, “...many adults prefer the disciplining of gender in children rather than the threat of experimentation” (2008:271). Bernstein’s article described Nora’s exploration of different gender identities from male to female. As a 7 year old, Nora told a friend that she was going to have gender reassignment surgery. Nora dressed and expressed her male gender identity. She was amused by adults’
bewilderment when they realized that Nora’s sex is female. As Nora developed she decided that she wanted to keep her female sex. She even attempted the female gender by going to prom, wearing a dress and make-up. Bernstein ended her story of Nora as a young adult who identified as female in gender but maintained her “jock” identity due to her participation in sports. Nora did not take time for female gender grooming but kept her long hair, often in a ponytail. Nora had not shared her sexual orientation with her mother as of publication time. This article is informative and illustrated that children may go through different stages of gender identity.

Levitt and Horne (2002) surveyed and interviewed a large Lesbian community. This community was located in a southeastern university city where the women felt safe to develop a feminist attitude and live according to their gender identity. Levitt and Horne surveyed the women through a yearly lesbian gathering. They also followed up with interviews of some of the lesbians who participated in the survey. A staggering statistic is that 90 percent of the participants felt that gender expression was an innate characteristic. Having been socialized in a larger social structure that believes this essentialist argument, even those who are part of the subcultural group that goes against the mainstream normativity fail to extricate fully from its influence. Levitt and Horne discovered that “Butch” lesbians realized their gender identity at an earlier age than “Femme” lesbians realized their sexual orientation.

Many butch interviewees described the difficulties of growing up and resisting traditional gender roles but having no way to label their experiences. A number of femme women interviewed described only being able to identify as lesbian after contact with a butch-femme community. This contact was needed for them to realize their erotic attractions, as butch aesthetics aren’t popularly represented in mainstream culture. One interviewee said, ‘It’s that process of figuring it out because it’s a subculture. It’s not visible.’ The traditional constriction of gender, which makes butchness invisible in mainstream culture, in combination with femme women’s similarity to the gender expression of heterosexual women, may make it more difficult for femmes who may be attracted to butch women to realize their sexual orientation at an early age. (2002:34).

This article also explained how gender identity affects an individual’s realization of sexual orientation. “Butch” lesbians realize they are different at a very young age. They know they do not fit into normal heterosexual feminine roles. Due to the differences between gender identity from their biological sex, individuals become aware of their sexual orientation at an
earlier age. This article illustrated vital information in understanding gender identity in the female sex.

The proceeding literature has provided background information about the social construction of gender and societal expectations in regards to gender roles. Bullying is a method that teenagers use to demonstrate that the victim is not adhering to social norms. The following literature provides examples of negative experiences and bullying by individuals that participate in atypical gender expression. Many times, these individuals do not feel safe in social environments. When homosexual individuals are able to “pass,” as heterosexuals, many do not experience bullying or negative social sanctions.

Society is making progress accepting current research about gender expectations and allowing atypical gender roles for men and women. Examples of atypical gender jobs held by women are police officers, firefighters, CEOs and military service. Examples of atypical gender jobs held by men are staying home and raising children, nurses and elementary school teachers. Although these examples show progress in society, improvement is still needed. Reyes (2013) confirmed this need of improvement in an article she wrote in the Los Angeles Times. She demonstrated that men who stayed at home to care for the children did not reveal their status on Facebook because they were afraid of the reactions of their friends. One man stated, “I don’t want other men to look at me like less of a man” (AA1). She explained, “When it comes to gender progress, said Ronald F. Levant, editor of the journal of Psychology of Men and Masculinity, ‘men are stuck’” (AA1). Reyes’ article explained the difficulty of both men and women who want to work in atypical gender jobs in society. Moss-Racusin et al. (2012) confirmed that more women are entering into the science field but despite recruitment strategies, less women are being hired. Their research demonstrated that faculty, both male and female, showed bias by hiring more men to work in their research labs.

Students are least likely to accept their peers that exhibit non-gender specific behavior and use bullying as negative sanctions. Research illustrated that gender expression is one way that students use to label a peer as exhibiting unacceptable behavior. Connell (2002) described “Sex Role Theory and the negative sanctions that society uses when boys do not appear as masculine. He stated,
“Sex role” theory explains gender patterns by appealing to the social customs that define proper behaviour for women and for men. Applied to men, sex role theory emphasizes the way expectations about proper masculine behaviour are conveyed to boys as they grow up, by parents, schools, mass media, and peer groups. This theory emphasizes the ‘role models’ provided by sportsmen, military heroes, etc; and the social sanctions (from mild disapproval to violence) that are applied to boys and men who do not live up to the role norms. (43-55).

Reyes also described that girls were allowed to be “Tomboys” but “Boys make fun of other boys if they step just a little outside the rigid masculine stereotype” (AA4). Disapproval of atypical gender expression is used to enforce expected gender norms. An example of atypical gender expression is boys wearing eyeliner make-up or girls wearing very short hair and dressing in boys’ clothes. Heterosexuals can display atypical gender expression as well as LGBTQ individuals. One contributing factor of bullying directly relates to how gender roles of students are perceived by their peers. Therefore some LGBTQ students are among those that are bullied because they do not express typical gender roles. According to an article by Kosciw, Greytak and Diaz (2009), many LGBTQ students have been harassed verbally and physically in school. Also many LGBTQ students do not feel safe at school because they do not feel protected by teachers and administrators. Varjas et al. (2007) verified that teachers and administrators contribute to the unsafe atmosphere in schools. Aviv and Shmeer (2006) relate the following statistics about the treatment of LGBTQ students in American Queer, Now and Then.

As in 1999 and 2001, the overwhelming majority of LGBT students report hearing homophobic remarks. At times, faculty and staff contribute to the problem by either making homophobic comments themselves or failing to intervene when they hear students making them. …82.9% LGBT students report that faculty or staff never intervened or intervened only some of the time when present and homophobic remarks were made. …64.3% LGBT students report feeling unsafe at their school because of their sexual orientation. (211-212).

The high percentages above demonstrate the frequent occurrence of LGBTQ students not feeling safe in schools, which creates a serious problem. Harris and Petrie (2003) also verify the same finding as above and added that bystanders would not report bullying because they are afraid that they would be bullied and do not want to be labeled a “tattletale” (2003:79).

Varjas et al. (2007) discovered that LGBTQ teachers are reluctant to intervene when LGBTQ students are being bullied. The LGBTQ teachers hide their sexual orientation and fear that they may be recipients of discrimination by school administration. They feel that their sexual
orientation will become known if they intervene on behalf of LGBTQ students. There is a persistent opinion among teachers, administrators and parents that bullying is a natural occurrence among students and there is nothing the adults can do to eliminate bullying.

Sometimes victims, as well as bystanders, do not report bullying because adults are ‘indifferent listeners’ who expect children to be able to handle their own problems and stand up for themselves. (Harris and Petrie 2003:80).

Research by Varjas et al. (2007) also support that teachers consider bullying a normal occurrence. It is evident that adults need to discourage bullying and help to protect the students.

Masculine and feminine characteristics usually reflect the sex of an individual. Early researchers described the differences of the sexes as either/or. Kalbfleisch and Cody’s (1995) book described Bem’s (1974) scale of masculinity and femininity that rated the amount of masculinity and femininity in a person. Kalbfleisch and Cody stated,

Neither men nor women were limited in their self-conceptions based on their biological sex. Ideally, both could be flexible and adopt masculine and feminine characteristics when appropriate. (1995:333).

They also described that the feminine and masculine traits became known as gender, which was independent of one’s biological sex. Thus the amount of an individual’s masculine and feminine characteristics were defined as gender roles. Masculine and feminine traits may be used as a way to determine if one believes an individual is a homosexual. Homosexuals often times develop gender roles or gender identities that do not coincide with their sex. In other words, homosexuals have strong masculine and feminine traits that do not correspond to their biological sex. Epstein’s (1997) article related examples from interviews with boys and their experiences in an all male school in England. She related the thoughts of one self-identified homosexual boy, Peter who developed a sexual relationship with another male in the school. But because of his masculine characteristics, he was not picked on or teased. She related her conversation with Peter.

This theme of his macho appearance and, at times, behaviour as a protection against being victimised for his gay sexuality reappeared frequently throughout the interview. We, whether we were doing it knowingly or not, we felt that if we maintain this image, if we maintain this macho image, and we attacked others, we would be left alone, and nobody would attack us, you know. (1997:109).

Epstein’s article illustrated that homosexual males who display masculine characteristics may escape the torment of their peers. The same is true of lesbians if they display feminine
characteristics; they too escape torment of their peers. Therefore “passing” is a method of protection. Epstein confirmed that Gay and Lesbian teachers do not feel able to defend homosexual students. Their fear of discovery and judgment keeps them in the closet, which did not allow them to help defend their students who were being teased or harassed.

The literature reviewed demonstrates that characteristics associated with masculinity and femininity has been in existence for an extremely long time. Society has constructed the dualistic categories of gender and does not allow for deviation from these expectations. Everyone lives participating in the social construction of gender. Problems have arisen in our society because many LGBTQ individuals do not feel that their gender agrees with their biological sex and they experience social sanctions when breaking the gender norms. Or they hide their true selves in order to escape society’s disapproval. Often times this leads to unhappiness and self-hatred. The literature demonstrated some teachers and adults feel that bullying is an acceptable social sanction to show their disapproval of atypical gender expression.

This paper will discuss examples that LGBTQ youth experienced when they discovered their sexual orientation, how they presented in appearance and their views about masculinity and femininity. A few participants in fact experienced bullying because of their atypical expression and teachers and leaders participated in showing their disapproval. My aim is to share the participant’s experiences in order to illustrate the damage done by expected gender roles in society.
CHAPTER 3

METHODS

I interviewed ten young adults and asked about their gender expression in junior and senior high school. Using pseudonyms, they were Milo and Sam bisexual males, Jeffrey, Todd and John gay males, females; Mary and Jane who identified as queer, Joan who identified as gender neutral, Katie a heterosexual and Fred, a transgendered female to male. My research question is: Do LGBTQ young adults believe they are targets of bullying or other activities because of their gender expression? I wanted to know whether my interviewees’ gender expression led them to be bullied. I asked open-ended questions pertaining to their dress, gender expression and experiences with bullying. I used probing questions to gain more insight and understanding. I recorded the interviews and transcribed the interviews soon after.

My research is based on the grounded theory method of sociology. According to Rossman and Rallis,

…grounded theory is viewed as an approach to data collection, analysis and theorizing…[where] multiple realities exist, data reflects the researcher’s and the research participant’s mutual constructions, and the researcher, however, incompletely, enters and is affected by the participants’ worlds. (2012:106)

They illustrated that the researcher attempts to enter the interview without fixed ideas about what the participant will share with the researcher. I used HyperRESEARCH to code emerging themes among those I interviewed. Rossman and Rallis explain, “Coding entails thinking through what you take as evidence of a category or theme. Categories are concepts, or abstractions” (2012:282). I found three main themes that my participants shared: (1) ideas about self-acceptance; (2) how they dressed or their appearance; and (3) what their perception was of masculine and feminine characteristics. Several sub themes were discovered. The sub themes of self-acceptance were influenced by religion and the participant’s choosing to join drama and choir.

I asked friends to ask their acquaintances who already self-identified as LGBTQ individuals, if they would talk to me. I was a teacher’s assistant and announced my thesis
project in class asking the students to refer their LGBTQ friends. I talked about my thesis project with everyone I knew and the students I worked with in Biology. I always asked them to refer their LGBTQ friends to me if they were interested in participating in my research. I used snowball sampling as several interviewees referred their friends to participate in my project. I found a heterosexual female that was at times mistaken for a lesbian and decided that her experiences were valuable to understanding gender expression and treatment by her peers. When the potential interviewees contacted me, they were told that I was researching LGBTQ individuals’ ways of expressing gender. It was explained that I would ask about their junior and senior high school experiences. And it was suggested we meet in conference rooms on various campuses and in an office building. These rooms provided quiet and a confidential atmosphere. As a last resort, I met an interviewee at a coffee shop, which was her choice.

I attempted to gain access to “at risk youth” to learn about their experiences. The “at risk youth” would be teenagers who may have been kicked out of their homes by their parents or had substance abuse issues. My theory was that they might have presented more atypical gender expression, which possibly contributed to their homelessness or substance abuse. Although I had volunteered time with two different groups where the “at risk youth” lived and visited, I was unable to get participants from this group of young adults.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

I wanted to determine if there was a relationship between atypical gender expression and being a target for bullying thus I interviewed nine LGBTQ individuals and one heterosexual individual. Most participants did not have negative school experiences. But several themes emerged from each of their interviews, including feelings of not wanting to be homosexual and wanting to be acceptance by their friends and families. A subtheme emerged pointing to the advantages of being involved in drama, choir and band as a way of blending with similar peers. Many dressed in heteronormative ways, which helped them to escape bullying. Throughout the interview, many shared societal views of masculine and feminine characteristics. I was interested to learn that several participants described music as being masculine or feminine. It was encouraging that all participants agreed that society should discard expected gender roles and allow people to express themselves freely.

SELF-ACCEPTANCE

A major theme pertained to self-acceptance upon realization of their sexual orientation. Some participants had negative reactions to their physical attraction to same sex individuals. Solebello and Elliot’s research helped to demonstrate why several participants had negative reactions to their discovery of same sex attraction. They stated,

…the fathers also indicated a sense of accountability for cultivating heterosexual identities for their sons. Indeed, underlying many fathers’ accounts of their sons’ sexuality was a notion that heterosexuality is not a given; it has to be taught.

(2011:302)

These fathers also stressed the fact that they wanted their children, especially their sons, to be heterosexual. This example demonstrated why several participants had problems accepting their homosexuality. Parents want their children to be heterosexual. Barton (2010) studied homosexuals living in the “bible belt” area of the United States. She discovered in her research that

…the majority describe living through spirit-crushing experiences of isolation, abuse, and self-loathing. The most damaging of these include rejection by family
and friends, social ostracism, and an internal psychological struggle over their same-sex attractions. (2010:477)

My participants who struggled with their homosexuality were raised in religious families, which made their discovery more painful. Johnston and Jenkins (2004) reported on the awareness process and the dilemmas about homosexuals sharing their discoveries. They stated, “Most models indicate that coming out usually begins during childhood or adolescence when people first become aware they are somehow different from their peers. Gay men and lesbians face unending situations where the decision to come out or not has to be made” (2004:20, 21). Several lived in fear of parents or peers realizing they had homosexual feelings.

One of my participants, Jeffrey related that he became intimate with his first boyfriend, Peter at band camp. When he and Peter came home from band camp, Peter’s mom discovered their sexual relationship and told Jeffrey’s parents and teachers at school. Jeffrey tried to deny his homosexuality and go back into “the closet,” which means hiding his same sex attraction. Milo who identifies as bisexual said,

I think I just started having some feelings for boys and such. And somehow for some reason I didn’t like it. I started not liking myself. …In one section [my] goal for that year for my fifth grade year, when I was eleven was to not be Gay and that’s what it said. Or not becoming Gay was the goal. I knew what the word Gay meant. And I knew that it was not something that I wanted to become.

Fred said about his same sex attraction before he transitioned to male,

…I remember one of my first attractions to female was in like church youth group that we were forced to go to every Wednesday night. And for me I absolutely rejected that and just thought that I was attracted to that person in some way. Like I didn’t really understand or want to understand anything deeper. …And so I rejected that I was even Gay until early 20s you know. And so then I just thought I’m asexual, I’ll never get married, I’ll never do anything and I wouldn’t allow myself to be attracted to any women.

Todd shared,

I mean I learned a lot about myself, but that summer I got extremely suicidal, that was probably the lowest point, I would say that was probably the second lowest point of my life. Was between my freshman and sophomore year of high school. …It revolved directly around my sexuality and my relationship with my parent and you know I was brought up in an environment that was very Jesus hates Gays. God hates Gays; you die go to hell.

Jane had lesbian couples in her life, yet when she thought she might be a lesbian, she thought no. She told of her first kiss with a boy and said,
I remember walking back from going to the park and hanging out with him and I kissed and I was like this ok whatever. Like this is nothing, like ok. And then in my head I was like, ‘Maybe I like girls.’ And then I immediately like shut that down. …So like, I’ve never believed that being gay is wrong. And also my brother is pretty flamboyantly gay, one of my brothers. I think I also had the idea that we already have one gay person in our family; apparently in my mind there was a quota. And we had reached said quota!

Later when Jane was in college and her friends were telling her they thought she liked this girl, she first said, “No, no, no.” Even though her parents had lesbian friends, Jane’s first thoughts were negative. Sam explained his own confusion with understanding his bisexuality. He stated,

…I felt unsure, because I consider myself bisexual. And I to this day don’t necessary understand that like and I don’t expect other people to understand it and I accept that, now. But then it was very hard to, to understand myself and then how do I express that to people and how do I try to have them understand and I mean I thought it was crazy so I’m like well people aren’t going [laughs] just jump on the bandwagon and be like oh he’s normal and then I’m like oh no way.

These examples illustrate the negative feelings that the participants held about being attracted to the same sex. Katie explained that the lesbians on her basketball team were ashamed to be called lesbians. She said, “So they hid and they didn’t you know talk to the rest of the team …” Katie also described the gay student who was captain of the color guard. She explained that he was made fun of by the football team. Todd contemplated suicide because he was taught that God hated homosexuals and the other participants tried to deny their same sex attractions. These negative feelings about their sexual orientation are a reflection of internalized homophobia that is perpetuated by the norms in society. Many students have reported that teachers made negative comments about their sexual orientation. Russell et al. (2009) stated,

Specifically, youth leaders of GSAs not only confront heterosexism and homophobia among their peers; they often confront bias and discrimination on the part of the institution of the school (its policies and practices), and of the adult authorities in schools. (892-893)

Teachers should not be contributing to teenagers’ harmful self–perception that is associated with their sexual identity. Instead, adults, parents and teachers should provide a supportive environment for their children to alleviate their feelings of fear and self-loathing. Nevertheless, Katie explained that her drama teacher was not accepting of the “flamboyantly” gay student in her drama class and the teacher contributed to the “shunning”
of the gay student. Todd shared that he was bullied and so I asked him why he did not report this incident, he shared an experience about his counselor and the discrimination that same sex couples faced at his school.

Oh I remember one time my best friend in high school. ...And he had a boyfriend at the time and they [were] kissing in a back in a corner. ...And my actual counselor comes out and ... it was a long process to get to these kids anyway. And goes you kids here, now! Hauls them into the office berates them saying they offended someone because they were kissing. ...I even remember at the time thinking I see cheerleader Jenny and football jock Tommy or non-sequester names basically fucking with their clothes on everyday, high noon at lunch on the campus and they’re not so much as reprimanded for this. ...And that was from a figure of authority. And I did not feel like there was [emphasis] anyway [!] I was going to talk to these people after seeing that.

Katie and Todd’s examples clearly illustrated that teachers and adults in authority contribute to LGBTQ students’ negative self-perceptions.

Some participants did not have any problem adjusting to the fact that they were attracted to the same sex. Mary explained that she grew up in a very open-minded home and her parents had the “gay conversation” with her. She described her concept of sexuality as an “instilled sense of sexual identity being very fluid.”

Mary said, Like I dated boys in high school and college and then but slept with some girls in college. Like there was no like dissonance for that for me personally. I met my current partner, Heather eventually. And I started dating her pretty casually. But I would say dating her was what really like caused a shift in my sort of sense of self. ...And I would say I now like identify as queer.

John explained that he came out when a girl asked him why he would not date her. When asked about his friends’ reaction to identifying as gay, he said,

**Mostly positive. It was kind of in the area it was sort of like nobody cares. Especially not in theater, I mean, theater groups - music groups they are all very open minded so nobody really cares. .....My parents were both very accepting. My brother and sister knew. So it was just like, ok. It wasn’t news to any of them.**

An interesting concept emerged about being confident in who you are and your peers are more accepting. Sam described a lesbian in his high school. He said,

**No one cared I mean. Especially because she was so strong about it and so open-minded. And I think that really shows you know if you are strong enough and brave enough to go through it and come out and be yourself. It’s not so bad.**

Jane talked about her brother, Michael, being strong and confident. Michael was president of his Gay Straight Alliance (GSA) as a sophomore, which is very impressive. He was
successful building the GSA attendees to around 80 students in a conservative military city. She said,

So my brother has been really into that [GSA]. And he totally would be the type of person that would get bullied, but if you ever meet my brother he is so happy and he is so high on life that it’s really hard to bring him down. I don’t think, for someone to bully him and it be effective, they would have to work really freaking hard. And I think that he, because he is such a strong person and he’s so happy and he’s so loved by everyone he meets. …He is Mr. Popular. He is really charming, very disarming, so I don’t think that people would bully him.

Joan told of a male student in her high school that wore high heels to school on a regular basis that she admired. She described his experience,

Yeah. I never knew him personally but he would mostly just...they would say...the "F" word...not "fuck" the other one. Say rude things and then he would say ‘f-off. I don't care about you guys.’ He didn't ever give them a time of day and there were more kids who were supportive of him and his little group who helped him out but mostly kids either ignored him or just say derisive comments but not to his face, ever. There's not really any like up front bullying.

John explained about the openly gay couple in his school.

Well …like you didn't have to be in the closet if you didn't want to be in the closet and there were two boys men I guess who were dating within our group. They were both very open. They were dating each other. One dressed in drag quite often for any show we had. Kind of as a joke I didn't really talk to any of them about what I was going through but it was just like ‘oh wow’ ok so it was good to see them out and open.

These experiences provide hope that the LGBTQ youth may have a positive adolescent experience going forward in society. When LGBTQ students have a positive, self-accepting attitude, their peers may not bully them. Also many parents and peers are becoming more open-minded and accepting of LGBTQ youths. Katie’s (heterosexual participant) reaction to being asked out by lesbians was very refreshing and compassionate and presents an excellent example. She said,

… I’ve had girls hit on me and it’s just like so it’s like oh I don’t go for that. But I’m like I’m complimented. Like I’m flattered, honestly. I mean if a girl comes to me I’m flattered, I’m like thank you. I’m like wow that definitely boosts my self esteem.

If more heterosexual people accept the compliment of being “hit on” or asked out by homosexuals there would be much less violence against homosexuals in our schools and society.
The participants provided examples of homophobia and positive self-acceptance. As society accepts homosexuality, more and more youth will experience less self-hatred. There will always be some religions that do not accept homosexuality but there is hope that youth will have the strength to ignore the hatred that these religions teach. Education is an excellent tool to embrace the diversity in society.

Butler is a contemporary philosopher and gender theorist who provided an explanation as to the subtheme of the Arts providing a safe environment for LGBTQ students. She agreed with Goffman and contended that there is no true form of gender and explained that gender is a performance that everyone in society participates. She declared that gender is drag and that there is no primary gender (Storey 2013:230). She stated,

Drag constitutes the mundane way in which genders are appropriated, theatricalized, worn and done; it implies that all gendering is a kind of impersonation and approximation. …*gender is a kind of imitation for which there is no original*…  (Storey 2013:230).

Butler illuminated why many participants shared that the Arts provided an opportunity for positive self-acceptance and membership in a group of peers that were accepting. Drama or theater clubs provided a safe environment for students to express more of themselves because actors play a role when on stage. Hence, they can try out their acting abilities because most teachers are open minded and accepting of LGBTQ students. Mary explained that the arts program at her high school provided a more accepting atmosphere of diversity. She said,

And then in high school I went to a like a “Arts” high school. It was a like really open community. So there were kids performing Arts and Dance and my friends and I were in the creative writing program. And so all kinds of people in term of like gender, sexuality and even other types of things.

Todd explained that drama club helped the students alleviate their anger of being teased and ridiculed. He explained,

By the time I came out, I had done the drama club which was really, essentially the LGBT Alliance in high school before we could have one. And I found a group of people. The teacher there was basically the mother of the outcasts and gave them a home and gave them self-respect and taught them to use their self-expression which otherwise would have probably gone to drugs and sex and violence. To channel that into theater and make it something beautiful and I remember very distinctly that she was so pivotal in that. And taught us how to use that energy of being the outcast to make something powerful out of it.

John explained his friends in theater were very accepting of him being gay. He said, “If anything it's kind of an asset to have, I would say.” Music also provided a safe
space for LGBTQ students and provided companionship with accepting peers. Sam participated in drumline because he liked the closeness of the smaller group. Jeffrey, who is now a music teacher, illustrated the advantage of using music or monologues to help his students express feelings of distress about their sexuality. He explained that he would choose a piece of music that would help the student realize why they were feeling distraught. Jane explained that women were not usually in the brass section of their marching band. But being different was possible by the small group’s unity. She said,

There wasn’t a lot of girls that played brass instruments, but we had, the girls who did, there were mostly trumpets, a few French horns. We had one tuba player. But they were, it would become like a really strong knit group of women just because there wasn’t a lot of us, so even if we weren’t like really close friends, we all had like a bond because of it.

The Arts create a safe haven and a space of acceptance for many students who are often outcasts in their schools. The Arts also provide a creative outlet for students to express their angst and frustration. It is important that society support the arts in high schools to allow students a safe place to express themselves.

**DRESS AND APPEARANCE**

The theme of dress and appearance of LGBTQ students emerged. I asked the participants how they dressed and if they used their appearance as a way to reflect their gender. Horn (2007) demonstrated that heterosexual male and female students along with LGBTQ students that expressed atypical gender characteristics were least accepted by their peers. Furthermore, their peers better accepted gay and lesbian students that expressed typical gender characteristics. Young and Sweeting (2004:527) also found that LGBT students that expressed atypical gender characteristics experienced a higher rate of bullying. West and Zimmerman (1987) described the importance that appearances play into confirming our gender to reflect our biological sex. They stated,

If we do gender appropriately, we simultaneously sustain, reproduce, and render legitimate the institutional arrangements that are based on sex category. If we fail to do gender appropriately, we as individuals—not the institutional arrangements—may be called to account (for our character, motives, and predispositions). (146)

In other words, teenagers judge their peers negatively if they do not dress according to their biological sex. Lorber (1994) described how the military realized the importance of enforcing
gender norms, which is used to empathize the difference in appearance between men and women. She explained,

At a rock and roll dance at West Point in 1976, the year women were admitted to the prestigious military academy for the first time, the school's administrators ‘were reportedly perturbed by the sight of mirror-image couples dancing in short hair and dress gray trousers,’ and a rule was established that women cadets could dance at these events only if they wore skirts (Barkalow and Raab 1990, 53).

Women recruits in the U.S. Marine Corps are required to wear makeup - at a minimum, lipstick and eye shadow - and they have to take classes in makeup, hair care, poise, and etiquette. This feminization is part of a deliberate policy of making them clearly distinguishable from men Marines. Christine Williams quotes a twenty-five-year-old woman drill instructor as saying, ‘A lot of the recruits who come here don't wear makeup; they're tomboyish or athletic. A lot of them have the preconceived idea that going into the military means they can still be a tomboy. They don't realize that you are a Woman Marine’ (1989, 76-77). (1994:26)

This example illustrated that society demanded that appearance was crucial in distinguishing women and men. Dozier’s (2005) research explained how society determines gender in appearance. Dozier interviewed 18 female-to-male transsexual individuals that illustrated the difference between sex and gender. One of the physical characteristics that the participants stated which identified them as male was facial hair.

Interviewees find certain sex characteristics to be particularly important to their social identity as male: ‘I think it’s all about facial hair. It’s not about my fetish for facial hair, but socially, when you have facial hair, you can pass regardless of what your body looks like. I mean, I was nine months pregnant walking around and people were like, ‘Ooh, that guy’s fat’. (2005:305)

Although pregnant women are distinctive, the facial hair eliminated the female sex and the individual was categorized male. Dress or appearance is a very important way that society determines an individual’s sex.

Many of the participants dressed in heteronormative attire that allowed them to blend in with their peers. Jeffrey stated that he dressed in jeans and t-shirts. He also told of younger gay students in his senior high school that portrayed atypical gender expression in dress and they were subjected to teasing but it did not develop into bullying. Milo said,

So a lot of the clothes were kind of big so it would be like I’d wear like kind of a hoodie like this [he was wearing a zipped up sweatshirt with a hood] maybe a pullover hoodie every day. Maybe one that had the school’s emblem, name on it and like some jeans I had to wear a belt with and some skater shoes and my hair was short.
Mary said, “Like I don’t know, I felt pretty fluid in like feeling comfortable in kind of like wearing more feminine stuff and you know than in jeans and flannel all the way across the board.” Todd said about his appearance, “Oh I grew my hair out, I wore the raver pants. I was a carbon copy of whomever I was hanging out with. There was nothing different about me.” Joan explained how dressing feminine gave her opportunities to make friends and fit in. She explained,

And so then, I decided like 11th grade I was going to start projecting feminine because I was bored of not having any friends. It actually it was probably the wrong reasons but it worked out really well because then I started making a lot of friends because I guess I was more of a girl or whatever. Which was ridiculous but it worked. So, then I don’t wear make-up and I don't do I feel like I act particularly feminine. I just dressed feminine and it worked out. …I never was overtly bullied. People never had the time of day because I wasn't very noticeable. That's why I decided I was going to start projecting feminine because I was bored of sitting at home on Friday nights I guess.

John’s appearance was typical masculine. He described his appearance,

I wore a lot of dark clothing, mostly jeans and lot of heavy jackets and sweaters and just darker colored t-shirts. I had really long bushy hair that I didn't take care of...and that was about it. …I tried not to care so much about it. Like, I didn't care so much the way I dressed or at least that is what I want people to think that I didn't care.

Sam explained his appearance,

Sure I mean I was physically I was a scrawny kid like not macho at all. And so I think that kinda was my own like I felt insecure about that. So I would wear like, like I don’t know flannel shirts, like long sleeves I wanted to make myself as covered up pretty much as possible. But in Temecula it’s very, very hot so that does not always work.

Fred said about his appearance before he transitioned,

I had, you know, my mom never let me cut my hair but I had, so I always tied it back in a ponytail. ...I mean, when I would wear the obligatory skirt, or something, people would make it a point to comment how nice I looked.

Fred communicated how hard it was for him growing up in a female body. Although he was never bullied in school, he was not allowed to dress or act as masculine as he felt inside. He said that it was extremely painful to receive compliments when he was forced to dress as a girl. He stated, “…and I’m like, I feel like shit, don’t tell me that I look good. And that always bugged me.” Jane described that she tried to dress more feminine in high school so she grew her hair long. She said, “Oftentimes I would just wear jeans and a sweatshirt all day
long. So I was never, I was never very feminine or extremely masculine in high school.” She was able to be androgynous and still be accepted by her peers. One reason most of my participants were not bullied was due to the fact that they wore heteronormative clothes and blended in with their peers.

Several had negative experiences when they expressed atypical gender appearance. Todd’s dress changed as he entered senior high school. He described his dress,

Well at first it was the raver generation, so it was like pink pants, purple pants, yellow pants. Brightly colored pants, brightly colored shirts, bright I was a walking rainbow.

When Todd was dressing “gay” he started being bullied at school. He explained that he was usually alone when the bullies approached him. He also shared experiences about how he was treated when he started dressing as a female. He liked to perform in drag. Todd described how he was beaten late one night and how he was bullied in senior high school.

One time I got broken ribs but that was actually in Hillcrest [Gay neighborhood in San Diego]. I was out way too late. I was a young kid, the shit I was wearing was clear, made me a target. …there was about 4 or 5 really drunk, looked like military personnel to me. …I’m not saying it was right but they threw me to the ground and kicked me a couple of good times. [About high school] …I know I got rocks thrown at me so I might have been hit there but I got shoved down a bunch of times. I mean the worst thing that happened, they used to pee all over my stuff was their big thing. It was really popular. Brian [best friend, gay] got it too.

After high school, Fred dressed more in tune with how he was feeling inside and dressed more masculine. He said, “Like I was like card-carrying dyke, like chain on my wallet you know shaved head like I was like don’t fuck with me.” Fred told of an experience when he was called dyke because of the way he dressed. Fred described the reaction of strangers when he walked down the street as a, “card-carrying dyke,”

And mostly, I don’t know that it’s words, its just looks. It’s mostly looks, the way that you see someone look at you, you know. …And often not even just disgusted, but just like different, you’re different. You’re different so people look at you, and that’s a human thing, I don’t think that’s necessarily negative, but it does have an effect on you.

Although Fred did not experience discrimination in high school, once he was able to display his feelings of gender, he started to experience society’s disapproval. Joan enjoyed dressing in masculine clothes but did not like the reactions of her peers. She said,
I guess, I expressed super masculine. I just did because I wanted to. It was cool. I was into it. The mostly, largely, from 7th grade to 10th, maybe the beginning of the 11th grade. I was super ignored by everyone at school.

Katie who is straight, described being called a lesbian because of her appearance. She did not wear make-up and did not like doing her hair. She thought that not wearing make-up and not doing her hair is why her peers thought she was a lesbian. She described the negative reactions she experienced and the way that she dressed. She said,

Well I was on the basketball team and as you know the stereotype for women basketball players, we are as very butchie and this and that. And we were discriminated a lot in high school. No one paid attention to us. …Ok elementary was more like basketball, athletic wear than middle school and high school became more you know jeans and a shirt. But otherwise it was jeans and a shirt for the most part. Yea, comfy, I like to dress comfy [laughing].

Jane described not being allowed to dress as she wanted to attend her grandfather’s funeral. Her father had taken her shopping.

And I wanted to wear a suit and tie. And so I had a suit jacket, white shirt, black pants, and a clip on tie. And my mom said I couldn’t wear that to the funeral. I could wear it to the reception, or like the family dinner we had the day before the funeral, but I was not allowed to wear that to the funeral. So I had to go out and buy…I don’t remember if I bought a dress or a skirt, but I had to buy something more feminine. And I think I wore tights which are so horrible and like uncomfortable shoes. And we bought all of this stuff like, the day before at like, a thrift store. Because I couldn’t wear what I wanted to wear. But I did, however, one of the guys that was my uncle’s best friend, he taught me…my grandfather always wore bow ties so we busted out the bow ties and he taught me how to tie a bow tie when I was really little.

Todd, Fred, Jane, Joan and Katie all confirmed that atypical gender dress was not accepted by their peers and society. Reed (2013) illustrated an experience he had on the tram.

A teenage girl sat across from me on the tram today. ‘Excuse me’ she asked, ‘are you a boy or a girl?’ ‘Boy,’ I replied. She leaned back and said, ‘So why are you wearing nail polish?’ I stared at her, taken aback by the venom in her voice. ‘No reason,’ I eventually responded. She and her friend shared an ugly look.

‘Honestly,’ I heard as they got up to leave, ‘a boy who wears nail polish what a fucking queer.’ What I didn’t tell her ‘Hey,’ I didn’t stand up and call after her, ‘you really want to know why I’m wearing nail polish?’

‘The first time I wore red nail polish it was smeared on my fingers by a group of laughing kids in a small village in the Andean mountains. I paint it on when I’m feeling sad or lost as a visual reminder of a time that I was happy and fulfilled. It’s a piece of self-identity, and it gets me through hard days.’

‘How dare you try to take that away from me,’ I didn’t snarl.
Reed continued to explain how girls are permitted to dress more masculine but boys are not allowed to dress feminine because they loose their power and status. It is important to remember that clothes are clothes and one should not be judged in anyway because of how they dress. Human beings need to embrace and support everybody’s individuality and value each member of society.

The participants’ experiences demonstrated that when they dressed opposite of their biological sex, they experienced negative treatment and teasing from their peers. Only one was outright bullied because his gender expression was the most atypical. Most dressed within the norm of their biological sex and thus experienced no negative treatment. The heterosexual participant illustrated the best example of how an individual’s dress and appearance is used to judge their sexual orientation and thus support their negative treatment. She dressed in jeans and t-shirts, did not wear make-up and did not “do her hair” which supported her peers perception of her being a lesbian. Her peers teased her but her self-confidence provided strength in not allowing their comments to make her feel badly. These experiences supported the research I found that peers are least accepting of individuals that express atypical gender expression.

**Masculine and Feminine Characteristics**

The final theme I observed was LGBTQ participants’ perceptions about masculinity and femininity. Lorber (1994) stated that there are not differences between men and women. She explained, “Individuals are born sexed but not gendered, and they have to be taught to be masculine or feminine. …For human beings there is no essential femaleness or maleness, femininity or masculinity, womanhood or manhood, but once gender is ascribed, the social order constructs and holds individuals to strongly gendered norms and expectations” (22, 25). Since we are not born as a masculine or feminine being, according to Lorber we need to learn what are feminine and masculine characteristics. Miller et al. (1997) described feminine and masculine characteristics. Feminine qualities were described as “…affectionate, compassionate, eager to soothe hurt feelings, gentle, sensitive to needs of others, sympathetic and tender” and masculine qualities were described as, “…acts as leader, aggressive, assertive, dominate, has leadership abilities, independent, and willing to take a stand” (726). Connell (2002) clearly explained how masculinity and femininity are used to describe
individuals regardless of their biological sex. He stated,

The gender structures of a society define particular patterns of conduct as ‘masculine’ and others as ‘feminine.’ At one level, these patterns characterize individuals. Thus we say that a particular man (or woman) is masculine, or behaves in a masculine way. But these patterns also exist at the collective level. (43-55)

Once an individual is judged to display atypical gender expressions, society uses social sanctions as a way to show disapproval. Deutsch (2007) described Sargent’s research on male elementary school teachers that illustrated the need of the men to act in expected gender roles. She said,

For example, Sargent (2005) describes the dilemma of male early childhood educators who wanted to nurture children in the ways characteristic of mothers but were constrained to behave more stereotypically. Unless they adapted more distant and masculine ways of being with children, men who nurtured were under suspicion of being pedophiles. (2007:112)

Although the male elementary teachers chose to work with children because they wanted to care for the children, the men were not permitted to show their nurturing abilities or they received negative social sanctions from their fellow teachers and administrators. This example demonstrated how men are not allowed to step outside their expected gender expression. The participants shared their thoughts on masculinity and femininity and their experiences in “doing gender.”

All participants explained their ideas about masculine and feminine characteristics. Whether their thoughts were about how to avoid acting “too” masculine or “too” feminine, they were aware that how they expressed gender reflected what they felt inside. Some tried to hide the fact that they felt like the wrong gender and others felt free to express themselves. Milo said

I wasn’t trying to be masculine or feminine so it was almost androgynous but it was in my mind to not express myself in a feminine way. So I had that thought, because I just, I didn’t want that. I was afraid of that. Because then people would be able to see what I was feeling inside, they could see the expression they could correlate that with what I was feeling inside.

Milo also said that he acted differently around boys and girls to fit in. He stated,

And with the boys I could also be myself but it was just different parts of myself. Like with the boys I would talk about technology or martial arts or we’d joke around about TV shows. With girls, I wouldn’t do that. With girls I’d talk about our classes and home life and what like matching up what we were feeling
sometimes. So that was the difference, but with girls I still, always felt more comfortable.

Jane described masculine characteristics as the typical 50s heterosexual, white, middle class male with a wife and kids. She described being feminine as, “So feminine is wearing dresses, and doing makeup, and doing the prep work and so, of all of the appearance thing.” John described masculinity as “confident, strength and sports.” Katie explained masculinity as society categorizes it as, “…macho, tough, don’t show emotions” and femininity again in typical societal categories, “femininity as weak, weak minded, not strong you know it’s just hiding all the time.” Sam described masculinity as, “sports playing, buff, always going to the gym.” Fred described what he thought determined masculinity and femininity. He stated,

What feminine is verses you know there’s gender verses sexuality and sort of femininity, it’s an essence, …I think people associate femininity with sort of looking pretty, with prettiness. …you know general society is you look female so you have you’re feminine so you have long hair you’re maybe softer, softer expressions, softer features whereas masculinity people tend to I think generalize it as hard edged in emotionalness as well as physicalness.

He also related that as a female he and his Dad were close because he did the masculine activities typical of males. Fred said,

He at one point you know made a joke that you’re the son I never had. And so we went fishing a lot. We went camping a lot. We did all the things that a father and a son would do. ….So I went to his shop and I made stuff with him.

Todd knew that he was effeminate and that was a reason bullies targeted him but he also knew of jocks on the football team that were out and they never got bullied. He said,

No I’m sure that I was targeted because I was obviously effeminate and obviously gay. Because there were times I got and I was called a fag and gay and I was pushed around far before I even discussed with anyone else that I was gay. ….I know kids in fact now I know of 2 jocks that were on the football team that are out and they never got it. …They did not get second one of bullying.

Sam described that he felt feminine because of his “scrawny” size and “higher” voice. He said,

I do feel overly emotional sometimes, which isn’t necessarily a feminine characteristic but, I just feel like I can get in moods and like I’ll have my friends tell me oh you know, you’re acting funny or you’re acting kind of like, I don’t know girly or whatever.

Although Sam did not feel that being emotional was a feminine characteristic, his friends called him “girly” when he was emotional.
Joan, the youngest person I interviewed had a very different view of femininity. She explained,

I would say that femininity is I guess, utilizing emotion. I really have trouble describing it because I don't want to say femininity and females are the same thing. I guess femininity is utilizing the softer nature of humans rather than the more powerful nature of humans. Being more receptive to ideas and being more listening and less brash and such.

She described how her friend defined pansexual, “as being attracted to femininity without caring how it came.” It did not matter whether the person was male or female; pansexuals are attracted to the specific characteristic. Joan was not the only person to feel uncomfortable labeling characteristics as masculine or feminine. Sam and Katie took a gender class and were hesitant to label specific characteristics as feminine or masculine. Katie explained,

I don’t really like to portray masculine and femininity like separate. I just see everyone as they are. I don’t like to classify, gosh that person really masculine, it’s just like well they’re a tough person. You know they are either, you know, they are build, they have a strong shell, you know they are hard to break, or they’re just you know a happy go lucky person and they don’t, they’re afraid. That’s how I would see it. I don’t really like to put masculine and femininity on people. I feel that, that’s weird.

John explained not wanting to categorize feminine and masculine characteristic because he felt that he expressed both femininity and masculinity. When he describe femininity and masculinity, he said,

There is different ways that the groups both work. Masculine is sort of it's like a specific type of comradely it's just the way you interact with each other is very different. Being a male in a group of other males. Where it is very light hearted and serious topics are just kind of they’re not resolved quickly but very, I don't want to say bulleted, very concise. They are usually very like well here’s my issue and here’s the response to that. Whereas female or feminine groups are more, I would say they are more serious but we can sort of talk more why something is a problem or how you feel about a certain problem or just different ways to view it and not necessarily looking for a straight answer on how to fix it. It's a weird, distinction.

Jane’s family was very progressive, her friends have commented on the different roles her parents have taken. She explained,

…my parents, my family defies like all the gender norms. My dad helps my mom cook every night; my dad does a lot of the cooking. My mom manages the books, my parents are photographers, so my mom sets up the shots, my dad moves a lot of the equipment, but my dad does all the Photoshop. My mom manages the books, all the schedule; my mom is the schedule person. And my dad, he did
fashion photography, he…I was like, ‘Dad, you are the gayest straight man I have ever met in my life!’ And he was, he would always like when I was in a re…sometimes he would just dry my hair, he’s always been like very much more emotionally available than my mom has. [Talking about being emotional] But if you’re trying to not let it show, she’s not as good at knowing when to come in and give you a hug. But my dad is very much like, ‘Come here, let me give you a hug.’… Both of my parents are very good drivers. For some reason my mom just usually does the driving and so.

Mary’s ideas were progressive when she talked about masculine and feminine characteristics of gender. She said,

But I would say how one chooses to present oneself to the world in terms of gender and that I don’t think of that as being strictly male or female. I definitely like fan of the spectrum and feel like people can be you know gender queer and somewhere in between or identify in I don’t know in a lot of different ways.

But Mary thought that gender roles where important because it was how people processed each other. She said,

“I mean I feel like I don’t know, it’s just helping us make sense of our world. Kind of make sense of the people around us. I don’t think it’s like a good thing.”

Todd also shared similar thoughts about gender expectations, he said,

“We are genetically hardwired to make a distinction, to distinguish between things. I don’t know that prejudice isn’t just a part of human nature.”

But Fred disagreed with the opinions above. He stated,

I think humans have a tendency to categorize. It makes things easier, but it’s also very limiting…. I think that maybe is a product of the gender roles that we have and that sort of fallacy of it. I think that people are just people. And the more we get away from roles the really, ….it makes it easier for everybody because then they can just express who they are.

Fred shared an example about displaying a masculine characteristic and how he was presumed to be gay because of his actions. As a female, he was on the high school softball team. He related,

So I was on the softball team in high school and I didn’t even consider myself gay. I was like asexual right. And so like baseball players you know like slap each other on the butt with their mitts you know what I mean? And so like I’d slap people on the butt with my mitt and be like you know good job and I know for a fact that I was not excessive about it. …But there was like a sudden rumor that I was gay because I was like slapping people on the butt. …But yet I think it was driven on like if a more feminine person had done that I have no question there’d be no question like there wouldn’t be a rumor about them being gay.
Some football players and baseball players hit each other on the butt and because they are athletic and super masculine, they are not presumed to be gay. But if a person’s gender expression does not match their sex, most people jump to the conclusion that the individual is gay. Most of my participants agreed that society’s expectation of gender expression is not good and harmful to those who feel their gender does not match their biological sex. I valued Fred’s description about gender roles, “I don’t think they’re important at all. I think gender roles are horrid.” I believe what Fred said was very appropriate about how confining gender roles can be.

Dozier’s interviews with transgendered males discussed the fact that many interviewees described the comfort they felt finally having a body that matched their gender identity. The interviewees related the increased status and power that being male afforded them in dealing in their social world.

This study of a small group of FTMs helps clarify the relationship between sex and gender because it does not use sex as the initiating point for gender and because most respondents have experienced social interaction as both men and women. (2005:314)

I was fortunate enough to interview a transgendered male. It illuminated experiences that I had never considered and provided valuable insight. Fred explained about his feelings of being forced into gender expression that he did not feel was his true gender. He said,

And I, I sort of shut down like I grew up in like a very conservative, Christian family and they and especially my mother was very forceful in trying to align me with femininity and align me in a female role. And I rejected that but I also I mean coming from you know I’m 32 now so I sort of thought back on a lot of these things and I couldn’t of said this at the time but I mean I internalized a lot of that.

He also explained how it felt to be in a body that matches his gender. I asked why he did not feel the need to act hyper-masculine. He said,

Because I feel comfortable, I feel absolutely like I feel like this. My body and like even the way that I feel inside, like I think hormones do have something to do with it. I felt like I don’t belong in that body. It was just a huge disjoint. And in order to feel more male, like I weight lifted, I was like you know buff power lifter you know. I mean I had to weight lift, I weighted lifted 2 hours every day. And now I’m like all right [causally] I’ll go for a run. And I got my physical, sort of I felt like I had to, that didn’t match like I was in this female body and that was not my body. And so I was going to make that into a male body even though it was still female. And then once I transitioned and slowly I’m just like I feel comfortable in who I am. Like I feel relaxed, I feel I don’t need to forcefully
express this masculinity because that’s how I feel inside. Like I feel that its like an
alignment.

I think Fred’s story is valuable to share in order to help society understand how horrible it is
for individuals to feel that they are in the wrong body or in the wrong sex. Fred explained,

Like not only do I feel comfortable inside my body but I am reaffirmed who I, my
expression is reaffirmed everyday like people see me as a man. And so I don’t
have to make someone see me as a man. Yeah I think society definitely has to do
with that relaxation and sort of like and that’s, I mean just as a side note, it’s
something that I’m struggling with personally right now, is being out more as a
Trans man. Because before it’s like you took one look at me and I didn’t have a
choice and now I have to tell someone. And that’s a really, that’s a really difficult
thing. And so, it’s so easy I mean that’s what they say about the Trans community
you sort of like fade into oblivion. It like suddenly you fit in, suddenly like it’s
easy. Like it’s so much easier walking down the street because people don’t stare
at me. And like that’s huge. And I think gender maybe in terms of your study
gender expression does have a lot to do with how maybe people aren’t actively
bullied but people stare at them. And the way you feel in your body when you
walk down the street is very different like your emotions you feel good like
you’re walking around and people like maybe somebody nods at you instead of 5
people like watching you go by, maybe one of them has a scowl, maybe one of
them has a smile on their face. But like it’s still, you’re in that environment
everyday and maybe people don’t know or you know it’s like you realize
something when you step out it. So for me stepping into a societally male body
suddenly I realized, I mean like god this is so much easier. My life, my day-to-day
experience in society is so much easier. And I think that’s why a lot of Trans
people fade away and something I’m struggling with is like no people need to
know Trans people in order to make it ok. And just like I think for the Gay
community the more Gay people you know, I think things have changed now
because people find it right to it morally, it’s morally like acceptance. It’s more
like oh I know a Gay person and like there’s no big deal. And so I think people
need to know Trans people in order to feel like they’re just people.

Fred provided a valuable concept about sharing a person’s self with others. Jeffrey and Todd
both explained how valuable a teacher’s acceptance and caring influenced their lives. When
Jeffrey’s boyfriend’s mother called the school to tell his teachers he was gay, his band
teacher called him into her office to see if he was okay. Jeffrey later told his band teacher
how much it meant to him that she cared and she did not realize the impact she made on his
life. Todd said that knowing a lesbian teacher was at his school provided him with an
example of a lesbian living her life. He said, “Her presence helped me and there was nothing
she could have done about that. She didn’t know, she didn’t talk to me over a conversation.”
So LGBTQ adults need to feel comfortable sharing their sexual orientation without recourse to show young LGBTQ students that life is worth living even through the terrible times.

Miller et al. (1997) researched undergraduate students’ perceptions of their masculine and feminine qualities to determine if their self-perception changed due to their environment. Bernstein et al. (2008) used “Bem’s Sex Role Inventory” as a guideline for feminine and masculine qualities in their tests given to the students. Feminine qualities were described as “… affectionate, compassionate, eager to soothe hurt feelings, gentle, sensitive to needs of others, sympathetic and tender” and masculine qualities were described as, “…acts as leader, aggressive, assertive, dominate, has leadership abilities, independent, and willing to take a stand.” They also listed neutral characteristics, “adaptable, conventional, friendly, helpful, moody, reliable, tactful, and unpredictable” to hide the purpose of the test (Miller et al. 1997:726). This article illustrated that a person’s self-perception of masculine and feminine qualities can change depending on the need to adapt to a specific task or job. They gave a pre-test to the students rating themselves on masculine and feminine qualities. The students were asked to participate in an experiment to determine job interviewing and applicant interviewing skills. In reality the experiment was to see if the student gave examples in their past showing that they had the masculine or feminine qualities that would aid them in a specific job. Miller et al. (1997) stated about expected masculine and feminine qualities,

Sex role stereotypes have traditionally polarized the expressive and instrumental roles associated with women and men, and a major social explanation for sex differences in expressive and instrumentality, when they are found, has been related to sex differences in opportunities to develop these competencies. (748)

This experiment in masculine and feminine qualities illustrated the student’s self-perception changed when asked about their job skills that required them to use opposite sex qualities. This is useful to teach that the qualities listed under masculine and feminine are not actually related to a person’s biological sex. It may be that males are not allowed to develop the feminine qualities due to societal pressures of displaying only masculine qualities and vise versa for females. I was encouraged that many of my participants were hesitant to describe characteristics as masculine or feminine. They all agreed that all of us should be permitted to feel and act according to what allows us to be a happy individual.
A subtheme emerged when several participants described masculine and feminine music. I asked them to explain. Sam said that he liked feminine music and that as he grew older his new male friends teased him about liking feminine music. When I asked him to explain, he said Britney Spears was feminine music and he made an effort to like the same music as his male friends. John described masculine music,

So, if I had to like say a specifically a masculine side of music that would be metal or punk or not necessarily pop. Not that pop is strictly feminine. Metal punk, rock, rap, R&B...it's mostly a male dominated field.

Jane talked about instruments that were masculine such as the brass section although a French horn was more feminine. I found it interesting that music and instruments were given masculine and feminine descriptions and illustrated that these ideas are created by society.

The use of masculine and feminine to describe characteristics need to cease. Characteristics are used to describe traits that an individual possess and there is not a need to ascribe masculinity or femininity to a characteristics. Miller et al. (1997) stated that students were fluid in which characteristics they used to describe themselves depending on the situation. Deutsch (2007) suggested that we “undo gender” to show our resistance to gender roles. She stated,

The language we use shapes what our minds are drawn to. Therefore, I propose that we adopt a new convention, namely that we reserve the phrase ‘doing gender’ to refer to social interactions that reproduce gender difference and use the phrase ‘undoing gender’ to refer to social interactions that reduce gender difference. (2007:122)

One way to help in changing social norms surrounding gender is to use language to show our rebellion against expected gender roles. This can permit males and females to act according to how they feel and not be obligated to act according to the narrow confines of social norms.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Although my participants provided examples that demonstrated the negative reactions by their peers when they expressed atypical gender expression, there were definite limitations to the conclusions I could reach based on my ten interviews. They were from the same background and were excellent students. Only a few individuals expressed atypical gender expression and the remaining dressed heteronormative. It is possible that I may find more examples of atypical gender expression in LGBTQ shelters. I attempted to obtain permission to interview LGBTQ youth in the “Youth Housing Center” run by The San Diego Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Community Center or more commonly known as The Center. Those in charge protect these youth and would not allow me access to interview them. I also tried to interview LGBTQ youth that dropped into San Diego Youth and Community Services youth center but none of the youth I met volunteered to be interviewed. In my future research I will attempt to find individuals with different experiences to determine the extent that atypical gender expression is related to bullying and discrimination. I want to provide evidence of the need to eliminate gender expectations that reflect an individual’s biological sex.

A subconscious question that lingered through my research was, with all the research surrounding gender, why have we, as a civilized society, not advanced our views and expectation concerning gender roles? Lorber’s, Paradoxes of Gender (1994) enlightened my understanding of why gender roles have been so persistent and in existence for so long. She explained, “As a social institution, gender is one of the major ways that human beings organize their lives” (1994:15) which is not a new concept.

In the construction of ascribed social statuses, physiological differences such as sex, stage of development, color of skin, and size are crude markers. …The building blocks of gender are social constructed statuses. (1994:17)

And then I understood. If we as a society made females and males equal, how would the males retain their privilege and status of power. It is as if all my education came full circle and I understood all the concepts of sociology through my lens of gender. Risman (2004)
contributed to my understanding as she described that we need to change the “structural framework” surrounding gender. She stated,

I prefer to define gender as a social structure because this brings gender to the same analytic plane as politics and economics... [because]...social structures exist outside individual desires or motives and that social structures at least partially explain human action. (2004:431)

I still maintain that it is necessary to eliminate society’s expectation of gender roles. This may not eliminate homophobia but will decrease the ability to judge if an individual is homosexual. In turn, this will contribute to the decrease of bullying in the schools of LGBTQ and heterosexual youth that do not adhere to societal gender roles. We need to keep pushing to educate all members in society to understand that the social construction of gender roles are to preserve the power of men over women and the power of heterosexuals over homosexuals. Our children’s health and safety depend on the acceptance of all individuals to be allowed to exhibit strength, independence, sensitivity, compassion and good communication skills regardless of their gender. These are all positive and admirable characteristics that help an individual contribute to society.

Newer research addresses the fluidity of gender expression. Similar to Bem’s (1974) description of masculine and feminine characteristics being on a sliding scale, females that transition to males discover that they want to stay in between the male and female categories. Diamond and Butterworth (2008) studied four biological female participants over a ten-year period. They discovered, “…that the feminist theoretical framework of intersectionality provides a generative starting point for theorizing women’s experiences of multiple, partial, and fluid gender identifications” (366). One of the participants maintains a male gender identity, although she never transitioned to male by surgery, she took testosterone. She maintains a feminine name, Lori while adopting a male gender identity. She lives between the boxes of male and female identity. She feels that to transition to a male would place her in a position of power that does not seem right to her.

Second, and perhaps most notably, Lori’s overall resistance to ‘picking a box’ and designating either a female or male identity as her true identity resonates with intersectionality’s challenge to the notion that any one particular identity status (i.e., ethnicity, social class, gender) must be personally and socially ‘primary,’ such that other identity statuses are analyzable chiefly with respect to how they add or subtract from forms of social marginality associated with the primary one. (2008:369)
Lori illustrated that some individuals’ gender identity is fluid. Another female Karen started taking testosterone in preparation for a female to male transition but realized she was comfortable in her female sex and did not complete the full male transition. Diamond and Butterworth (2008) described the importance of these two participants self-discovery. They stated,

The framework of intersectionality is relevant to Karen’s and Lori’s approaches to their bodies because intersectionality directly counters essentialist assumptions about the primacy of biologically-based forms of identification over others. (370).

Although society values the definite lines of gender and biological sex, Diamond and Butterworth (2008) demonstrated that some individuals never fit into the boxes of male or female and share the characteristics of both femininity and masculinity.

I believe that research with intersexed individuals provided us with a greater understanding about gender. Hester (2004) explained research on individuals that are born with ambiguous or both sexual organs. He demonstrated that there is no clear path to determine if an intersexed person will identify as male or female. He stated,

Indeed, what becomes clear from studies of intersexed people is that the sex of a person is not determined by chromosomes or by genital morphology or by brain structure or by hormonal influences, but by several different factors that can combine in ways that are very organic, and not mechanistic. …Chromosome sex may not coincide with expected internal or external anatomical features, nor may these coincide with sex/gender identification, nor may this identification be set permanently in the life of an individual, nor may any of these cooperate with moral expectation of heterosexual object desires. (2004:4)

Hester further illustrated the different parts of the body that determine sex/gender. He advocated that there is more to gender than hormones and biological sex. There are many markers in the body that determine the type of person one will find attractive. This supports why LGBTQ individuals feel their gender does not coincide with their biological sex.

There have been several recent articles that some countries are adding an additional category for gender. An article appeared by CBC News (2013) that Australia is changing the binary categories of gender. The article stated,

An Australian court has cleared the way for people to identify as neither male nor female on government documents, after protests by a genderless activist went global. …A third option — ‘non-specific’ — can now be listed as a valid gender status.

Australia has illustrated that it is possible to begin to dismantle the dualistic theories in
The parents will make that choice by leaving the boxes for male and female genders blank. The new law is meant to avoid the need to label an intersex baby as male or female before the child is old enough to decide. The child could also opt to remain classified as intersex. German passports ‘will soon be allowed to have an 'X' in the gender field, according to a spokesman for the interior ministry,’ Agence France-Presse says.

It is very important that members of society learn to allow fluidity in gender expression. The children in our society need to feel accepted, safe and feel allowed to express their gender regardless of their biological sex.
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APPENDIX

INTERVIEW GUIDE AND PARTICIPANTS CHART
Interview Guide

INTERVIEW GUIDE T#:______ Pseud____________________________

Please share with me your middle/high school experiences.
I'd like to also hear about growing up, relationships and family dynamics.

Please describe your story about discovering your sexual orientation.

Please describe for me your dress and demeanor in school.
What do you enjoy wearing most?
What do you hate wearing?
Please share with me if you change your clothes after leaving your home and if so why do you change after leaving?

What does Gender Expression mean to you?

Please describe what you think masculine and feminine characterizes are?

Please describe an instance when someone commented on your gender expression.
What is a typical reaction of others to your gender expression (parents, children, teaching peers, administrators, social acquaintances)?

Please describe how safe you felt at school when you were freely expressing
yourself.
Your best experience(s)
Your most safe feelings?
Your worst experience(s)
Most frightening experiences

Please describe an instance when you were bullied or you witnessed bullying?
How do you feel about bullying?

Can you please tell me what kinds of groups were supportive at your school of LGBTQ students?

I'd like you to consider for a moment that you have been asked to help formulate a plan to decrease bullying in school. Please tell me what you would suggest.

How would you eliminate typical Gender Roles?

Concluding questions - Allow him/her to sort back through the interview and highlight anything he/she thought was important or any questions he/she didn't expect, any he/she did expect and I didn't ask. Any questions for me. How did he/she feel during the interview?

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