“IF HE DIDN’T HAVE ME RIGHT NOW, I WOULD BE REALLY FEARFUL FOR HIM”: AN ANALYSIS OF NARRATIVES OF CISGENDER MEN WHO ARE FATHERS OF CHILDREN WHO IDENTIFY AS TRANSGENDER

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Jillian B. Blum

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The dissertation of Jillian B. Blum was reviewed and approved* by the following:

**JoLynn Carney**  
Associate Professor of Counselor Education  
Dissertation Advisor  
Committee Chairperson

**Richard Hazler**  
Professor in Charge of Counselor Education

**Katie Kostohryz**  
Assistant Professor of Counselor Education

**Allison Kootsikas**  
Assistant Professor of Curriculum and Instruction

*Signatures are on file in the Graduate School.
ABSTRACT

This exploratory qualitative dissertation analyzed the narratives of six cisgender men who live in the southern region of the United States of America and are fathers of children who identify as transgender. Participants were recruited via snowball sampling and data were collected using three in-depth interviewers and analyzed using phenomenological analysis procedures while utilizing a constructivist paradigm worldview and McGoldrick, Carter, and Garcia-Preto’s (2011) *Family Life Cycle Theory* as the theoretical framework. The interviews focused on questions relating to learning about fatherhood, being a father, being a father of a child who identifies as transgender, and the meaning these fathers make of these experiences collectively.

Findings were presented by crafting profiles of each participant. This process allowed the interviews and interpretation to take on a narrative form. Excerpts for each participant were chosen based on those that were the most illustrative and representative of my research questions and the emerging themes. The three main themes that emerged from the interview data were: the impact paternal involvement has on fathers’ patterns of behavior, adapting to child’s gender identity by engaging in advocacy, and navigating the developmental process of self-evaluation. Implications for counselors, social workers, psychologist, school systems, insurance companies, and policy makers in developing and advocating ways to support these men and their families are discussed.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Prologue

The old saying, “What happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas,” does not apply to this study because that is where the initial stages of my topic development happened. One summer I was enjoying a family vacation in Las Vegas—because what would be a better family vacation than going to Sin City? Nevertheless, my father and I were playing a very non-risky game of roulette. Simply betting five dollars on black/red or even/odd. After awhile of playing, a man sat next to me and struck up a conversation. This conversation started with the usual, “Where are you from?” question and I asked the man what brought him to Las Vegas? He said, “My son is getting married to his boyfriend.” I said, “Oh that’s great! Mazel Tov!” The man proceeded to thank me and discussed how it took him awhile to get to this place where he could actually attend his son’s wedding. After some probing, the man discussed how early on he could not imagine how his son was gay and wondered what he as a father had done wrong that caused his son to be gay. I was curious how he got to this present point where he was not only coming to the wedding but also telling someone about his gay son. He said he just kept to himself and did not really talk about it with anyone. He explained he just let time pass and finally it seemed more normal to him. Unfortunately, I did not get to speak with him for very long to continue to investigate this process he had gone through. The man made his last bet and cashed out and off he went to celebrate the nuptials of his son.

After he left, my father, who had remained silent turning the time I spoke with this man, turned to me and said, “I could relate to some of the things that guy was saying.” I was taken back by this comment because ever since I came out as gay to my family at the age of 16, I felt nothing but supported. Then I started to think back and could not recall actually talking to my
father about being gay or his thoughts or feelings about it. And now when I reflect back on my coming out process, I just recall my dad sitting in silence and the rest of the family talking, but not him. And within the last 15 or so years, my dad was always so nice to girlfriends and LGBTQ friends and just seemed to go along with whatever was happening at the time. I asked him how what the gentleman had said that resonated with him, and my dad said, “Not going to lie, I wondered how am I going to tell people? Did I encourage you to do sports and hang out with me too much and that’s why you’re gay?” I was really shocked and felt extremely guilty. I had never even thought to check in with him about his thoughts and feelings on this matter.

My father went on to say how he worried for my safety as we were in a small town in Georgia. I asked how he felt about my sexuality currently and he said he no longer had any worries or hang-ups with it. I asked how he was able to get to that place and he responded with, “I just figured I’d let your mother deal with it. She’s better at things like this. And I’d just see what happened and eventually it was okay.” He went onto say that after awhile he heard more from mainstream media about being gay not being a choice and he began to feel better about his lack of role of causing it. He also surmised that he helped raised my older sister and brother relatively the same way and they both turned out to be straight; so he thought that was further proof that he was not at fault for me being gay. He did not talk to a counselor, friends, family, or even me about it. Just processed it all internally.

While I was glad to see he felt better about the situation, it still upset me that the first conversation we had about this topic was 15 years after the fact. After our trip, I went back to Atlanta, GA and attended the Southern Comfort Conference. This conference, for transgender people and their family, not a celebration for the alcohol it shares its name with, allowed me as a counselor to be apart of their conference and speak to a number of fathers who have transgender
children. It was astounding to me how similar their stories were to my father’s and the
gentleman’s I spoke with in Las Vegas. Although my father’s and the gentleman’s experiences
were based on having gay children, the fathers of transgender children reported basically
processing their child’s identity on their own as well. Though each father at the conference had
their own respected worries, thoughts, and feelings about their child’s situation, they rarely spoke
of seeking out to others to help them and often left the day-to-day dealings to the child’s mother.

It got me to think are these fathers all just processing their thoughts and feelings in the
dark? Alone? What goes on during this processing time? What is their experience when their
child states that they are transgender? I went to the literature to look for answers and did not find
a single study that investigated only the experiences of fathers who have transgender children. It
was at that moment I thought this was an opportunity to add to the literature and fill a gap that
needs to be filled. More so, I wanted the chance to give these men a space so that they can have a
voice and speak about their experiences firsthand. Their invaluable information will, therefore,
help us as counselors learn how to better help them during this life event.

**Background of the Study**

Helping counselors understand how to assist transgender individuals and their families
coincides consistently with the goals of our counseling governing bodies. The increased
emphasis in multicultural counseling training and competency development spearheaded by the
American Counseling Association (ACA), Association for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and
Transgender Issues in Counseling (ALGBTIC), and the Council for Accreditation of Counseling
and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) standards has amplified counselors’ attention
towards diverse populations. Despite this multicultural movement, the transgender population
often goes unaddressed and has been characterized as the outsider of the lesbian, gay, bisexual,
and transgender (LGBT) community (Forman, 2004; Lev, 2007). This outsider status is often attributed to the differences in political focus, concerns, and needs between transgender people and lesbians, gays, and bisexuals (LGB). These vast differences (e.g., bathroom access, gender identity protection, healthcare access) have some even calling for the dropping of the T in LGBT due to the transgender population’s needs not being addressed (Hayer, 2016). Even when transgender people are in the same fight as LGB, their needs can sometimes be ignored for the betterment of the LGB population. This was apparent when the Employment Non-Discrimination Act of 2007 (ENDA) eliminated gender identity from its protection list and only included sexual orientation in fear that it would not be passed by legislators if transgender anti-discrimination wording was included (Equality Federation, 2007).

Likewise as the transgender population’s needs sometimes go unaddressed in the political arena, their issues and ways to work with transgender people in counseling programs can be greatly absent. Some have hypothesized that this could be due to the lack of empirical research (Carroll, Gilroy, Ryan, 2002; Fox, 1996). Nevertheless, this is problematic because counselors are likely to encounter at least one transgender client during their careers (Feldman & Bockting, 2003). It is well documented that transgender individuals often experience high incidents of violence, isolation, substance abuse, suicidal ideations, and homelessness (Clements-Nolle, Marz, & Katz, 2006; Finneghan & McNally, 2002; Kenagy, 2005; Lombardi, 2002; Mathy, 2002; Xavier, Bobbin, Singer, & Budd, 2005). Yet, counseling training programs and research within the counseling professions typically do not address these concerns or these individuals lived experiences (Korell & Lorah, 2007).

It is unfortunately not surprising that with a lack of literature exploring transgender people’s lived experiences, their families’ experiences are also gravely absent. A transgender
person transitioning causes a shift in the structure of the family unit. Family members are not immune to the sudden instability and stress associated with changing of roles in the family system. Not giving an adequate voice in the literature exploring families of transgender individual is, therefore, problematic as family members of transgender people share many similar experiences of their transgender relative, including stigma, stress, and uncertainty of next steps (Ellis & Eriksen, 2002). It behooves us greatly as counselors to have a building body of research to act as a foundation to help guide us when working with these families. This is largely because our field is overall not prepared to meet the needs of this population and parental support and acceptance have been seen to be beneficial factors for transgender adolescents’ wellbeing (Carroll, Gilroy, & Ryan, 2002; Simons, Schrager, Clark, Belzer, & Olson, 2013; Wren, 2002). The lack of literature and research illuminating the family’s experiences makes drawing upon their stories for guidance to help structure counseling interventions difficult, if not impossible, in some cases. This is especially true for the fathers of transgender children.

Currently, there are no studies focusing solely on the lived experience of these fathers. Some studies have taken the liberty to explore the experience of the mother, in a case study, or mothers, in a larger sample size study, who have transgender children (Cohen-Kettenis et al., 2006; Johnson & Benson, 2014; Kuvalanka, Weiner, & Mahan, 2014; Lesser, 1999; Pearlman, 2006). Interestingly, although the focal point of these studies was the experience of the mother or the mothers, mothers would sometimes discuss their perceptions of the fathers’ experiences. This is actually not uncommon when it comes to researching fathers’ experience overall. Guzzo (2011) notes that, “Men's own voices are conspicuously absent in much of the new research on father involvement, which often uses mother's reports of father behaviors” (p. 1). This is seen in Kuvalanka, Weiner, & Mahan’s (2014) qualitative study with five mothers reporting that all of
the mothers believe the fathers took longer than they did to understand and accept their child’s gender identity. One of the mothers thought her child’s father struggled with their child’s gender identity due to him not being able to fulfill his responsibility as a father to protect his child from a sometimes unaccepting society (Kuvalanka, Weiner, & Mahan, 2014). While the mothers describe the fathers as going through their own transformation of accepting their child, it was the mothers who report they, “…led the way for their families in terms of accepting their children’s transgender identities” (Kuvalanka, Weiner, & Mahan, 2014, p. 367).

The voice of the father of a transgender child has been shared from the perspective of the child’s mother. Some studies have taken the next step and explored the experience of both mothers and fathers who have transgender children (Gregor, Hingley-Jones, & Davidson, 2015; Hegedus, 2009; Hill & Menvielle, 2009; Kane, 2006; Menvielle, Tuerk, & Jellinek, 2002; Riley, Sitharthan, Clemson, & Diamond, 2011; Riley, Sitharthan, Clemson, & Diamond, 2013; Wren, 2002). Wren’s (2002) study of 11 families (9 mothers & 6 fathers) found, “Some of the fathers were found to typically deal with the many difficulties in talk about the topic by not talking about it” (p. 384). This often leaves the mother to discuss gender issues with the child and being the guiding force when it comes to this topic, much like the mothers’ accounts discussed in the above section. Moreover, fathers were seen as the status quo makers as a way to cope with the loss of their expectations of their child’s gender identity (Wren, 2002). Fathers would either minimize the gender identity issue or try to carry on without allowing the gender issues to interfere too much with everyday life (Wren, 2002). It is important to note, however, that once fathers did begin talking about their child’s transgender identity, they came to better understand what was happening in this more active role and had more positive thoughts and feelings about the situation (Wren, 2002). A more detailed discussion of the other studies will be explored in
Chapter 2.

It is important to note, each study (Gregor et al., 2015; Hegedus, 2009; Hill & Menvielle, 2009; Kane, 2006; Menvielle et al., 2002; Riley et al., 2011; Riley et al., 2013; Wren, 2002) had more mother participants than father participants. Although these studies do include fathers’ input, some of them are heavily biased towards the mothers’ participation. In both Riley et al. (2011) and Riley et al. (2013), 87% of the participants were mothers versus 10% of them being fathers (in addition to one guardian). Similarly, Hegedus (2009) had an 11 to 1 ratio when it came to mothers and fathers and Menvielle et al. (2002) reports, “mothers were the primary participants” (p. 1011). Therefore, even when fathers are participants, they are underrepresented. This gives further indication of the importance to have a study with only fathers involved. This study, consequently, gives fathers the opportunity to be the sole focus and have their experience told by their first-person accounts.

Like the other members in the family, these men are no less immune to the changes associated with this process. Yet they are often, as will be discussed in the next chapter, the silent partner and less likely to seek help for this life event. It is, therefore, critical to obtain the firsthand knowledge these men have in order to begin to understand how they process this event and how mental health counselors can better serve them. This need to learn about their experience via their narratives will be a main focus and purpose of this study.

**Purpose of Study**

Much of the above statements are contributing factors to the purpose of this study. Helping to facilitate this study so that fathers who have transgender children get their deserved opportunity to have a voice within the literature is a main focus and purpose of this study. The aim of this study is to understand the lived experiences of these men living within the southern
region of the United States by utilizing my constructivist paradigm worldview and McGoldrick, Carter, and Garcia-Preto’s (2011) *Family Life Cycle Theory* as the theoretical framework. Through their voices expressed via a series of three in-depth interviews, this exploratory study offers unchartered and important information to help aid counselors, social workers, psychologist, school systems, and policy makers in developing and advocating for ways to support these men and their families.

E lecting to include only participants who reside in the southern region of the United States was an important distinction due to potential cultural attitudes about gender norms that might not be as prevalent in other parts of the country. Also, the current political climate within the southern region has called for discriminatory legislation attempting to make it illegal for a transgender individual to use the bathroom that corresponds with their gender identity. These nicknamed “Bathroom Bills” have been introduced in Alabama, Florida, Kentucky, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia (Harress, 2017; Sanchez, 2017; Snyder, 2017). Much attention has been paid to North Carolina’s bathroom bill, H2 Bill. This outpouring of media attention surrounding this bill has created a mass civil liberty debate (Gordon, Price, & Peralta, 2016). Southern states have enacted or proposed Religious Freedom Bills or Religious Freedom Reformation Acts (RFRA) in Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia (NCSL, 2015; Sydell, 2017; Tan, 2016; Torres, 2017; Villarreal, 2017) These pieces of legislation discriminate LGBT individuals by allowing schools, religious groups, and businesses the ability to refuse services, participation in school or religious activities, or adoption to LGBT people due to religious objections. Also, legislation to make discrimination against LGBT individuals illegal in the south has been met with resistance. In Houston, Texas voters rejected a
bill, the Houston Equal Rights Ordinance (HERO), which would make it illegal to discriminate against someone based on their sexual orientation and gender identity and allow those to use restroom facilities that corresponded with their gender (Moyer, 2015). Much like the North Carolina H2 Bill, HERO was met with, “no men in women’s bathrooms” propaganda attempting to illicit fear that people would now be in danger in bathrooms if this bill passed due to male predators using this legislation as a loophole to attack women and girls in bathrooms (Miller et al., 2017, p. 1) despite the fact that transgender people are much more likely to be assaulted in bathrooms than cisgender individuals (Herman, 2013).

HERO also received criticism for going against traditional gender roles (Morris & Driessen, 2015). A number of studies have indicated that areas of the southern region are more likely to support a more traditional concept of gender roles for men and women (Bolzendahl & Myers, 2004; Carter & Borch, 2005; Eldridge, Mack, & Swank, 2006; Konrad & Harris, 2002; Rice & Coates, 1995; Twenge, 1997). Transgender individuals are often thought to be in violation of gender norms and, therefore, not adhering to these culturally derived expectations. This likely produces more prejudice for transgender people in comparison to other parts of the United States (Gerhardstein & Anderson 2010). The potential socio-cultural influence within the southern United States also impacts the vertical stressors of the participants that are not as readily witnessed in other areas of the country. McGoldrick, Carter, & Garcia-Preto, (2011) explain vertical stressors as family memories, traditions, and expectations that are passed down through generations and have a historical influence (e.g., family attitudes, expectations, taboos, labels, and issues experienced growing up). The authors also discuss how these stresses can be impacted by living somewhere at a given time and, “…is to an extent marked by its members’ experience” (p. 9). Participants were, therefore, asked about potential influences living in the
southern region of the United States had on their experiences as a father of a transgender child. Qualitative research was chosen to acquire these men’s lived experiences. The rationale and benefits for choosing this type of methodology will be discussed in the following section.

**Benefits to Qualitative Research**

Hearing from these men with their own voices will be a critical factor for learning about their experiences. As stated prior, there has been no precedence set for exploring fathers of transgender children. Because of a lack of scholarly research, qualitative research will be an appropriate and logical method. Qualitative research is an indicative approach in which knowledge can be built when there is an absence of sufficient empirical research (Merriam, 2002). This type of methodology, consequently, assists in developing a base of knowledge that can then be expanded in future research studies, especially for this unchartered subject matter.

Qualitative research produces results that can be adapted to help connect empirically based research with counseling practices and interventions (Kazdin, 2008). Participants’ lived experiences help to guide interventions and practices because the rich, descriptive information they share can let policy makers and counselors know what this population is needing and how to help them process their stressors. This type of methodology can also be beneficial when a population, like the one in this study, is underrepresented and marginalized in research (Curry, Nembhard, & Bradley, 2009; Nápoles-Springer & Stewart, 2006). Qualitative research gives participants whose voices are not readily available in literature the opportunity to have their stories and experiences heard in a more in-depth forum. Seeking in-depth interviews gives space to encourage the participants to express their thoughts, feelings, and beliefs in their own language that is yet to be explored. The participants, therefore, are not limited in their means of expression when describing their experiences.
Significance of Study

This study addresses the gap in the knowledge base regarding fathers who have transgender children and living within the southern region of the United States. Analyzing these men’s narratives allows vital information to be offered to numerous mental health professionals, including counselors. Counselors will benefit from these results because they provide in-depth and rich understanding about how these men experience this phenomenon. The information provided from their voices, that have been unspoken in the literature until now, will help shape theoretical interventions and programs. The ways in which these fathers’ histories and help seeking behaviors are explored in this study provides critical implications for providing support, reducing stress, and counseling interferences. The qualitative research design allows for the collection of these narratives in order to provide richness and convey the complexity of their experiences. The following research questions will be used to elicit and guild the collection of information about these fathers’ experiences.

Research Questions

Review of the existing research on fathers of transgender children assisted me in developing the following important questions that I will address in this study. My questions are:

1. How do men develop their perceptions of fatherhood?
2. How do men describe their experiences as fathers raising a child who identifies as transgender?
3. What meaning do men associate and derive from this experience as fathers having a transgender child?

Conclusion
This chapter first gave an overview of how I came to personally acquire an interest in this topic. The background and purpose of this study, benefits of qualitative research, significance of study, and the research questions were presented. In the next chapter, literature review of fatherhood, important concepts and language of gender and sexual identities, theoretical framework, ambiguous loss, disenfranchised grief, help seeking behaviors in men, fathering influence on children’s gender identity, model of family adjustment, social stigma, and parents’ experience having transgender children are discussed.

Definition of Terms

Defining key terminology and concepts is crucial for establishing the conversation of fathers and their transgender child.

- **Sex** refers to the natal (biological) sex, such as male, female, and intersex, which are based on the appearance of the external genitalia assigned at birth (Money, 1995).

- **Gender** is a cultural, social, and psychological construct that dictates a sense of being male, female, neither, or a combination of genders (Kessler & McKenna, 1978; Nagoshi, 2010).

- **Transgender** is an umbrella term encompassing a variety of people who do not conform to the gender norms established by their sex and, therefore, have gender identities, expressions, or behaviors not traditionally associated with their assigned sex at birth (Alegria, 2011; Lev, 2004).

- **Transsexual** is described as individuals whom do not believe their physiological body is congruent or represents their true sex and usually, but not always, undergo some medical intervention to physically transition (Dickey, Burnes, & Singh, 2012; Lev, 2004; Meyerowitz, 2002).
• **Male to female (MTF)** transsexuals have been assigned as biologically male at birth, but identify as female in terms of their gender (Xavier, 2000).

• **Female to male (FTM)** transsexuals have been assigned as biologically female at birth, but identify as male in regards to their gender (Xavier, 2000).

• **Gender dysphoria** is described in the latest addition of The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-V) as, “the distress that may accompany the incongruence between one’s experienced or expressed gender and one’s assigned gender” for at least a six-month duration (APA, 2013, p. 451).

• **Cisgender** refers to an individual who happens to have his/her gender identity correspond with their natal sex (Markman, 2011).

• **Fatherhood** is denoted two ways: parental status and parental involvement (Pleck, 2010a).

• **Child** is being defined not necessarily to mean that of a minor within this study. The term was used to articulate the relationship the participant has to the identified relative who is transgender and not necessarily reflected age.

The terminology related to transgender identities and their father is very complex. Therefore, a more extensive description of important incongruences in language and concepts associated within the transgender community and fatherhood will be provided in Chapter 2.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I provide a comprehensive review of literature that has addressed the experiences of families with children who identify as transgender. I give particular attention to the experiences of fathers. Definitions, theoretical framework, model of family adjustment, help seeking behaviors in men, an evaluation of the current research regarding mothers and parents of transgender children, and stigma are included.

Important Incongruences in Language and Concepts

Identification for transgender individuals can often be complex and consist of contrasting language due to the vast diversity within the community (Lev, 2007). Addressing the complexity of the terminology, which can be confusing for people, is important in clarifying the context related to living life as a transgender person. Even with the wide arrange of identification, language representing transgender people in both an affirming and inclusive way is limited (Korell & Lorah, 2007). This is concerning because language is very influential and the use of inaccurate, misgendering, or disrespectful identification can greatly disempower people who identity as transgender. Due to this potential misuse of language and the expansive terminology, it is imperative to highlight the research literature around important concepts and language related to this study.

Sex, Gender, & Transgender

The general public, including some mental health professionals, often use the terms sex and gender interchangeably, but these terms are distinct from each other (Alegria, 2011; Lev, 2004; Stryker, 2008). Sex refers to the natal (biological) sex, such as male, female, and intersex, which are based on the appearance of the external genitalia and the complex relationship among an individual’s genetic, hormonal, morphological, chromosomal, gonadal, and biochemical
makeup (Money, 1995). Gender is a cultural, social, and psychological construct that dictates a sense of being male, female, neither, or a combination of genders (Kessler & McKenna, 1978; Nagoshi, 2010). Individuals’ self-concept of what their gender is, regardless of the natal sex, is their gender identity (Lev, 2004). Based on a person’s gender identity, the individual expresses their gender via way of gender roles. According to Lev (2004), “Gender roles are the expression of masculinity and femininity” (p. 397). Gender roles are how people convey or perform their gender within society. These roles are often socially constructed and enforced. It is important to note that gender is a continuum that is multidimensional (Lev, 2004). Gender is not a dichotomy and people identity, perform, and express their gender in diverse ways along this spectrum.

Most Eastern and Western societies still dictate that it is generally expected that people will act in accordance with their sex and socially constructed, assigned birth gender (Lev, 2004). It essentially is a social contract that if one has a vagina, she will generally act and express herself within the realms of femaleness. When incongruence between sex and assigned gender occurs, however, people may consider themselves to be transgender. The label of transgender is an umbrella term encompassing a variety of people who do not conform to the gender norms established by their sex and, therefore, have gender identities, expressions, or behaviors not traditionally associated with their assigned sex at birth (Alegria, 2011; Lev, 2004). There are a variety of terms that people have adopted and identify as that fall under this overarching term of transgender. Lev (2004) notes that transgender people under this umbrella can include those who identify as, “transsexuals, cross-dressers, masculine-identified females, feminine-identified males, MTFs, FTMs, transmen, transgendered women, intersexed, and other differently gendered people” (p. 399). Transgendered persons, gender-variant persons, and trans persons are some terms used interchangeably to describe the term transgender (Carroll, Gilroy, & Ryan, 2002).
Gender identity is not binary and individuals might find themselves along the gender continuum between male and female. Individuals who identify as being neither, both, or a mix of female or male may identify as genderqueer, multigender, genderfree, two-spirited, gender outlaws, gender trash, or androgynous and may wish to use pronouns outside of the typical he/she and him/her dichotomous pronouns (Bockting, 1999; Carroll, Gilroy, & Ryan, 2002; Hendricks & Testa, 2012; Nestle, Howell, & Wilcins, 2002). Some of the possible preferred pronouns are they/them/their, ze/zir, zie/zir, ze/hir, and xe/xie (Feinberg, 1998; Hord, 2016).

Another term under the umbrella of transgender, are people who identify as transsexual. Transsexual people are described as individuals who do not believe their physiological body is congruent or represents their gender identity and, usually but not always, undergo some sort of medical intervention to physically transition (Dickey, Burnes, & Singh, 2012; Lev, 2004; Meyerowitz, 2002). They may elect to take hormones or undergo sex reassignment surgery (SRS) in order to appear more female or male, while others may choose to only socially transition (Carroll, 2010). Social transition may include changing their name, dressing in more masculine or feminine clothing, and altering documentation such as a birth certificate. The process and steps one takes to transition is an individual choice (Alegria, 2011; Lev, 2004).

Transsexual individuals can identify as male-to-female (MTF), a trans woman, or female-to-male (FTM), a trans man (Hendricks & Testa, 2012; Lev, 2004). According to Xavier (2000), MTF transsexuals have been assigned as biologically male at birth, but identify as female in terms of their gender. FTM transsexuals have been assigned as biologically female at birth, but identify as male in regards to their gender. Individuals who happen to have their gender identity correspond with their sex, and therefore do not identity as transgender, are referred to as cisgender (Markman, 2011). In respect to brevity and clarity, when referring to a person within this study
whose gender identity does not correspond with their sex, I shall refer to them as transgender (e.g., the fathers within this study’s children). It is important to note, however, that other authors and quotes cited in this thesis might use other terminology outlined above.

Just as gender is not binary, sexuality is not either. It is important to discuss sexual orientation for this study as the relationship between these identities is quite complex and participants and/or their children might also reflect this complexity (Lev, 2007). In some aspects gender identity and sexual orientation are independent of each other, yet intertwined at that same time. Gender identity refers to the internal concept one has of their self as male, female, both, or neither despite their biological sex (Lev, 2004). Sexual orientation refers to the sexual or romantic attraction one possesses (Lev, 2004). There are several sexual orientations to delineate one’s attraction or romantic interest. Gay and lesbian identities are sexual orientations that refers to an individual that is attracted to the same sex/gender; heterosexuality refers to someone being attracted to the opposite sex/gender; bisexuality is having an attraction for both males and females; asexual is defined as an individual who does not wish to engage in sexual activity with any sex/gender; and pansexual individuals have an attraction to individuals along the continuum of gender identity (Kuper, Nussbaum, & Mustanski, 2012; Savin-Williams, 2006).

Transgender individuals’ sexual partners can be of any gender or sex. It is important to distinguish that gender identity and sexual orientation are not the same. Nor are they opposite of each other (Schilder, Kennedy, Goldstone, Ogden, Hogg, & O’Shaughnessy, 2001). Although these identities are not equivalent, they can influence and manipulate how one labels their gender and sexual identities. This interconnection between these identities can be viewed within the construct of sexual identity. According to Lev (2007), “Sexual identity is actually a broad term that includes a biopsychosocial integration of four component parts: biological sex, gender
identity, gender role expression, and sexual orientation” (p. 155). These identities, therefore, are linked to each other. One’s biological sex will influence their gender identity based on the congruence or incongruence they experience between these two components. An individual’s gender identity will then be expressed through their gender role expression. Lastly, based on one’s gender identity, an individual will dictate how to label their sexual orientation. It is important to further clarify that if one changes their gender identity, it does not necessarily mean their sexual attraction changes. At times individuals may experience conflict with these different identities and the next section will outline this struggle from The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual perspective.

**Gender Dysphoria: DSM**

Transgender individuals may experience anguish or distress about their gender identity being in conflict with this natal sex. This distress can produce the diagnosis of a disorder called *gender dysphoria*. Gender dysphoria is described in the latest addition of The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-V) as “the distress that may accompany the incongruence between one’s experienced or expressed gender and one’s assigned gender” for at least a six-month duration (APA, 2013, p. 451). Even if an individual does not experience distress as the result of this incongruence, they may be distressed with the lack of available hormone treatment and/or surgery to complete their desired physical transition (APA, 2013). Gender dysphoria replaced the previous diagnosis, gender identity disorder (GID), found in The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition, Text Revision (DSM-IV-TR) because it is considered more descriptive than GID (APA, 2013). There are separate criteria for children and adolescents compared to that of adults. Children’s diagnosis is
based on more concrete behavior than the subjective desire for adult and adolescent individuals to transition (APA, 2013).

Much like the terminology discussed earlier as ever changing over time, the diagnosis of gender dysphoria only recently came to be after several changes to the DSM diagnosis. The first two psychiatric diagnoses pertaining to gender dysphoria in children, adolescents, and adults, gender identity disorder of childhood (GIDC) and transsexualism, appeared in DSM-III (APA, 1980). The revision to the DSM-III, known as DSM-III-R (APA, 1987), added gender identity disorder of adolescence and adulthood, nontranssexual type. In DSM-IV (APA, 1994), and, consequently, in its text revision edition, DSM-IV-TR (APA, 2000), gender identity disorder (GID) of adolescence and adulthood, nontranssexual type was taken out and the diagnoses of GIDC and transsexualism were collapsed into one, GID, with different criteria sets for children and adolescents/adults. As gender dysphoria is the most updated diagnosis, I will be referring to this term when discussing DSM diagnosis. It is important to note, however, that in the span of literature over the years, the above diagnoses might be used based on when that research was conducted and reflecting the diagnoses of the time period. Regardless of the DSM framework, individuals in the transgender process often find themselves in a place where they want to communicate what they are going through with their families. In addition, this discourse can greatly impact the family system, which needs to be considered when exploring fathers’ perceptions of their transgendered child. Family relationships provide the important context for this study as it provides a theoretical framework in which to place the value of the study’s findings.

Theoretical Framework: Family Life Cycle
From a research perspective, the Family Life Cycle Theory fits as the underlying theory for this study. McGoldrick, Carter, and Garcia-Preto’s (2011) *Family Life Cycle Theory* is a theoretical framework that shows how a child who identifies as transgender can both stress and enhance the family system’s life cycle. McGoldrick, Carter, and Garcia-Preto (2011) developed seven stages within the family life cycle that each requires its own emotion process of transition. The stages and emotion transitions include: (1) leaving home and emerging as young adults accepting emotional and financial responsibility for self; (2) joining of families through marriage or union and commitment to a new system; (3) creating a family with young children and accepting these new members into the family system; (4) raising adolescents within the system and increasing flexibility of boundaries to promote children’s independence and grandparents’ frailties; (5) launching children and moving on at midlife by accepting a multitude of exits from and entries into the family system; (6) families in late middle age accepting the shifting generational roles; and (7) families nearing the end of life by accepting the realities of limitations and death and completion of one cycle of life. In addition to the emotional process of transition, the authors also report there are several second order changes required by a family system to proceed developmentally that include, but are not limited to: establishment of self in community and larger society, realignment of relationships with extended family, friends, and larger community and social system to include new partners, collaboration in child-rearing, financial and housekeeping tasks, renegotiating the couple system, incorporating the wisdom and experience of the elders, and managing reversed roles in caretaking.

During these life cycle stages, families can experience vast amounts of stressors and adjust to these stressors in various ways. McGoldrick, Carter, & Garcia-Preto (2011) discuss horizontal and vertical stressors within families (see Figure 1). Vertical stressors, they note, are
family memories, traditions, and expectations that are passed down through generations and have a historical influence (e.g., family attitudes, expectations, taboos, labels, and issues experienced growing up). Vertical stressors represent the ways individual family members respond to experiences based on their collective family identity and their constructions of what is or is not acceptable based on cultural and societal history, stereotypes, and patterns of power.

Horizontal stressors are stressors experienced by a family through time as they cope with and adjust to the transitions in the family life cycle as it relates to community connections, current events, and social policy and how these impact the family or a specific family member at any given time. Horizontal stressors can be predictable (e.g., life cycle transitions) or unpredictable (e.g., trauma, unemployment, member’s gender transition, etc.). The interrelationship of vertical and horizontal stressors for families can impact their functionality based on a number of factors that include, but are not limited to economic and community resources, coping strategies, and physical/mental health. It is important to note from McGoldrick, Carter, & Garcia-Pretto (2011) that:

Given enough stress on the horizontal, developmental axis, any individual family will appear extremely dysfunctional. Even a small horizontal stress on a family in which the vertical axis is full of intense stress will create great disruption in the system. The anxiety engendered on the vertical and horizontal axes are the key determinants of how well the family will manage its transitions though life. (p. 9)
Figure 1. Multicontextual framework for assessing problems (McGoldrick, Carter, & Garcia-Preto, 2011, p. 8).
Parenthood is one of the most definitive parts of one’s life and can also be denoted as the most dramatic stage as well (Carter, McGoldrick, & Petkov, 2011). Parenting often comes with certain assumptions and expectations. Horizontal and vertical stressors, therefore, can influence families by causing shifts in roles and responsibilities. One such assumption and shift in roles is a sense of cisgendernormativity, or believing that one’s daughter will remain a daughter and act within the confines and expectations of what it is to be a daughter (Erickson-Schroth, 2014).

Within families, much of the relationship connection is via the label we place on family members based on their sex (e.g., father, mother, aunt, uncle, daughter, son, etc.). According to Norwood (2012), “These labels serve as indications that family relationships are steeped in assumptions of stable gender/sex identities” (p. 78). Therefore, with such an emphasis placed within families of maintaining gender/sex identities, when the unexpected horizontal stressor of a family member transitioning to their true gender occurs, the family’s expectations and norms (i.e., vertical stressors) impact how the family responds.

It is important to note that within the multicontextual framework for assessing problems (McGoldrick, Carter, & Garcia-Preto, 2011), there are social-cultural contexts that can also influence the ways families respond to life events. Families do not strictly exist within a vacuum and are not immune to social influences. As stated earlier, horizontal stressors relate to community connections, current events, and social policy and how these impact the family or a specific family member at any given time. For example, social stigma and family’s religious affiliation, although outside of the family entity, can influence how accepting a family unit is when gender variance is presented. Lev (2004) furthers this notion of greater societal impact by stating that gender variant behavior and expression has, “…social, political, religious, moral, economic, and familial repercussions” (p. 54).
Ambiguous Loss

The ways families respond to the horizontal and vertical stressors of a family members’ transgender identity has been “rarely neutral” with strong feelings and thoughts along a spectrum that make for new shifts, barriers, and boundaries within the family system (Connolly, 2006, p. 7). Some of these feelings include a sense of anger, anxiety, betrayal, denial, depression, grief, guilt, loss, and shame (Emerson & Rosenfeld, 1996; Lesser, 1999; Lev, 2004; Peo, 1988). This feeling of loss has been described as an ambiguous loss. Ambiguous loss (Boss, 1999, 2006) is a stress to the family system in that it is a paradoxical phenomenon of a psychological and physically presence-absence paradigm. Boss (2007) defines the physical absence as leaving without goodbye and the psychological absence as goodbye without leaving. The latter, therefore, refers to the experience of a transgender family member. The person is still physically there, but whom the family has come to know and the idea and expectations of them as a whole are no longer present.

Norwood (2012) found that family members often describe this experience of adapting to the changing identity of their transgender family members like a, “living-death” sensation (p. 88). Adjustment to the new person while mourning the loss of the person the family came to know can be a struggle. This experience of ambiguous loss can bring about much stress to the family as they battle with the mixed emotions of wanting to uphold the family’s relationships, roles, and traditions in conjunction with outsider influences such as religious affiliations, normative beliefs/messages, and social stigma. It is, therefore, imperative to utilize The Family Life Cycle as a framework for this study as it assisted in exploring the process and stressors these men experience when their child reveals their gender identity. How these men process this sense of loss and the social impact influencing their reactions can have repercussions for their mental
health and their family’s.

**Disenfranchised and Restoration-Oriented Grief**

Reacting to this ambiguous loss discussed above can elicit certain types of grief processing. A child disclosing a desire to transition from a given gender to their true one can produce social stigma. Parents will sometimes find themselves unable to process their grief openly due to the stigma attached to this loss. Doka (1989) describes this process, known as disenfranchised grief, as “grief that is experienced when a loss cannot be openly acknowledged, socially sanctioned, or publicly mourned” (p. 1). Although a loss has occurred, a parent of a transgender child might think they do not have the right to openly mourn or seek out support or guidance from others during this time of transition. Societal norms determine the “grieving rules” as to what constitutes as legitimate grief and how that loss can be mourned (Doka, 2002, p. 161). Gregor’s (2013) study of eight parents of transgender children reported some participants expressing disenfranchised grief. Parents reported that outside members they disclosed their child’s gender identity to would minimize or belittle the sense of loss they were experiencing. Kauffman (2002) reports that individuals might actually disenfranchise themselves during times of loss out of fear or shame that their child’s transition will be stigmatized. Parents may deem themselves as unworthy of support and not wish to publicly acknowledge their mourning to friends, other family members, or professions.

This disenfranchised grief can paralyze parents, practically fathers, from processing their grief openly and in healthier ways. Both Gregor (2013) and Wren (2002) report that fathers will often continue to carry out everyday tasks without allowing their child’s gender identity issues to interfere too much with their overall lives. Wren (2002) denotes this processing of grief as “restoration-oriented” grief and surmises the trouble for fathers experiencing this type of grief is,
“…they become cut off from their child’s emotional life and the complexities of their predicament” (p.393). Fathers embark on avoiding processing their grief or loss of their child’s gender identity and instead elect to cope by being the status quo maker of the family unit at the expense of their own thoughts and feelings. It is important to note that once fathers did begin talking about their child’s transgender identity, father came to better understand what was happening in this more active role and had more positive thoughts and feelings about the situation (Wren, 2002). By helping fathers to process what factors, whether intrapsychic or interpersonal, are disenfranchising their grief and, therefore, getting to talk more and help their understanding is imperative (Doka, 2002). The emergence of grief and how it is processed can be seen within the Model of Family Adjustment.

**Model of Family Adjustment**

As discussed within *The Family Life Cycle* above, when a member of the family comes out as transgender, they are not the only ones who must adjust. Their family members also experience a developmental process of how to cope with the relative’s transition. Lev (2004) developed a four-stage model, Family Emergence Stages, describing the experience family members go through during this time. The Family Emergence Stages are: discovery and disclosure, turmoil, negotiation, and, lastly, finding balance (Lev, 2004). It is important to note from Lev (2004) that:

Family emergence involves a complex interaction of developmental and interpersonal transactions. It is an adaptive process, one that family members are often unwilling participants in, and in which they may feel somewhat like hostages on another person's journey. An important distinction exists between engaging in one's own transgender emergence because there is an inner pull to live more authentically and being "forced" to cope with another person's emergent transgender feelings. Family members often express resistance, avoidance, and denial about even beginning the process. It is important to remember, however, that not every family member will experience transgender emergence as a "crisis," and some partners, children, and parents appear to accept transition in stride (p. 280).
Due to the complexity of family reactions described above, this developmental model acts as a blueprint and might not be linear or representative for everyone. Nevertheless, looking at it from a guidance point of view, during the first stage of discover and disclosure, family members may experience shock, betrayal, and confusion. Within the second stage of turmoil, the most difficult stage, family members may become withdrawn, emotionally and even physically volatile, hopeless, and stressed, and mimic posttraumatic stress disorder responses (Lev, 2004). Some of the negative reactions to the disclosure of a family member’s gender identity might be delayed and the initial reaction might be that of supportive or actually inviting until the reality of the life changes that are to become (Lev, 2004). The third stage of negotiation refers to the family coming to the realization that the family member’s gender identity is permanent and will not simply go away (Lev, 2004). It is during this stage that family members begin a dialogue to discuss and define what the family member is comfortable with and what limits to set when it comes to the relative’s newly revealed gender identity (Lev, 2004). The fourth and last stage, known as Finding Balance, marks the end of turmoil and the need to negotiate differences within the family. At this stage, resolution of gender issues is not necessarily achieved and permanent. It instead infers that the transgender identity of the relative is no longer a secret and the family is ready to integrate the transgender person back into the family fold (Lev, 2004). The family is able at this point to refocus their lives around everyday events and occurrences and not surrounding their lives around gender issues. As noted above, these developmental stages are not indicative of all families and might not happen in a linear fashion. It will be of interest to see if fathers within this study attest to these stages as something they have too experienced. The following section discusses relevant research exploring the experience of this family adjustment amongst mothers and parents of transgender.
Mothers

As stated in Chapter one, no research has been solely dedicated to the experience of fathers. Some studies have taken the liberty to explore the experience of the mother or mothers who have transgender children (Cohen-Kettenis et al., 2006; Johnson & Benson, 2014; Kuvalanka, Weiner, & Mahan, 2014; Lesser, 1999; Pearlman, 2006). Interestingly, although the focal point of these studies was the experience of the mother, the mothers in a few of the studies discussed their perceptions of the fathers’ experiences. This is actually not uncommon when it comes to researching fathers’ experience overall. Guzzo (2011) notes that, “Men's own voices are conspicuously absent in much of the new research on father involvement, which often uses mother's reports of father behaviors” (p. 1). This is seen in Kuvalanka, Weiner, & Mahan’s (2014) qualitative study with five mothers reporting that all of the mothers believe the fathers took longer than they did to understand and accept their child’s gender identity. One of the mothers thought her child’s father struggled with their child’s gender identity due to him not being able to fulfill his responsibility as a father to protect his child from a sometimes unaccepting society (Kuvalanka, Weiner, & Mahan, 2014). While the mothers describe the fathers as going through their own transformation to accepting their child, it was the mothers who report they, “…led the way for their families in terms of accepting their children’s transgender identities” (Kuvalanka, Weiner, & Mahan, 2014, p. 367).

The mother spearheading the acceptance process of the transgender child was also seen in Johnson & Benson (2014). A qualitative study of one mother with a transgender daughter, the mother too discusses her perception of her daughter’s father. Believing that the father of their transgender daughter is having trouble accepting his daughter’s identity, the mother in the study of Johnson & Benson (2014) took it upon herself to provide, “…an immense amount of research
to look through, and attempted to take him to therapy appointments” (p. 134). Literature has reasoned that the role of communicating with the transgender child and helping to bring awareness is often seen as, “the job of the mothers” (Wren, 2002, p. 383). Fathers from the mothers’ perspective, therefore, appear to take a backseat on how to proceed and lag behind in comparison to mothers when their child identifies as transgender. Though individual attention has been granted towards the mothers of transgender children, the next section will discuss research that explores the parental units’ experiences.

**Parents of Transgender Children**

The voice of the father of a transgender child has been shared with that of the child’s mother. Some studies have explored the experience of both mothers and fathers who have transgender children (Gregor, Hingley-Jones, & Davidson, 2015; Hegedus, 2009; Hill & Menvielle, 2009; Kane, 2006; Menvielle, Tuerk, & Jellinek, 2002; Riley et al., 2011; Riley et al., 2013; Wren, 2002). Wren’s (2002) study of 11 families (9 mothers & 6 fathers) found, “Some of the fathers were found to typically deal with the many difficulties in talk about the topic by not talking about it” (p. 384). This often leaves the mother to discuss gender issues with the child and being the guiding force when it comes to this topic, much like the mothers’ accounts discussed in the above section. Moreover, fathers were seen as the status quo makers as a way to cope with the loss of their expectations of their child’s gender identity (Wren, 2002). Fathers would either minimize the gender identity issue or try to carry on without allowing the gender issues to interfere too much with everyday life (Wren, 2002). It is important to note, however, that once fathers did begin talking about their child’s transgender identity, they came to better understand what was happening in this more active role and had more positive thoughts and feelings about the situation (Wren, 2002).
Hill & Menvielle (2009) also found that even regardless of the gender of the child, fathers were less involved with parenting decisions in respect to gender issues of the child. However, 60%, at least initially, began policing their child’s gender and reinforcing stereotypical gender roles and expression (Hill & Menvielle, 2009). Fathers would embark on sports outings and would either take away dolls for natal boys or encourage doll play for their natal girls. Half of the fathers spoke to the interrationship of gender and sexuality by linking crossgender interests with being gay or lesbian (Hill & Menvielle, 2009).

Kane’s (2006) study of 42 interviewees (24 mothers & 18 fathers) who have preschool 3-5 year old children, both natal females and males, found natal girls get much more positive responses to crossgender behavior and expression than their natal male counterparts. This parallels Thorne’s (1994) and Steensma, Biemond, de Boer, & Cohen-Kettnis (2010) findings, discussed more later in this chapter, on how pre-adolescent girls often get more leeway to engage in crossgender behavior than boys. Compared to the nearly nonexistent negative responses towards daughters, 23 of 31 parents of sons expressed at least some negative responses (e.g., discouraging or even forbidding nongender conforming expressions and behaviors) towards their sons gender-atypical expression (Kane, 2006). Much like the results of Hill & Menvielle (2009), fathers in Kane’s (2006) research also equated crossgender behavior with that of homosexuality and policed their sons’ gender roles and expression by activity steering them away from icons of femininity (e.g., pink or frilly clothing, skirts, dresses, nail polish, dolls) and more towards stereotypical masculine activities and items (e.g., rough housing, trucks, sports). Unlike mothers, several fathers expressed a great sense of personal accountability for helping their sons develop and accomplish masculinity. According to Hill & Menvielle (2009), “In some cases, these heterosexual fathers even explicitly judge their success as a father based on the degree to which
they are raising adequately masculine sons” (p. 167). The notion of personal responsibility for a child’s gender identity will be discussed in further details later in this chapter.

Gregor, Hingley-Jones, & Davidson (2015) interviewed 5 mothers and 3 fathers of transgender children utilizing a free association narrative method. The authors’ results indicated the following five overarching themes developed within their grounded theory analysis: loss, not thinking, uncertainly, ambivalence, and acceptance. Though both mothers and fathers were interviewed, the maternal and paternal results were lumped together as parental themes; therefore, differential experience of fathers was unable to be determined. Nevertheless, the theme of loss of expectation of their child, much like in Wren (2002), centered around a period of mourning and grief surrounding the future expectations of their child that would no longer happen. The experience of ambivalence and acceptance focused around thoughts of stigmatization, which will be discussed later in the chapter. Parents report being caught in between their child’s wishes and the worry of social stigma and bullying (Gregor, Hingley-Jones, & Davidson, 2015). This conflicting thought process was also observed in Hegedus (2009).

Social stigma was also observed in the theme of acceptance. Gregor, Hingley-Jones, & Davidson (2015) note, “Acceptance in this study seemed to be couched more in terms of how others might view and ‘accept’ their child, rather than how the parents themselves accepted their child…” (p. 243).

Both Riley et al. (2011) and Riley et al. (2013) obtained their results of the needs parents with transgender children have from the same parent participant pool, with the former focusing on the parent survey. Due to the similar nature and parental results of the studies, I will focus this section of the literature review on Riley et al. (2011). The authors noted the following six themes from their Internet survey of closed- and open-ended questions of 31 parents/guardians of
transgender children (27 mothers, 3 fathers, and 1 guardian): (a) identification of the gender variance, (b) parents’ responses and reactions, (c) seeking emotional support, (d) dealing with negative responses from others and concerns and safety, (e) seeking medical support, and (f) political, government, legislative support. Fathers’ and mothers’ responses were not separated out and all themes came under the response of the parents. Parents in this study also worried about the safety and stigma and secondary stigma associated with their transgender child. The need for information on how to navigate having a transgender child and seeking support from peers to connect with and gage how to set limits on their child’s gender expression was a focal point for the parents within Riley et al. (2011) and shared by the parents in Hegedus (2009). Riley et al. (2011) also showed similar themes with Hill & Menvielle (2009) of parents struggling to learn how to accept their child and having fears about their child’s safety and future success and happiness. Parents also discussed the frustration of not being able to readily find medical support to help with their family’s needs (Riley et al., 2011).

Menvielle et al. (2002) discussed the focus of parental groups over the course of three years of 12 families who have “gender nonconforming boys” (p. 1010). Much like in previous studies mentioned above, parents focused on grief. Much of this grief was centered on grieving the expectations parents had of their children’s gender expression and conforming to societal norms. Parental focus of these groups also surround the thoughts about disclosure of their child’s identity to others and how to use humor to handle embarrassing situations.

Each study (Gregor et al., 2015; Hegedus, 2009; Hill & Menvielle, 2009; Kane, 2006; Menvielle et al., 2002; Riley et al., 2011; Riley et al., 2013; Wren, 2002) had more mother participants than father participants. It is important to note, however, that although these studies do include fathers’ input, some of them are heavily biased towards the mothers’ participation. In
both Riley et al. (2011) and Riley et al. (2013), 87% of the participants were mothers versus 10% of them being fathers (in addition to one guardian). Similarly, Hegedus (2009) had an 11 to 1 ration when it came to mothers and fathers and Menvielle et al. (2002) reports “mothers were the primary participants” (p. 1011). Therefore, even when fathers are participants, they are underrepresented. This gives further indication of the importance to have a study with only fathers involved. This study, therefore, gives fathers the opportunity to be the sole focus and have their experience told by their first person accounts. The following section will present an introduction on fathers and how the meaning fathers place upon fatherhood is influenced and shaped by social context and childhood influence, which can in return influence their responses to gender identity with their child.

**Fathers**

Within in cultural context, the role of fathers may vary; however, the definition within the social science field has rather distinct parameters. A man becomes a father after having his first child (Tarfer & Mott, 1997). Fatherhood, sometimes interchangeably used with the term fathering, has been defined using two related, yet very different ways that has yielded two denotations. According to Pleck (2010a), this first denotation of fatherhood is the parental status. While parental status once implied only that of the biological male parent, changes to family structure now include other types of fathers (Tarfer & Mott, 1997). These can include both biological relatives and non-biologically related men functioning as the child’s father. They are referred to as the child’s father figure, father surrogate, or surrogate father (American Psychological Association, 2009; Tarfer & Mott, 1997). Father figures include, but not limited to: stepfather, biological relative (e.g., grandfather, uncle, brother), adoptive father, teacher or coach, religious or spiritual leader, or a romantic partner of the child’s other biological parent.
who can either be cohabitating or not with the child and parent. The above listed men can be considered father figures if they are, "a substitute for a person's biological father, who performs typical paternal functions and serves as an object of identification and attachment” (American Psychological Association, 2009, p. 189). Pleck’s (2010a) second meaning of fatherhood is the behavior of fathering, which is often defined in terms of parental involvement. Parental involvement is more than just the frequency of interactions with the child. Pleck (2010b) denotes three primary components of parental involvement: (a) positive engagement activities, (b) warmth and responsiveness, and (c) control when it comes to decision making for the child.

Fatherhood is not solely confined to the family system. The next section will discuss how the societal influence has, and continues to, impact the role of fathers throughout history.

**History of Fatherhood in United States of America**

The roles of fathers over the past few decades have changed, matured, and evolved. Although mothers continue to be seen as the primary child caregiver, fathers have begun to take on more child-rearing responsibilities (Day, Lewis, O'Brien, & Lamb, 2005). Contributing to this change have been more federal and state policy initiatives that have influenced the way the American public perceives the role of fathers in the family (Brothernson & White, 2002; Fagan & Palm, 2004). The Obama administration has placed great emphasis on programs focused on fathering that have helped to contribute to an increased interest in support for father involvement (Cowan, Cowan, & Knox, 2010; Fagan & Palm, 2004). This emphasis of fatherhood child-rearing involvement and co-parenting was not always the role of fathers. Instead, Pleck & Pleck (1997) discusses four stages of fatherhood gender role development for fathers in America. These include: the stern patriarch in colonial times, the distant breadwinner from 1830-1900, the sex-role model between 1900-1970, and to the present day co-
parent/involved father. The main responsibility of the father during the stern patriarch stage was to be the moral teacher that ensured children developed appropriate sense of values that were often modeled after Biblical scripture. Fathers were the main disciplinarian and sole decision power of family finances and children’s romantic relationships (Pleck & Pleck, 1997). During the time of the distant breadwinner era, the father’s main function was employment outside of the household. This left the mother to be the primary caretaker of the child (Pleck & Pleck, 1997). Fathers soon started to take on the role of the sex-role model during this next stage. Here fathers still maintained their breadwinner status, but also actively ensured that there were distinct gender roles between him and the mother (Pleck & Pleck, 1997). During this time period, fathers appeared to be emotionally distant as they left the role of the emotional supporter to the mother. Lastly, the co-parent/involved father, appearing currently, engages in more shared parenting responsibilities and has a more equal division of labor with his partner. Within this stage, fathers are also emotionally more available and intimately involved in caregiving of the child than ever before (Pleck & Pleck, 1997). In addition to the legislative influence, mentioned earlier, contributing to this more nurturing and involved fathering, some trends have accompanied this shift. These include women increasingly entering the work force, increased absence of male figures in the child’s family, more participation of other fathers in children’s lives, and more cultural diversity within the American society (Cabrera, Tamis-LeMonda, Bradley, Hofferth, & Lamb, 2000). A contemporary father is now considered to be “the good dad” when he can both provide financially and is a full, equal partner in the caregiving to his child (Pleck, 2004, p. 32). As discussed, the historical period of fathering can greatly influence the roles and expectations of fathers. In addition to this piece, the childhood experiences a boy has with his own father, or lack of a father, can impact and influence his fathering to his own children. This impact, as
highlighted in the scholarly literature, will be discussed in the following section.

**Childhood Parental Influence on Fatherhood**

Men learn their own childrearing styles through interactions with significant role models (Guzzo, 2011; Parke, 1995). Two major hypotheses were developed to help explain ways men’s interaction with their fathers influence the type of parental role they exhibit. These hypotheses are modeling hypothesis and compensatory hypothesis (Parke, 1995; Sagi 1982). Modeling hypothesis is based on observational learning and social learning theories in which men’s attitudes and behaviors are learned from their experience with their own fathers (Bandura, 1999; Guzzo, 2011; Parke, 1995; Sagi 1982). This theory, therefore, surmises that men look to their own experiences with their father as a mental prototype for developing their own parental approach (Nicholson, Howard, and Borkowski 2008). Within this theory, consequently, men who had a distant father will be distant themselves as a father and those men with good fathers are predicted to be good fathers. It is important to note that men might not completely model their fathers’ behaviors and attitudes and instead may select certain attributes of the fathers to develop their own fathering style (Masciadrelli, Pleck, & Stueve, 2006).

The compensatory hypothesis states men attempt to offset their childhood experiences of an unavailable or unsupportive father by engaging in high levels of involvement with their child in order to makeup for their childhood (Sagi, 1982). Men with a perceived lack of a positive fatherly role model will, therefore, want to do things differently than their fathers did in order to makeup for their own fathers’ shortcomings and deficiencies they perceived in their own childhood (Parke, 1995; Townsend 2002). Their attitudes and involvement are developed in opposition to early experiences with their own fathers. Men with uninvolved or absent fathers, Daly (2003) notes, may have a need to step up as a positive role model in response to the lack of
a role model they had growing up.

Consequently, Pleck (1997) suggests that if a man has a positive experience with his father, he is more likely to adapt his fathering style to that of modeling; conversely, if a man has a perceived negative experience with his father, compensation will more likely occur. Both Guzzo (2011) and Nicholson, Howard, and Borkowski (2008) found overall consistent results supporting the modeling hypothesis. While other literature, Pruett (1987), Radin (1988), Snarey (1993), found support for the compensation hypothesis. To complicate matters, however, additional research, Beaton, Doherty, & Rueter (2003) and Floyd & Morman (2000), supports the idea of a combination of the two hypotheses. The common thread with each of these hypotheses is the impact childhood experiences have on fathers. Attitudes and beliefs about parenting which fathers adopt are prone to be influenced by how their own fathers parented them (Daly, 1993; Krampe, 2003). This indicates the importance to ask participates about their experiences in childhood in order to gage the potential influence it had on the type of father they became. How fathers experience their own father, or in the absence of one, can teach them what role they need to play in their own child’s life and what they are responsible for with their own child’s development. With the influence of the upbringing, the next section will discuss the transition from being a man to a father.

**When a Man Becomes a Father**

Becoming a father has been characterized as one of the most definitive and dramatic stages of a man’s life (Carter, McGoldrick, & Petkov, 2011). Fatherhood has been marked as a roller coaster of sleep deprivation, stress, chores, and balancing schedules. Despite the probable and perhaps inevitable stress to come with fatherhood, a vast majority of men will become a father within their lifetime (Snarey, 1993). According to Blackenhorn (1995), fatherhood, “…is
society’s most important role for men…fatherhood, more than any other male activity, helps men to become good men…” (p. 25). It is essentially impossible to study fatherhood while ignoring the father’s identity as a man. Dowd (2000) supports this notion by stating, “Men’s identities as fathers do not exist in isolation from their identities as men” (p. 181). Transitioning from a man to a man who is now a father is dependent of each other. The role of fatherhood impacts his role as a man and the type of man he is impacts the type of father he becomes.

The type of father a man becomes is extremely complex and dependent on several factors. Fathering is thought of as a non-static practice in which a man’s fathering style is determined by his individual personality, socialization, and family history (Snarey, 1993). Snarey (1993) contends with the information provided in the above section that a man becomes the type of father he is based on modeling his own father’s child-rearing style or rejecting it. While Blackenhorn (1995) reports that the transition to fatherhood helps to social men away from an aggressive man to a more socially acceptable person with a sense of purpose. To add to the complexity, some have argued that the development from man to fatherhood is not a clear model (Dowd, 2000). With the variability in the research and the horizontal stressors discussed within The Expanded Family Life Cycle model scope, it will be imperative to discuss what this transition from man to man as a father was like for these participants. The following section explores the role of fathers and their feeling of accountability towards their child’s gender identity.

Fathers and Gender Identity

The role of fathers and its impact on their child’s gender identity is complex. Gender recognition usually emerges around age two years old and, consequently, this makes parents extremely influential on a child’s gender development due to the amount of exposure the child
has early on with his or her parents (Pleak, 2009). Much of the literature has discussed the impact fathers and mothers have on preventing and promoting transgender identity and gay or lesbian identities. The former is thought to be a more serious or extreme version of the latter and preventing gay or lesbian identities will help prevent a transgender identity (Bailey, 2003; Socarides, 1969, 1982). Thus, being gay or lesbian has been thought of as resulting in the child becoming transgender in some extreme cases. Therefore, some of the following literature will touch on fathers’ thoughts about the development of their children’s sexuality and gender identity as there is an interrelationship between the two (Hamilton and Armstrong, 2009; Pascoe, 2011).

Johnson (1963) reports that the father is, “the instrumental leader of the family as a whole represents the outside world to his children” (pp. 322-323). It is, therefore, the father’s role via internalizing a reciprocal role relationship that he socializes and teaches both his daughter and son gender conformity and gender role expectations for their respected gender (Johnson, 1963). Fathers process and participate in their child’s gender identity development differently than that of mothers. Fathers tend to reinforce stereotypical gender roles and boundaries more than mothers, especially when it comes to sons (Maccoby 1998; Marks, Lam, & McHale, 2009; Ruble, 1988). Several theorists, including Mischel (1966), a social learning theorist, emphasized this influence parents have on gender identity by father’s teaching his children via these stereotypical gender roles and boundaries how to genderize themselves properly. Mischel (1966) indicated that gender identity is developed by a reward system where fathers encourage gender roles through reinforcement and modeling. Fathers might reward their sons with their time while doing gender normative activities such as sporting events where fathers can both model their
maleness and also encourage their sons to engage in such activities as a way to promote their sons’ masculinity.

Much has been made about how fathers influence gender identity in a normative way. Often times when the child does not conform to sexual and gender roles and, subsequently, identities as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender, the fault is placed on the parents. The too much mother and not enough father conclusion has been a common theme within the literature for the causality of transgender identity, especially when it comes to the development of male to female transgender individuals (Nicolosi, 1991; Nicolosi & Nicolosi, 2012; Stroller, 1985; Zucker, 1990; Zucker & Bradley, 1995). Fathers are seen as absent, passive, and distant, while mothers are domineering, smothering, and overbearing. As discussed above, it is the father’s role to teach his son and daughter how to perform gender roles in a culturally normal way. If the father is not present or more passive and gives way for the mother to illustrate less stereotypical gender roles, the faulty parenting might result in the child identifying as transgender. Green (1987, 1995) postulates that the solution for not causing transgender identity is to teach parents that gender is unchangeable and increase the father’s involvement while he enforces stricter gender boundaries and rewards proper gender normative behavior. Though this conclusion of blaming the parents has come into question and sparked much criticism. Bolin’s (1988) research did not find that the transgender participants had overbearing mothers and absent fathers. In fact, some research has speculated that transgender individuals falsified their parental stories to match this common assumption in order to appear more like a true transgender person and perhaps help them solidify meeting criteria in order to obtain medical treatment (Denny & Roberts, 1997; Stone, 1991; Walworth, 1997).

Nevertheless, it is no surprise that with the emphasis in the research pointing to fathers as
the vessel for teaching children about gender roles, that fathers would develop a sense of responsibility for it, especially when it comes to their sons. Solebello & Elliot’s (2011) qualitative research interviewing 23 heterosexual fathers about their experience when talking to their children about their sexuality yielded some interesting findings about their desire for their child to not only identify as heterosexual, but also have a normative gender expression. As stated earlier how sexuality and gender identity are linked, the fathers in Solebello & Elliot’s (2011) study states that not only do fathers prefer their sons to be straight, but most believe that coaching their sons to have a masculine and \textit{proper} gender expression will better guarantee a heterosexual identity. When it comes to their son’s sexuality, these fathers do not just assume their son to be straight. Fathers often equate masculine gender display with heterosexuality (Martin, 2009). It appears fathers take a more active role in modeling and engaging in various strategies with their sons in order to craft, construct, and shape a more masculine and heterosexual identity (Kane 2006; Solebello & Elliot, 2011). Fathers are particularly invested in their son’s sexuality and gender development due to a sense that it is a reflection of their own. Fathers feel accountable for their son if he turns out to have a noncomforming gender or is not straight (Connell 1987, 1995; Kimmel, 1997; Marin, 2009; McGuffey, 2005; Solebello & Elliot, 2011). Parents have even been shown to report blaming themselves for their child’s homosexuality (Fields, 2001). These findings speak to the notion that masculinity is dominant and privileged and a homosexual son or a feminine one is devalued.

Solebello & Elliot (2011) also had fathers who have daughters (21 sons and 15 daughters) within this study. Even with the differences in gender, “Fathers of both sons and daughters construct and reinforce male sexual privilege and heterosexuality’s status as ‘natural’ and ‘right’ form of sexuality” (Solebello & Elliot, 2011, p. 298). It appears, however, that fathers do not
embrace the same accountability for their daughter’s sexuality and gender identity as they do sons. In fact, the idea of a having a lesbian daughter was much more accepting and daughters engaging a more varied gender expression was giving more leeway from fathers (Solebello & Elliot, 2011). Early childhood tomboyish behavior of girls often gets a pass and is tolerated by with parents (Freedman, Tasker, & di Ceglie, 2002). Some literature (Steensma, Biemond, de Boer, & Cohen-Kettnis, 2010; Thorne, 1994), however, reports this leeway period for daughters might be short lived and the desire for girls to act in a gender conforming way may soon develop for parents. Thorne (1994) reports that the times when parents allow more inclusive gender roles and expressions for their daughters “…begins to tighten as girls approach adolescence and move into the heterosexualized gender system of teens and adults” (p. 17). Additionally, as adolescence approaches, so does puberty and the social stigmatization of outside groups to conform to society standards of gender (Steensma, Biemond, de Boer, & Cohen-Kettnis, 2010). Having a gender identity that is not matched to that of the natal sex can generate stress within the family, as seen via The Family Life Cycle and model of adjustment. This stress can also be enhanced due to the prospections and attitudes of the outside world. The transgender child can be ostracized by others and in exchange, so can the father. This experience of shame is discussed in the following section.

Social and Secondary Stigma

Research has explored the social stigma experienced by marginalized groups (Bailey, 1999; Friedman, 1999). Goffman (1963) defines social stigma as “…an attribute that is deeply discrediting…” (p. 3). What is deemed as stigmatizing is confined to social rules and norms and often disqualifies individuals from full social acceptance and can leave the individual or group feeling “not quite human” (Goffman, 1963, p. 5). It is unfortunately no surprise that people who

Jones et al. (1984) lists six dimensions of social stigma that can impact the severity: concealability, course, disruptiveness, aesthetic quality, origin, and peril. Concealability is the notion of how hidden or obvious a person’s discrediting attribute can be. Jones et al. (1984) argues that the more masked the attribute is, the less the social stigma will be. Connecting this to someone who identifies as transgender, the ability to conceal their gender identity can be difficult for most. Beauchamp (2009) reports that the ability to cloak a transgender identity can be of great discourse and fully erasing one’s gender identity history is impossible due to the difficulty some have with changing of birth marker on legal documents and struggle to obtain medical interventions to alter one’s appearance. Therefore, some people who identify as transgender might be labeled as “a man in a dress” by society. Even those individuals who are able to live stealth, where one’s transgender identity is not known or evident and the person is able to pass as their true gender, not having the correct documentation to reflect their gender or having relatives or other individuals who reveal their natal sex can still occur (Edelman, 2009).

The second dimension, discourse, refers to how the characteristic progresses and if it goes away. Jones et al. (1984) argues that, like being transgender, the more an attribute is irreversible and continues to progress, the more negative attitudes society will bestow upon it. The third dimension is disruptiveness, or the adverse impact the characteristic has on the person’s interpersonal interactions. Having a fairly rigid gender dichotomy in most societies, those who do not conform to the binary gender construct will experience problematic and
disruptive interpersonal interactions (Gainor, 2000). Aesthetic refers to how attractive or
disgusting society perceives the attribute to be. So often individuals who identify as transgender
are thought of as disgusting and immoral and not having a lot of positive qualities in society
(Grossman, D'Augelli, Salter, & Hubbard, 2006; Meyer, 2012; Stotzer, 2008). The fifth
dimension is origin. Which asks the question where did this attribute come from? Jones et al.
(1984) suggests that if it is perceived that someone caused the negative attribute, they will be
more stigmatized.

There is no scientific consensus for a single origin pathway for what causes someone to
identify as transgender (Bockting & Coleman, 1992). Despite not knowing the origin of
transgender identity, research suggestions that people who identity as transgender have been long
thought of as not having an innate origin for their gender identity and, instead, are simply
deceiving themselves, pretending to be something they are not, choosing to not live as their natal
sex, and even being a fraud (Raymond, 1979; Flynn, 2006). These long-lived thoughts by some
will contribute to more negative attitudes towards transgender people because people see them as
the cause of their gender identity and, therefore, more harshly stigmatize them. Lastly, peril is
the perception of how dangerous or threatening the characteristic is. The perceived danger can be
either a physical one or a fear of being uncomfortable or susceptible of the characteristic.
As North Carolina and other states debate what anatomical characteristics someone needs to
have in order to enter one bathroom versus another, it highlights the physical threat some
associate with transgender people. Much of the debate about allowing transgender people to go
into the bathroom that reflects their true self has been marked by the stigma that transgender
people are sexual predators and merely wanting to use bathrooms for sexual assaults (Erickson-
Schroth & Jacobs, 2017); despite the fact that transgender people are much more likely to be
assaulted in bathrooms than cisgender individuals (Herman, 2013). Transgender people are also stigmatized due to supposed threat to vulnerability and being comfortable as they, “evoke negative reactions because they violate the widespread assumption that sex and gender are ‘naturally’ dichotomous” (Norton, & Herek, 2013, p. 750).

By examining the six social stigmatizing dimensions laid out by Jones et al. (1984), it is certainly reasonable to see that people who identify as transgender are severely stigmatized. Falk (2001) and Remafedi (1987) both note the unfortunate reality that transgender children are often subjected to considerable stigma. It is important to convey that social stigma affects not only transgender people, but their families as well. The process by which a person is stigmatized by virtue of association with another stigmatized individual has been referred to as “secondary stigma” (Halter, 2008) or “courtesy stigma” (Goffman, 1963) or “associative stigma” (Mehta & Farina, 1988). Once a member of the family has disclosed their gender identity, “There is a sense of isolation as family members struggle with who to trust, coupled with an equally frightening fear of exposure that others will find out. In addition to their own shock of discovery, they soon realize that their loved one will be stigmatized…” (Lev, 2004, p. 284). These fathers, therefore, will not only need to process their own potential stigma of their child, but also the secondary stigma attached to having a child who identifies as transgender.

Research that has compared levels of secondary stigma between parents of sexual minorities and transgender children has found that not only is the secondary stigmatization greater for the parent with a transgender child, but also is much more prolonged and complex (Pearlman, 2006). According to Israel (2006), the stigma attached to the disclosure of a transgender child can be so great that parents sometimes react with, “Why can’t you just be gay?” (p. 52). Parents unable move from the stigma associated with their transgender child end
up continuing to struggle with who and how to obtain support from and even, “bolster their view that transsexuality is wrong for their child” (Wren, 2002, p. 389). In addition, parents of transgender children may have their secondary stigmatization manifest into isolation and feelings of shame and isolation (Menvielle, Tuerk, & Jellinek, 2002). With the severity of social stigma attached to their child and then, consequently, imposed on them as fathers, it will be important to explore how these fathers respond to the secondary stigma they incur. Believing that the burden of establishing their child’s gender identity can be a source of stress for fathers. This can be especially true if the child’s gender identity does not develop in correspondence with their natal sex and secondary stigma emerges. Due to the stressful nature, I will highlight from the scholarly literature how men seek psychological help.

**Help Seeking Behaviors in Men**

The stereotype of men refusing to ask for directions when they are lost or the saying boys don’t cry are popular ways men and masculinity are characterized in society. Empirically men are less likely than their female counterparts to seek professional help for various issues such as depression, substance dependency, and stressful life events even when men are experiencing comparable levels of distress (Andrews, Issakidis, Carter, 2001; Husaini, Moore, & Cain, 1994; Kessler, Brown, & Broman, 1981; McKay, Rutherford, Cacciola, Kabasakalian-McKay, & Alterman, 1996; Weissman & Klerman, 1997). Cross culturally, the likelihood of men seeking psychological help decreases when they identify as a non-European American man (Chandra, Scott, Jaycox, Meredith, Tanielian, & Burnam, 2009; Shin, 2002; Solberg, Ritsma, Davis, & Tata, 1994). For example, when it comes to depressive symptoms amongst Latino immigrant men, Cabassa’s (2007) research found that these men were more likely to utilize help of family members and/or spirituality than psychological services.
This discouragement of help seeking behaviors seen disproportionally with men is because of its perceived association it has with femininity. Masculinity is dominant and privileged, while femininity is devalued (Pascoe, 2011). Traditional masculinity includes, but is not limited to the following characteristics: power, dominance, independence, control, being stoic, and self-sufficiency (Mahalik et al., 2003; Möller-Leimkühler, 2002). Often these characteristics are seen as inconsistent with help seeking behaviors and feminine. Seeking help is often thought of in a negative light for men due to the vulnerability and weakness associated with it (Pederson & Vogel, 2007). Instead, the adage is that real men can solve their own problems on their own and weaker man cannot solve their problems continues to be reinforced. Men get these cues of what is appropriate by looking towards the larger societal context. Overall there is a public stigma (i.e., what society views as negative) associated with men seeking help, especially psychological help, and, therefore, men are more likely to internalize this public stigma than woman and convert it to their own self-stigma (Corrigan, 2004; Vogel, Wade, & Hackler, 2007). Not only do men get these images that seeking help is weak or inferior, they actually start to believe it themselves and avoid behaviors or activities connected with obtaining help outside themselves.

Traditional counseling, consequently, is one such activity men avoid due to the perceived threat it has on a man’s sense of masculinity (Schaub & Williams, 2007). Allocating control, being vulnerable, and talking about feelings in order to solve a problem that one cannot resolve on their own can result in feelings of emasculation. Encouraging men to obtain mental health counseling can be a “hard sell,” (Brooks, 1998, p. 73). Therefore, while changes to culture take time, the literature has developed several suggestions to help get men through the therapy door and asking for help that can be addressed more immediately. According to Vogel,
Heimerdinger-Edwards, Hammer, & Hubbard (2011), having space on a therapist’s website acknowledging the stigma and providing additional information combatting the negative messages accompanying men seeking counseling. The use of cognitive therapy (Mahalik, 2001), bibliotherapy (Heesacker & Prichard, 1992), male-focused brochures about therapy (Hammer & Vogel, 2010), and incorporating story-telling, journals, and metaphors (Johnson, 2001) have been identified as ways to better engage men in psychological treatment. Several researchers also saw the value in men’s group counseling as it offers a space for men to reciprocate help and normalize the overall therapeutic process and group members’ issues (Andronico, 1996; Rabinowitz, 2001; Robertson, 2001; Vogel, Heimerdinger-Edwards, Hammer, & Hubbard, 2011). With traditional counseling often seen as a threat to a man’s masculinity and, therefore, under-utilized, discussing how these fathers within this study cope with the stresses of this life event will be instrumental in learning how counselors can intervene.

**Conclusion**

Several conclusions can be made from the literature exploring the relationship and impact transgender children have within the family system. Particular conclusions, however, pertaining to the experience of fathers who have transgender is limited and studies exploring only the voices of the fathers with transgender children are nonexistent. Gender identity development, nevertheless, is of special interest to fathers. The literature discussed above focuses on fathers’ need to police children’s gender roles with more traditional rigor than mothers and feel more accountable and responsible for the development of gender norms, especially with their sons.

When gender does not match that of the child’s natal sex, secondary stigma and ambiguous loss occurs and fathers appear to leave the conversation of the child’s transgender identity up the mothers’ discretion. Stress associated with this life event has been seen to
manifest into several horizontal and vertical stressors, as stated in the Family Life Cycle. Men coping with these stresses, however, are not likely to seek out help, especially when it comes to psychological help.

As stated in Chapter 1, the purpose of this study is to fill in the gap within the literature by giving fathers of transgender children a voice to discuss their experiences. The scholarly literature reviewed above has helped to shape the type of method design to use in order to collect these voices. The following chapter will discuss the methodology of the study.
CHAPTER 3: METHODS

In following chapter, I present the narrative design of my qualitative research study to investigate how fathers with transgender children make meaning of their experiences. A rationale for using a qualitative research design to answer my research questions is discussed within the framework of my researcher worldview. An outline of procedures including participants, demographic questionnaire, recruitment strategies, data collection, screening process, sample size, interview questions, and data analysis will be presented. In addition, a layout of how I will work to obtain trustworthiness and rigor will be discussed.

Researcher Worldview

My decision to use qualitative methodology is influenced by my worldview as a researcher. This worldview consists of a constructivist paradigm (Ponterotto, 2005), which holds that reality is constructed within the mind of the individual (Creswell, 2007; Ponterotto, 2005). Individuals’ construct and interpretations of experiences influence their choices and actions (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2002). A constructivist paradigm “provides the primary foundation and anchor for qualitative research methods” (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 129). I too look towards this paradigm as the foundation of my worldview of this study. I align with this worldview because I believe these participants’ realities are relative to the individual and not based on a single external entity (Ponterotto, 2005). The individual might not readily know the meaning of these perceptions and choices. It is, therefore, my role as the researcher to collaborate with the participant via an interactive dialogue to co-construct their interpretations (Ponterotto, 2005). The emphasis of a constructivist paradigm in research is to understand the participants’ lived experience from their day-to-day point of view (Schwandt, 1994, 2000). This emphasis aligns
with my goal of this study as I am seeking to understand the lived experience of fathers who have children who identify as transgender and can do so by studying these men’s narratives.

**Research Design: Narrative Research**

Hearing from these men in their own voice will be a critical factor for learning about their experience. Obtaining and analyzing their narratives will help to achieve this study’s purpose. Producing a universal and comprehensive definition of narrative research is difficult due to the variety of meanings several disciples bestow upon it (Riessman, 2008). In its simplest form, nevertheless, narrative research captures and analyzes life stories (Webster & Mertova, 2007). The premise of narrative research is that individuals live and understand their lives in a story format by connecting events with beginning, middle, and end points (Sarbin, 1986). It is, therefore, within the confines of narrative research that these narratives are uniquely considered both the method as well as the phenomenon of the study (Clandinin, 2007; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

According to Clandinin & Connelly (2000), the best way to represent and understand participants’ experience is through the use of narratives. Because I seek through this to explore the stories of fathers with transgender children using a constructivist paradigm lens, a narrative research design appeared appropriate and logical. Narrative will allow participants to discuss how they construct their own experiences and explore areas of oppression and power. Furthermore, due to the lack of research, as reported earlier, narrative methodology helps to fill in vital gaps within this subject matter. Qualitative research, and therefore narrative methodology, is an indicative approach in which knowledge can be built when there is an absence of sufficient empirical research (Merriam, 2002). This type of methodology, consequently, assists in developing a base of knowledge that can then be expanded in future
research studies. The following research questions will help to guide the exploration of these men’s experiences within the parameters of qualitative research.

**Research Questions**

Review of the existing research on fathers of transgender children assisted me in developing the following important questions that I will address in this study. My questions are:

1. What are these men’s perceptions of their experience as fathers?
2. How do these fathers describe their experience as fathers raising a child who identifies as transgender?
3. What meaning do these fathers associate and derive from this experience having a transgender child?

**Procedures for Data Collection and Analysis**

Ways of conducting this study will be outlined in the following sections. It will be important to develop this blueprint to guide the type of participants that will be apart of this study, how data will be collected and analyzed, and how the integrity of the study will be maintained.

**Pilot Study**

A pilot study has two different uses in social sciences research. It acts as both a trial run in preparation for the actual study and also helps researchers try out research instruments (Baker, 1994; Polit, Beck, & Hungler, 2001). Utilizing a pilot study has several advantages. These advantages include: identifying potential research procedure issues, conducting provisional testing of data collection, instruments, and recruitment strategies, and determining the cultural and political appropriateness of research context (Muoio, Wolcott, & Seigel, 1995; Kim, 2011; Prescott & Soeken, 1989; van Teijlingen and Hundley, 2002). Practicing the methods of a study allows for researchers to catch potential issues and sculpt the project based on feedback obtained.
Pilot studies can be an important first step for studies as it can improve the overall study. Simply put, “Do not take the risk. Pilot test first” (De Vaus, 1993, p. 54).

Because of the benefits listed above, a pilot study was completed for this major study. A father originally from Europe, but now living in the south, who has a transgender child was contacted via social media and asked if he would participate in a pilot study. The participant, with the pseudonym of George, agreed to participate. George was given an electronic version of the demographic questions and asked for feedback about the culturally appropriate wording and clarity of the questions. George reported having a clear understanding of the questions and did not find any of the wording or language offensive. No changes were made to the demographic form.

George also completed each of the three interviews. The interview protocol was done by following the guidelines, discussed in sections below, in order to see if this could be replicated for the full-scale study. George was asked to not only answer the interview questions, but also give his feedback about the questions asked and the overall protocol. George had no feedback about the list of questions for the first interview. For the second interview, George thought the questions, “What ways do you cope with these challenges?” and “How have you obtained help?” to be redundant questions. The latter question was, therefore, removed from the interview protocol of the second interview. For the third interview, he reported the questions were understandable and thought provoking, but thought these were much tougher questions. George reported that the two prior interviews were about mostly reporting events, but the third interview asked him to draw meaning and this was more difficult for him. He believed that it might be beneficial to future participants to have this difference in types of questions emphasized so that he was in a more analytical mindset for the third interview. I applied this feedback to the
interview protocol for the major study and emphasized the types of questions the third interview would have in order to better prepare participants for this experience.

Piloting this study helped to not only improve interview protocol, it also allowed me to practice how to conduct an interview over the phone and test recording instruments to make sure they would adequately record the interviews. This piloting increased my confidence because I had prior experience conducting the interview protocols and had more assurance that the interview questions were a good measure. This practice helped to remind myself that I am the interview with these fathers, not their therapist. While interviewing George, there were times when I wanted to interject or confront ideas, but I quickly realized that was not my role. It was helpful to have the initial experience so that I was aware of this urge and avoid any counseling in the interviews. Piloting also allowed me to assess the feasibility of this full-scale study and obtain preliminary data. It got me more comfortable with recruiting participants via social media and reaching out to potential participants I did not know. Though George’s information was very valuable, his responses were not analyzed for this study. His suggestions for changes to interview questions and protocol were implemented for the major study. After the completion of the pilot study and with Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, I began to recruit the participants for the full-scale study.

**Participants**

Participants were chosen for this study by using purposeful sampling strategies. Because I sought to explore and understand the lived experience fathers of transgender children, it was vital that my sample reflect these demographics. Criterion sampling, therefore, was implemented. According to Patton (2002), criterion sampling is seeking “all cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance” (p. 238). Narrowing the scope of participants to
meet certain criterion, which will be discussed in the next section, focuses the study on this particular population and their lived experienced. Using criterion sampling, consequently, helps to gather more detailed information when researchers are trying to describe a specific groups’ experiential phenomenon (Collingridge, 2008). The characteristics of each of these men were obtained in order to better assess their experience and ensure they met the specified criteria. After the completion of the pilot study and upon Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, I began to recruit the participants for the full-scale study.

Recruitment

Obtaining male participates has been historically difficult to recruit in research studies (Daly, 1993). In addition, American Psychological Association (2013) reports the prevalence of natal adult males with gender dysphoria ranges from only 0.005% to 0.014% and 0.02% to 0.003% of natal adult females of the United States population. With such a small prevalence rate, finding participants single handily who meet the criteria for this sample may be quite challenging and more like finding a needle in a haystack. As discussed above, potential participants might be stigmatized and not readily wish to discuss their experience in fear of exposure. Heckathorn (1997) notes that fathers of transgender children are considered as a hidden population because there are, “no sampling frame exists, so the size and boundaries of the population are unknown; and second, there exist strong privacy concerns, because membership involves stigmatized or illegal behavior” (p. 174). The best recruitment approach for hidden populations is snowball sampling (Goodman, 1961). Snowball sampling was, therefore, used to recruit participants. In snowball sampling, participants are asked by the researcher to provide information to help identify other potential participants (Patton, 2002). Even if the participant is not able to identity other members who meet the criteria for the study, passing on the study’s
information as a referral within their own communities can potentially lead to gaining more participants (Patton, 2002). This use of snowball sampling was helpful in leading to a sufficient sample to study.

To begin the snowball recruitment, I first contacted people who I have met at transgender themed conferences and asked them to forward a recruitment email to people who might be able to participate in this study. I also utilized support groups for parents who have transgender children on social media. I obtained permission from the administrator of each group to post my information on their walls. I also posted this information on my social media pages and asked members to please share the information with people they know.

Computer-mediated communication, such as YouTube, has become a popular medium for those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender to express themselves and connect with others (Green, Bobrowicz, & Ang, 2015). I suspected YouTube would be a potential source for recruitment as there have been a number of YouTubers who identify as transgender who have shared their stories about lives and their transition and have developed a large following of fellow transgender and gender non-conforming people. I contacted these individuals and asked if they would be willing to share my information with their followers. Several did forward my information.

Instructors and professors from several universities and college in Counselor Education, Counselor Psychology, Psychology, and Sociology programs were emailed a forwarding recruitment email and asked to forward it to students and/or individuals they believe might be interested in participating in the study. This email was also sent to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) organizations and support groups around the United States. Once a
participant was identified, he was evaluated to ensure he met the eligibility criteria, which will be
discussed below.

Eligibility/Screening Questions to Participate in Research Project

Revisiting the notion of criterion sampling, I have four criteria that each participant had
to answer “yes” to in order to be interviewed. They were as followed:

1. Are you over 18 years old?
2. Are you able to speak and understand English?
3. Are you the father of a child who identifies as transgender?
4. Do you live in the southern region of the United States of America (Defined as Alabama,
   Arkansas, Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana,
   Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas,
   Virginia, and West Virginia)?

The list of states within the southern region of the United States of America, mentioned
above, is defined by the Census Bureau Regions and Divisions (2015, February 9). Electing to
include only participants who reside in the southern region of the United States was an important
distinction due to potential cultural attitudes about gender norms that might not be as prevalent in
other parts of the country. Also, the current political climate within the southern region has
called for discriminatory legislation attempting to make it illegal for a transgender individual to
use the bathroom that corresponds with their gender identity. These nicknamed “Bathroom Bills”
have been introduced in Alabama, Florida, Kentucky, North Carolina, South Carolina,
Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia (Harress, 2017; Sanchez, 2017; Snyder, 2017). Much attention
has been paid to North Carolina’s bathroom bill, H2 Bill. This outpouring of media attention
surrounding this bill has created a mass civil liberty debate (Gordon, Price, & Peralta, 2016).
Southern states have enacted or proposed Religious Freedom Bills or Religious Freedom Reformation Acts (RFRA) in Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia (NCSL, 2015; Sydell, 2017; Tan, 2016; Torres, 2017; Villarreal, 2017) These pieces of legislation discriminate LGBT individuals by allowing schools, religious groups, and businesses the ability to refuse services, participation in school or religious activities, or adoption to LGBT people due to religious objections. Also, legislation to make discrimination against LGBT individuals illegal in the south has been met with resistance. In Houston, Texas, voters rejected a bill, the Houston Equal Rights Ordinance (HERO), which would make it illegal to discriminate against someone based on their sexual orientation and gender identity and allow those to use restroom facilities that corresponded with their gender (Moyer, 2015). Much like the North Carolina H2 Bill, HERO was met with, “no men in women’s bathrooms” propaganda attempting to illicit fear that people would now be in danger in bathrooms if this bill passed due to male predators using this legislation as a loophole to attack women and girls in bathrooms (Miller et al., 2017, p. 1); despite the fact that transgender people are much more likely to be assaulted in bathrooms than cisgender individuals (Herman, 2013).

HERO also received criticism for going against traditional gender roles (Morris & Driessen, 2015). A number of studies have indicated that areas of the southern region are more likely to support a more traditional concept of gender roles for men and women (Bolzendahl & Myers, 2004; Carter & Borch, 2005; Eldridge, Mack, & Swank, 2006; Konrad & Harris, 2002; Rice & Coates, 1995; Twenge, 1997). Transgender individuals are often thought to be in violation of gender norms and, therefore, not adhering to these culturally derived expectations. This likely produces more prejudice for transgender people in comparison to other parts of the
United States (Gerhardstein & Anderson 2010). The potential socio-cultural influence within the southern United States also impacts the vertical stressors of the participants that are not as readily witnessed in other areas of the country. McGoldrick, Carter, & Garcia-Preto, (2011) discuss how there is stress of living somewhere at a given time and, “…is to an extent marked by its members’ experience” (p. 9). Participants were, therefore, asked about potential influences living in the southern region of the United States had on their experiences as a father of a transgender child. After determining the eligibility of the participants, a demographic questionnaire was provided to each father.

**Demographic Questions**

Gathering demographic information was obtained verbally or electronically prior to the first round of interview questions. The list of demographic questions can be found in Interview Guide (see Appendix D). The reasoning for gathering this information was to provide a contextual overview of each participant and to identify preferred pronouns and gender identities for each participant’s child so that I can respectfully discuss their children in the way they identify. It was very important to me not to misgender any of their children.

In lieu of checking boxes and circling predetermined responses, I chose to have only blank, fill-in responses for the demographic questions. With all of the different terminology one can identity as, I wanted to be respectful and empower participants to identify themselves as they choose, which included them choosing a pseudonym name for themselves and their child for this study. Some fathers had their child pick his/her own pseudonym name and reported his child’s choice to me. According to Ferendez et al. (2016), this approach of fill-in the blank responses, “…respects that a set of mutually exclusive categories cannot always faithfully represent a respondent’s race, ethnicity, gender, etc.” (p. 9). As stated above, the demographic questions
were piloted and no changes were made at the recommendation of George. The purpose of piloting the demographic questions was to avoid any potentially perceived offensive questions or wording and identify any confusing language or questions. The demographic information obtained and reasoning for the sample size are each outlined below.

**Sample**

Narrative research is designed to explore and understand a phenomenon extensively. This designation for a more in-depth analysis, therefore, calls for fewer participants than other types of methodology (Creswell, 1998; 2012). According to Creswell (2012), many narrative studies have only had one to two participants. I strived to reach saturation, in which information begins to be repeated by participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). My goal ultimately as the researcher was to obtain a sufficient sample of participants that yielded a thorough exploration of this phenomenon with rich descriptive data.

Six participants were interviewed. Several fathers contacted me, but these six men were chosen because they met all the criteria needed and were able to complete the interviews in a timely manner. Five of the participants identified as White. One participant reported identifying as Hispanic/White. All participants were heterosexual and cisgender men. All currently live in the southern region of the United States. Participants’ ages ranged from 48-54-years-old. Three participants reported earning a Bachelor’s degree, one reported having some college, one obtained a Master’s degree, and one has a high school degree. The range of the age when the participants’ children disclosed his/her transgender identity was 13-16-years-old. The range of the children’s current age was 15-28-years-old. Three participants had a child who identified as MTF and three had a child who identified as FTM. Each participant indicated he was the biological father of his child. Three of the participants reported currently being in a romantic
relationship with the child’s mother. While the other three reported being married to the child’s mother at one point, but reported all three had since divorced. Participants stated a variety of religious/spiritual orientations that have been outlined in each of their profiles presented their respective chapters. The process of collecting data from these participants is discussed in the next section.

**Interview Protocol**

When a potential participant contacted me, I replied to his inquiry by emailing him the recruitment email with the informed consent attached to the same email. Fathers’ participation implied their voluntary consent to participate in the research. A date and time for the first interview was scheduled via email and the demographic questionnaire was also sent electronically. Four of the fathers filled the demographic questions out electronically. Two had me collect it over the phone during one of the interviews. Participants had the opportunity to either conduct a phone interview or meet face-to-face at a location of the participants’ choosing. McDowell (2001) reports meeting in a comfortable place of the interviewee’s choice will help to create a more pleasant atmosphere that may reduce their tension. Due to location and scheduling, however, no father was able to meet in person. Only phone interviews were conducted. This first interview consisted of obtaining demographic information and answering the first section of interview questions. An attempt to schedule the second and third round of interview questions was also established during this initial data collection. Each interview was audio recorded. The interview protocol for each participant is outlined in the next section.

**Interview Questions**

Data were collected following Seidman’s (2006) phenomenological interviewing structure. A semi-structured interviewing process was used due to allowing each participant the
flexibility to answer questions as they wish while still covering the same context areas for all participants (Noor, 2008). This model consists of conducting a series of three separate in-depth interviews with each of the participants (Seidman, 2006). All three interviews had a specific focus. The first interview centered on the participants’ life history (Seidman, 2006). Participants were asked during this first interview to answer demographic information and discuss their life up to the present time within the context of fatherhood. The second interview focused on the details of their experience (Seidman, 2006). The purpose of this interview was for participants to concentrate on their present lived experience as it pertains to the topic. The third and final interview highlighted the participants’ reflection on the meaning (Seidman, 2006). This final interview asked participants to reflect on the meaning and understanding of their experience and the intellectual and emotion connections they developed between their work and life (Seidman, 2006). This interview model is appropriate and reasonable for this study because Seidman’s (2006) method of interviewing elicits the exploration of participants lived experience. Through semi-structured, open-ended questions, participants were able to share their stories and reconstruct their realities about being a father to a child who is identifies as transgender. This reconstruction piece reflected my constructivist worldview in that my role as the researcher is to collaborate with the participant via this interactive dialogue to co-construct his interpretations (Ponterotto, 2005).

Seidman (2006) recommends each interview to be spaced three days to a week apart. This time frame allowed for participants to have space to reflect upon and process the previous interview. Fathers were given the opportunity to elaborate on anything from the previous interview that they wished in the next interview. For the third interview, they were free to email or call me with any additional information. This interview time frame also allowed for the
interviews to remain connected to each other while not being too spaced out that information was readily forgotten. The time frame in between the interviews gave me the opportunity to listen to the previous interview before the next interview. This helped to refresh my memory on information shared and follow up with any clarifications I had. With the exception of one participant whose third interview was rescheduled 14 days after his second interview due to scheduling constraints, each participant was interviewed within the three days to a week apart timeframe.

Seidman (2006) also recommends each interview lasting between 60-90 minutes. The first interview ranged from 40-82 minutes with an average of 55 minutes. The second interview ranged from 33-78 minutes with an average of 65 minutes. The third interview ranged from 30-80 minutes with an average of 45 minutes. Some fathers were more concise in their story, while others were longer winded and elaborated more on each question. Once participants answered the following questions outlined above, their results were then analyzed using the below data analysis structure.

**Data Analysis**

Data analysis followed Hycner’s (1985) 14-step phenomenological analysis procedure. These 14 steps are:

1. Transcription
2. Bracketing and Phenomenological Reduction
3. Listening to the interview for a sense of the whole
4. Delineating units of general meaning
5. Delineating units of meaning relevant to the research question
6. Training independent judges to verify the units of relevant meaning
7. Eliminating redundancies
8. Clustering units of relevant meaning
9. Determining themes from clusters of meaning
10. Writing a summary of each individual interview
11. Return to the participant with the summary and themes
12. Identifying general and unique themes for all the interviews
13. Contextualization of themes
14. Composite Summary

I digitally recorded the audio of each interview and had them transcribed verbatim by a hired transcriber. The transcriptions were then used to bracket information and complete the step-by-step directions above. The step to return the summary and themes to participants was not done due to the IRB mandate that not data be connected to the participant directly. Step six was also not completed due to the inability to obtain trained, independent judges to verify the units of relevant meaning because of time and resources. Data were presented by crafting profiles of each participant. This process allowed the interviews and interpretation to take on a narrative form (Seidman, 2006). Excerpts for each participant were chosen based on those that were the most illustrative and representative of my research questions and the emerging themes. Profiles presented in combination of all three interviews in a chronological fashion. This organization allowed readers to map the participants’ lived experiences from the beginning, middle, to the present time. These profiles were also presented in participants’ own words to empower their stories and to better connect the reader to the narrative (Seidman, 2006). It was imperative to develop a plan to ensure the rigor and integrity of these six participants’ data were maintained. The following section will discuss ways in which trustworthiness was achieved.
Trustworthiness of Qualitative Research

Rigor must be established in qualitative research. Although the idea of rigor has been conceptualized in several ways, Lincoln & Guba (1985) discusses rigor in the form of trustworthiness. Trustworthiness is defined as closely and accurately reflecting and presenting the meanings as described by the participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Considered the validity within qualitative research, trustworthiness does not develop naturally within the research process and, therefore, following criteria to establish this is needed (Padgett, 1998). Lincoln and Guba (1985) established the following four constructs as criteria of trustworthiness: credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. These constructs were embedded into this study and provided structure for optimizing its validity.

Credibility

Credibility is identified as the internal validity construct of trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004). This construct seeks to ensure that a study measures what it is actually intended on studying (Lietz, Larger, & Furman, 2006; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To promote credibility, Lincoln & Guba (1985) reported the following provisions: triangulation, peer debriefing and member-checking.

Triangulation is a, “cross-checking of data and interpretations through the use of multiple sources and/or data collection techniques, as well as different investigators” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 109). During this process, I discussed the data with my academic advisor and had a further discussion about the data with my committee as well. Also, there was a cross analysis amongst the three interviews. Peer debriefing sessions were instrumental to further develop this study and help narrow my vision of it. I consulted with my committee and other researchers who are familiar with either the subject matter or the methodology. As mentioned earlier in this paper,
I elicited the help from a father not directly associated with this study to help pilot the demographic questions and interview protocol. Not only did debriefing with multiple sources help establish the direction and next steps for this study, but also this process was also cathartic for me (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This emotional release was very beneficial to lower my stress and feelings of being overwhelmed as I work towards this study’s completion.

**Dependability**

Dependability addresses the issue of reliability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004). Essentially, this refers to the concept that similar results would be obtained if this work were repeated (Shenton, 2004). Researchers’ thoughts and beliefs may both assist and hinder the process of co-constructing meanings (Gullemin & Gillam, 2004; Shenton, 2004). It is, therefore, imperative that I acknowledged my thoughts and beliefs during this process. This can be done through the process of reflexivity in which researchers deconstruct their own thoughts and beliefs that might be biasing the research (Shenton, 2004). I consistently wrote in a reflective journal about my potential biases and had a continuous dialogue about my thoughts and beliefs with my committee members. Along with reflexivity, the notion of upholding participants’ confidentiality is also vital to dependability (Shenton, 2004). Pseudonyms were used and all ethical procedures outlined in the informed consent were followed. All hard copy information was stored securely in a locked file cabinet and electronic documentation was stored on a password protected computer that was accessed only by myself. Lastly, the details of the study’s procedures and data analysis were thoroughly discussed previously in this chapter in order for future researchers to repeat similar work.

**Transferability**
Transferability is defined as the external validity or generalizability construct within qualitative research (Shenton, 2004). The intent of this construct is to allow other researchers the ability to judge to what extent the results can be applied to other situations (Merriam, 2002). Rich, thick description of the details of the study enhances transferability (Wolcott, 2008). I provided extensive descriptions of the participants’ demographics and how they presented during the interviews to enhance the transferability. I reported extensive narratives of participants’ responses to help provide evidence to support my data analysis and allowed readers to determine the amount of degree to which the analysis can be discerned to other contexts. Being transparent and explicit about the method of data collection and its analysis also acted as a guideline for others to replicate the study.

**Confirmability**

Confirmability refers to the degree to which the results can be confirmed or corroborated by others (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004). This objectivity calls for the researcher to recognize the shortcomings of the study and discuss the details of it to allow others to evaluate the integrity of the research (Shenton, 2004). There are a number of strategies for enhancing confirmability. I kept detailed records of any transcriptions, emails, memos, journal entries, and notes associated with this study as an audit trail (Charmaz, 2006). Extensively detailing the procedures was completed in order to demonstrate the study followed specific protocol and was within the confines of the IRB and American Counselor Association’s (ACA, 2014) ethical standards. A discussion of limitations was accessed to evaluate the shortcomings of the study and discussed in Chapter 1 and further in section below. Lastly, confirmability also denotes the admission of researchers’ beliefs and assumptions during the process of the study (Shenton,
2004). Consistently assessing my beliefs and assumptions in written journal entries and verbal discussions with committee members was completed to monitor and address my biases.

Conclusion

In this chapter I discussed the methodological design that was used to examine and better understand the experiences of fathers who have transgender children. Choosing the narrative design was based on the rationale presented above as sufficient way to obtain firsthand life experiences of these men. The literature review in Chapter 2 also helped to justify this means of data inquiry. The next chapters will present the results of each man’s experience as a father of a transgender child by means of crafting profiles. Each profile will begin with a description of the fathers’ demographic information and my own personal commentary on my experience with them. The rationale behind adding my own thoughts about each father is to add to the richness of the description and hopefully paint a fuller picture of the interview process as I experienced it.
CHAPTER 4

“I just walk around wanting to punch everybody.”

Clyde’s Story

Clyde is 45-years-old, White, heterosexual, married to the mother of his MTF child, Bonnie. He reports Bonnie is his biological child. Clyde reported he identifies, “...as Christian. Just for your personal understanding of that, we identify more as probably believing in God and Christ in terms of, "Love thy neighbor as thyself," that sort of thing. Organized religion has us pretty well turned off at the moment. That's essentially because we're parents of a trans child.” He also has completed some college. He discovered his child, who uses the pronouns of she/her, was transgender at around the age of 13-years-old. Clyde’s daughter is currently 15-years-old.

Clyde contacted me directly after seeing my post. He was the only father in this study who was not referred by a third party. In initial emails, Clyde reports, “I'm long-winded and highly opinionated.” Clyde appeared to be very willing to answer any and all questions. True to his initial email statements, he did appear long-winded and highly opinionated. All interviews were done over the phone. It was rather easy to build rapport with him.

The Fatherhood Experience

I'm one of the lucky ones in truth. I was born to a set of very loving parents who, up until my father's death, were together. He was 42 when I was born. He was born in '27. He was 17 when World War II happened. He served in World War II, so he's a part of that greatest generation that was not what you would call fond of emotions. My father was a poet. Finding his poems one day really educated me a lot about the man he was. In our personal interactions, he never withheld saying things like, "I love you."
We spent a lot of time together on the weekends when he wasn't working. We went camping a lot. We were always around one another. It was a very positive relationship. Tumultuous, sure, when I hit the teen years because there was, at that time, a pretty good gap. By the time I'm in my teens, he's in his mid to late 50's. He had gone from a very liberal graduate to being part of the John Birch Society. He'd gone through this transformation from liberal to conservative and I picked up on a lot of those conservative traits. The thing that stuck with me is there was a dedication to family, there was a dedication to my mother. My father was always there for me when I needed him.

I'm sure I did some things during my life that hurt him in different ways, but he was a very good father. I know one of the things in this day and age is to really talk about these paternal conflicts that happened, but my father and I just didn't have that. We had a pretty normal straight up relationship. I took from that many things: Responsibility to spouse, responsibility to children. My father went through a series of job changes over the years and all of them were persistent in making sure that he was providing for the family. He spent a lot of time with me directly and I'm sure that that had a significant effect on how I parented my children.

There's definitely all of the camping trips we took. There are incidents from those of him drinking around the fire with other dads while those boys and I just hung out and played. I remember Sunday mornings were pretty easy. We didn't go to church, so our Sunday mornings were the day that dad really got to sleep late, but he'd be up in time to watch the PBS morning movie on Sunday. We watched a lot of old films together. My father was not only a huge fan of Frank Sinatra movies, but Frank Sinatra music and also country music. My father really introduced me to old style country music with Mel Tillis and Merle Haggard and Conway Twitty
and these ancient men of The Oakridge Boys. And I remember being driven around in various vehicles. My father owned a host of different vehicles during my teen years there.

I didn't understand until much later that my mother, as she rose through the ranks in human resources at a university, ended up making a lot more money than my father did. So I always had a mother who was the primary breadwinner in our family. And the reason I think it's significant is that it was never a huge deal. The fact that my mother had essentially a corporate position where she had a higher earning potential than my father didn't matter because they were a team. It really changed the way I thought about feminism, the way I thought about women's rights, the way I thought about equality in America. I think ultimately that's going to lead to when we talk about the acceptance of my daughter as trans. You'll probably find that I'm not a typical male in terms of I am not inherently competitive with everybody. I have never been threatened by women in any capacity. I have always done my best to respect women. When I have worked with or for a woman I never felt like they got their job because they slept their way there, or because they had a large chest, or because they were somehow chosen because they were women rather than they were equal to the task at hand. In fact, I married a brilliant woman who's like 93 times smarter than I am and has always been the primary breadwinner in our family. I think there are some males for whom that is an issue.

When you asked me about specific memories of my father it's hard because they all come flooding back at the same time. But if you ask me about lessons learned from my father, I learned a lot about how to treat women from my father. I learned about how to dress and be confident as a man. I learned that neither one of those require you to be cruel or cold. I think all of that is kind of the legacy that I have from my dad. My father dressed well most of our lives even though he didn't buy Armani suits or anything like that, he was very conscientious about
wearing cufflinks, wearing a tie, and a sport jacket. He wore cologne, and he was fastidious about his shoes. He would pull me aside from time to time and say things he said, "You can learn a lot about an individual based on how they care for their shoes.

We embraced rules for what men did and didn't do. Those included treating women a certain way. He both demonstrated and there were times that he would reinforce this with words, but for the most part he's like, "You always open the door for a woman. You should always be dressed well. You should treat women with respect. You should stand when they enter the room. You should pull their chair out for them." Things like that. But the funny thing to me in looking back at the way he said these things is that he didn't say them like women were these incredibly fragile creatures. Everything was generated from a position of respect. Like, "This is how you respect the other sex." That being said, my father, I would say, that he was not a cruel man. I'm not sure that if I had turned out to be gay he would have been thrilled.

We had gay friends growing up. My hairdresser, talk about stereotypes, was a gay man. It was funny because we would have great conversations about, "Hey, what does your generation think about this in relation to the gay community?" It was just funny because I never saw gay people as kind of a character of other humans. I just felt like they were just different. They were still people. In the same way that a white man and a black man are fundamentally different because of the color in their skin and possibly culture, but they're the same because they're both humans. You slice them open, both of them bleed red. It never seemed to me to be an issue. I'm not sure, considering my father's somewhat conservative leanings, that if I'd turned out to be gay he would have handled that very well.

I think a lot of the things that shaped my ideas about fatherhood had to do with the fact that I saw a lot of marriages dissolve as I grew up. As a child of the 80's, it just seemed like
marriage was really cheap and it fell apart really fast. It was very temporary for a lot of people. I saw fathers who could easily have taken time to raise their children knowing that they created those children and chose not to. I'm not talking about fathers who couldn't physically be near their children because the mother chose to move out of state or whatever. Or the mother took the child and disappeared in some way. I'm talking about people who literally lived in the same town.

The fact that my father was present all the time, the fact that my father was there for hospital visits and for weekends, and for just everything, that's just what I expected out of fathers. I saw so many relationships just completely fall apart. I saw so many damaged kids throughout my life. I said, "That is absolutely not what I am going to do to my children," which I'm sure had a significant effect on how I treated Bonnie when she came through as transgender. My wife having worked at a University for many years and being very good friends with a student who was gay, she would tell us these horror stories about these kids who would come out to their parents as gay or as transgender. It just broke my heart. I don't know who could do this to a child that you birthed. I couldn't do that to a child of mine that committed a three-state murder spree.

It is so weird (the transition from being a man to a man who is now a father). There's no good way to prepare for it. I kept saying I'm not financial prepared. You get this idea in your brain that you want to be somewhat successful in your career first. You're never ready for a child. I hung in there as best I could. Even my wife had a really good first pregnancy. We did everything you were supposed. We went to Lamaze classes and some things like that, and you think that you're ready for what's coming, and you're just not. You have no idea.
It's one of those things like riding a bicycle downhill for the first time. You have no idea. Here's it's going to go. You're just trying to hold on happening you don't crash. It was very bizarre from the point of view of I'm an outgoing individual, but I also like time to myself. I like video games. I like to read. I like to hike. I like to do all sorts of things that just get me away from other people. Once we had a child, I couldn't just go off into my office and disappear. Though I will tell you that we had a very good time with our first child because very early on into his life, he would go to sleep around 8:00 and not get up until 6:00.

I guess the best description is adapt or die. I ended up adapting my life as many different ways as I could to make room for that child. It was tiring, and it was stressful, and people told me that because I was ADD I was going to sit the car seat on top of the car with the child in it and drive off. Wonderful for a new father to hear. In addition to generally being worried about that very thing. I wasn't truly worried because, in the same way that I think women generate maternal instincts, I think there are paternal instincts that pop out, too, and magnify. Ever since I met my wife, truly ever since I dated women, I've had an instinct to protect them. It was not stemming from the fact that they were weak or anything like that. It's just my nature. When we'd walk on the sidewalk, I walk in a certain place. If we're coming up on rough ground or something like that, I'm extra careful to make sure that if she's wearing heels or something like that I'm paying attention to how she's walking, even if she's not.

You become that way with kids instinctively. Everything about being a dad is protecting. Everything I did was to protect that child in some way. It was a tremendous change from being a couple. We couldn't just come home from work and be chilling and doing what we want to do and say, "Hey, you want to go catch a movie, or you want to go out for Chinese? You want to
order Chinese, or just hang out, or have crazy amounts of sex right in the living room, that sort of thing?" All that disappears. Because there's always this initial consideration of the child.

I think your mindset is important in going into it. I think you got to say, there's parts of it that are going to suck. It's going to be incredibly tough. But it's a long game. It's not short term kind of fitting though your frustrations will be. They'll be short term. You just have to kind of keep that perspective going in. There's some frustrating things. I think every father will say, "There's a million things I didn't know." If I had the chance to go back and do them all over again, I would.

I consider myself a typical Southern gentleman. I don't know that being in the South influenced it more than if I had been in Hawaii. It's hard to tell. I've always developed what I thought was a very chivalrous nature. I was determined to be a father who reflected that. No matter what they're doing to you, you don't lay into them. My eldest was actually the one that argued with me about that, and I just said, "Dude, seriously. You don't know what you're talking about. You don't hit women." I have always been a large defender. I think that is probably the most Southern thing about parenting, other than, "Yes, sir," and, "No, sir." I really promoted them saying, "Yes, sir," and, "No, sir," and, "Yes, ma'am," and, "No, ma'am," very young because I felt that it was important they show respect. Not because they were Southern but because that's what I'd always done. A lot of times when people say, "You don't have to call me that," or, "You say that and I look around for my dad," or something crazy like that, and I'm like it's not about that. It's more about me than you

I think what makes a man a good father is being dedicated to his house and being dedicated to his children. I will never tell you put children first because I felt that you had to
strike a balance. We would take vacations, a quite a few of them without our children. We would go weekends without our kids, we'd go on vacations without our kids.

**Being a Father of a Child who Identifies as Transgender**

How do I put this? So, take a daughter that's a pain in the ass to begin with, and then add, going through the transgender change to that. And you begin to get a perspective of the kinds of headaches that the trans-parent feels with that. I walk around every day wanting to punch everyone because of the bathroom bills and things like that. She read online about how transgenders are destroying the world or how it's a choice they've made because they want to use a different bathroom. And so you're in a constant state of anxiousness because you're continually having someone insult your child.

And that's a very hard thing for me to put into words. In the academy they describe different levels of being aware. And red is the most alert and then yellow and down from there. Most people are a step below yellow, which is not really alert at all, I think it's green. And they counsel police officers to always be yellow, to always be looking for a threat, always be looking for a problem, always be looking for some sort of danger right around the corner. Whether it's stepping into a puddle or a guy with a gun. Whether I want to be in it or not, I'm just waiting for the next threat. Kids kind of look at us funny from time to time when you say we moved to because we moved to where we did specifically because of her.

But moving down here, we specifically selected a county because the day that President Obama issued his directive through the DOE (Department of Education) saying that any school that receives federal money the kids should be able to use whatever bathroom they want to go into, this county Schools down here, immediately said, "We already do that. That's standard procedure for us. We will always protect our LGBT students." And so we knew coming down
here was where we wanted to be because we knew the school system would protect our daughter and so we made that move and that's one of the things that has somewhat alleviated some of the pressure that you feel but as a parent you want to protect your kids. It's an instinctive thing. I think moms have a very nurturing aspect to them that turns on when they reach motherhood. And I think the fathers' perspective is instinct. I guess is to be protective. We baby-proof the house, we put the gates up in the house. All these jokes about fathers and danger are really kinda funny things because I know that most of the fathers that I know are really, really overprotective guys. And I was protective before, when I had two boys. And now that I have a boy and a girl, it's even worse because I see her as both my child and trans daughter. And everything that comes along with that. So she's not just a girl out there. She's a girl whose trans so there's different groups of people who could be predators on her as there would be for just a normal girl.

We (Clyde and Bonnie) were talking about different things and my wife had forgotten her room key. And so she got back to the hotel before I did and I had Bonnie with me and so my wife was locked out of the hotel. And I said, "Well just walk around and grab another key from the front desk." Well, that's when instead of finding shortcuts she circumnavigates the building and it's really dark and whatnot. She's paranoid and she's pretty concerned about her place and my daughter's like, "Why is she so upset?" And I said, "Well, Bonnie, you didn't grow up as a female so this is probably not on your radar, but it's something that you should be very cognizant about. See, her life, is very different from you and I. You and I grew up as boys. From the time we were little to our teen years, we never had to worry about being raped by anybody. I mean, sure, it happens but it doesn't happen anywhere close to what it does to women and I just kinda lied to him, and I said, "I've never walked down the street and worried I was going to get raped."
I said, "That's your mother's greatest fear, right there." I said, "She's a little bitty woman. She's not going to be able to fight off an attacker." I said, "She's petrified of that kind of thing happening to her." I said, "So you need to please be aware that as you make this transition, this is something that you seriously need to be aware of. Be aware of your surroundings; be aware of who's around you." That's something that she's coped with in her life and something that you've gotta start coping with now. And it was a very staunch realization for her that she's made a very unique choice in her life about who she's supposed to be because there's a lot of things that go along with it that she just didn't expect.

That's what I would say is my general experience as a trans dad these days. I just walk around wanting to punch everybody. And I expect the worst from people. I shouldn't. And that could be a combination of my background and expecting the worst from people right off the bat. So I'm expecting someone to say something stupid. I'm pretty sure I'm going land in jail before too long. And someone's going to say something stupid and it's going to get heated and that's going to be assault charges and then I'm gonna get carted off to jail.

Trying to think of her as being a little girl is part of (the challenge of having a transgender child). It says a lot about the different gender norms that we have. Little girls are taught about hygiene, they're taught about makeup and hair and things like that since they're young. Well, Bonnie has never been taught any of that stuff. And because she's stubborn as a mule, she doesn't really want to learn it. And so we have constant battles over things like deodorant. She's never had that I need to get up two hours before school so that I have adequate time to shower, brush my hair, put it up, do make-up, get ready, all that kind of stuff. She's used to crawling out of her bed 30 minutes before school and finally dragging herself to the shower and throwing some
clothes on and heading out the door. And so just trying to help introduce the feminine aspects of being feminine to her is challenging.

Trying to deal with the hate that comes to her. Trying to get other people to accept her gender is a challenge. We can't change her birth certificate in (a southern state) because that state won't allow us to until she's physically had sexual reassignment surgery. And so her passport says that she's female and her drivers' license says that she's female. And now, one of the things that I'm concerned about with the government's latest proposal on healthcare is they're talking about genetic testing. There's this whole concept of just trying to get the documents corrected and the hoops that we've had to go through different agencies. We had to submit for her passport four times for them to finally give us a passport and the passport’s only good for two years. You have to resubmit after that term. I'm worried because she and I are supposed to take a trip to Asia in the fall and I'm worried that her passport is going to expire before we get there. And I'll have to worry about trying to get her a new passport on the fly.

We've had the hardest time finding a pediatric endocrinologist because there's about ten times the number of kids out here than there were at (the other southern state). Most did not deal with transgender individuals and just trying to get our records out of (the other southern state) into a primary care physician's hands here, was a significant challenge. It's been going on for six months. And we keep banging our heads against the walls because we've called multiple endocrinologists just trying to get the records sent and things like, we've jumped through all these hoops and then finally decide, "Well, we don't deal with transgender so we don't really want to see your child." One day, fine, and so we start moving to the next doctor. And in the meantime, she wears patches, hormone patches, and she takes a puberty shot and these are not typically prescribed by your general practice physician. Our current doctor that Bonnie has is
very reluctant to prescribe them. She did and she gave us a 90 day supply because she said it would take a little time for us get to see an Endocrinologist and get the records and everything. So she understood the situation but she was very honest with us from the beginning. She said, "I've never had a transformation before." She said, "I want to make sure that I make all the right decisions." She said, "I'm very skittish about doing it without an Endocrinologist looking over my shoulder." And so just trying to get the endocrinologist was difficult. It's things that I'm sure normal for most people who are moving somewhere to try to get their medical records and whatnot but a lot of these systems, you can't just call up and say, "I want my records." You've gotta go through crazy online forms and you've gotta make sure that you have some sort of signed papers here and there to be able to get them sent to the right place and then the doctors' offices are good and bad about following up about that stuff. It's just been an absolute nightmare. This is the nice part about being a married couple, in some respects, is that a lot of times my wife will do reading and research that I don't do. And so then we'll go and we'll track down those counselors one by one, but yeah, I there's not a whole lot of resources for trans people.

I mean it felt like a lot of the challenges that we have faced as a trans family have really been problems people face just having teenagers. But definitely in the medical realm, that's something where you always need help and counselors. Bonnie has depression and so she's being seen by a counselor and I don't know if it's related to, or part of, or completely independent from her being transgender. It could just be that she's a manic-depressive and miserable. And so that's something that we have dealt with by a specialist. And yet that's another round of phone calls, "Hey, we're interested in getting an appointment, leave a message." And then they call and they miss you. And then you call, and miss them, and so there's a lot of challenges here that present
themselves. I find it hard to specifically bitch about as a trans dad because I feel like it's the same problems as most dads run into.

It's subtle stuff (that's the most rewarding). I would say, she's getting to be who she wants to be because it's who she is. She denied herself for such a long time, as to how she felt, and I feel like she's a freer person because of it. And that, to me, makes me happy. She's not living cloaked. She's living as who she's supposed to be. I would say that she had been a more sensitive child. She's a peacemaker. She would dress up in my wife's gowns from time to time. We all thought it was really funny and I didn't think to myself, "Wow, my child's gay," or anything like that. It was just funny. It's one of those things that's harmless. You don't assign gender issues. She was always fond of green, my wife had this green, short nightgown, and it swallowed Bonnie up completely, but she loved wearing it. And probably because it was soft and satin, right?

I guess she was 13 or 14 and she let us know via Facebook. Facebook messenger actually because she was afraid to come and talk to us to our face. And so she let us both know via messenger and we immediately said, "It's okay. It's no big deal." And, "You know, we're very sorry it's taken you this long to come and tell us." But she said that she felt that way since she was seven. And she's 15 now. And I guess she was either 13 or 14 at the time and we were like, "You know, you're still our child, if something is important to you, and it's up to you, it's what we've got to run with." And I think she really expected us to question it more and I'm sure we did question it at times.

We had talked long ago even before the kids were born. You ask yourself this million questions like what if it it has one arm? Or what if it has 3 arms, or what if it has 6 arms or, you know, or what if they're gay, what if they have 3 legs? And so you play this game with each
other. And you're kinda testing your mate to see what it is that will bother you. In reality, the questions you're asking your mate are the ones you're really asking yourself. What am I willing to quote, "Put up with." And you learn early on that there's nothing that you put up with. There just is and there isn't. So you child either has certain facts or doesn't. The child either is female or isn't. The child either is an athlete or isn't. You just accept it as part of who they are. I have not understood their parents who railed against their children for being one way or the other. I get it's something indoctrinated and religions but I just can never. I felt like if I ever had children and they came to me and said that they were gay I didn't consider trans at the time. But if they said they were gay, I was like, so what? They're gay. Never thought about trans. But life's gonna be a little tougher because a lot of people aren't going to dig you. But life's tough anyway, so, you know, just support them and love them the best I could. This is who she is. It's her thing. So to me, in a lot of ways was no big deal. It's just something that we kinda rolled with.

In some respects (I’ve had grief), but not the loss of a boy so much. More of the loss of her original name. And we thought that it was the perfect androgynous name cause it can go either way, right? The problem is what they're called. But I miss the kid that was the boy. So I guess the difference is so very real because I have Bonnie the daughter, the same personality, the same person and she loves me and I love her and so it works out just fine. There's not as much grieving as I think with somebody who had a boy from a very young age and they were going into national league baseball or a kind of a power lifter and champion and manly perceived. I guess those guys are going to have a great deal of grieving. We just really didn't. We didn't really lose a boy. We just changed.

It was really just we're going to try and make the pronoun decision correct and make sure we call her she and make sure your brother calls her she and we'll see how it goes. She was going
to church at the time and so we talked to the church members. A few of them said, everything's going to be just fine; a few of them didn't like it. So, we eventually said, "Going to church is your option." This is a person who's doing something that affects nobody but themselves and you're coming down on them for it and I don't understand that. The youth leader at church likening her to a demon, other than that, most everybody has been very positive or forthright with her. It was the younger pastor talking to the older pastor and because the older pastor and I were such very good friends, he said, "Hey, I don't want you to go ballistic when you hear this, but I wanted to relay this to you because I want you to understand that we're talking about this with our staff and we're guiding people through this." And I'm like, "Okay." And basically, one of the new youth leaders had said that there was a comment made about her having a favorite bible verse. And the response from the youth leader was, "Well even demons can quote the bible." And the pastor said, "You know, that's where you're going with this, she's not a demon." And basically tried to correct the youth pastor, but the fact that it even came across from this consideration I want to say, it's the kind of response we expected from the church. So it wasn't that surprising when it happened. And it feeds back into that theory that we talked about initially, that I just walk around and wanted to punch people. That's the kind of thing I see on a regular basis. That's the kind of thing that I'm worried about on a regular basis. And I'm looking for it. And I probably shouldn't be looking for it, but it's what I do. I'm looking for it every time I turn around. I'm expecting somebody to say something stupid about my kid and I feel like I should just be carrying around a baseball bat. But that's the only time that we've really face a lot of interference, other that just hearing the legislators speak about transgender issues.

I have a very conservative friend. He's got a gay sister. And so when it comes to issues dealing with gays and lesbians, he's pretty outspoken about how we need to treat them
appropriately because he's been there and experienced it firsthand. And I'm sure I come across that way too on some of these issues related to transgender people because of what I'm experiencing here I feel like I have to say something about it. Whereas before, I just kind of didn’t. But we've been very outspoken. I've written members of Congress about transgender issues and things like that because it's part of my family.

My mother can't seem to get a handle on it. She keeps hoping that Bonnie will snap out of it. Like it's a phase or something that she's going through. She can't get pronouns right. She calls them the boys instead of the kids or something like that. And I don't know that she will. I'm trying not to give her a complete pass. I've corrected her when she doesn't do it correctly, but she's been somewhat open. She's offered several times to take Bonnie shopping for dresses. And I don't know that Bonnie has been all that comfortable in doing that just yet. And I think she's leery of Grandma because Grandma's having dementia issues and all, but for the most part, that's been the only real family. We don't have a very big family anymore. Most of them have died off and or are just not people that we associate with so there's not really been a whole lot of activity related to transgender discussion. So we haven't really been able to gauge a whole lot of family and their response on this. And probably has been fine. People that Bonnie has been around have all been very functioning just fine. She doesn't like her doctor, like her doctor has tried to be very courteous I think. She might not be getting pronouns right but she tries.

School's actually gone quite well. She identifies as transgender and lesbian so she has a girlfriend and she's doing quite well in school. Much better than she had been doing in school prior to the move. And so I don't know if it's just a change up to high school or if it's the change to a new venue. We would move her down here so she could be Bonnie. She had no baggage down here like she had up there where she would've gone to school with people who knew her
from her old school. They might've outted her. So, I think that's a big benefit of her being down here.

It's weird (telling others about his child is transgender). I think you're going out on a limb any time you're telling someone that your child is different than theirs. And it took a while before we talked to Mom about it. I remember when I married my first wife we were talking about racism and she said, "You know, your grandfather is kind of racist." And I'm like, "Yeah, he is." And I'm like, "Well, you aren't." I said, “But he's 90-something and you're not going to change 90 years of someone just being something.” And so I tried and when I talk to people I don't want them to feel like I'm pressing some sort of agenda on them. Even though I feel that I am, I just feel like I'm telling them, this is who my daughter is, and a lot of people I don't tell because there's no real need to. I want her perceived as female from the get go and not this female transgender person, just a female. So other than medical personnel, we don't give a whole lot of disclosure to people.

Our first counselor was very good because her first counselor was transgender as well. The first thought when she came out was we need to get her to go to the doctor, get her a therapist. And it was a pretty good counselor in terms of how to see it through. Sometimes Bonnie would lay down a pretty flimsy ball of B.S. in the counselor's office and the counselor would kind of see through it and push beyond it and how it would tie to those feelings and things like that. But there was a trans group for teens that was offered by the same counseling office so she went there once a week and she started building friendships and that was good.

Making Meaning as a Father of a Child who Identifies as Transgender

It's weird from the prospective of you're not just trying to protect them as a child anymore; you're trying to protect them as a child who is a member of a very different class now.
So, it's almost like you're considering dual threats to your children. And I think when someone thinks about the role of a father, they think about the role of protecting the family, probably the outdated role of being the primary breadwinner and all that kind of stuff. The challenge for me is having to not just champion the normal things that I would champion for my child, but also in terms of her especially being a male to female. Looking out for a daughter I need to be worried about sexual discrimination and be worried about things like rape, and worried about equality in the workplace and things like that. But I also need to be worried about the fact that she was not female from birth. Which a lot of people just don't like that. You know it doesn't affect them in any way shape or form, but for some reason it's a problem. So that kind of thing is just a little weird today.

It's hard to say how southern cultural has influenced me cause being pretty white bread, I really don't have any huge amounts of culture to draw upon and our own personal family culture has been. We've been very open about these things for a very long time. So now that it's a member of our family, I can't say that it’s necessarily a huge change for how we felt beforehand.

I'm more protective now since she's made the transformation or is in the process of making the transformation to female. In a lot of ways there's a lot of things you take for granted with boys. And there are a lot of worries that I don't have for my son for example. He tells me he's gonna be out late at the movies, he tells me he's going to be hanging out with friends. As far as safety, of course it's always in the back of my mind as a parent but its not something that springs to the forefront whenever I'm gonna go and do "X". With her, anytime she says I'm gonna be out with friends, it's more of a "really, what friends? Where are you going? When are you going to be back?"
So, the way I think about gender and privilege really has had to change in a lot of ways. I do think that there is a privilege that comes along with being male in a lot of aspects of life and she's given that up. And I think that's gonna be tougher on her than she expects. It shouldn't be naturally. Women should have the same shake that men have, but the truth is we been a patriarchal society for so many years it's hard to escape that in a matter of days or a matter of years. I think that recognizing transgender individuals as random normal humans is just not happening yet. I think that their significant and we're trying to accept them, but I think that we're probably now where we were with gays in the 70's in terms of transgender. You still get a lot of negativity. Trannie and what not out there and so I think there is a lot of valid concern about worrying about discrimination and other issues that might come up in the life of my child.

I think that the truth is that I'm not sure I would be the best person to give advice. I kinda feel like I'm still so new at this. But the one thing I can say is, love the child as you loved them beforehand. They've not changed. They've just taken a different direction in their lives and from birth we want our kids to be happy. I think any child who feels like they belong to a different gender and they're denying that just feel terrible. And that's not what you want for your child. You want them to experience life to the fullest and if they're not you should kind of rejoice in the fact that they've now found who they are. But I would definitely say get involved with a therapist. Definitely make yourself aware of the different organizations that support transgender individuals because I think that will make a huge deal. We've gotten some references for different things down here. Medical care, therapists referrals and things like that, and those are invaluable. You can't really talk about how much of a difference that makes.

My daughter's primary care provider had never serviced a transgender at all or transgender youth and so right from the beginning if she's truly going to serve my child she's got
to go out and learn all there is to learn about the physiology of a child going through hormone therapies, puberty blockers, things they touched on very briefly in med school. But for the most part, they don't know anything about. And given most modern family practices, most doctors come in and spend five minutes or less with their patients. They are trying to see 60 people in a day, a lot of them are "I've got flu, I've got a broken collar bone, "I've got a broken wrist", or something like that they are dealing with or just general "Hey, it's good to see you for your six month check up" or whatever and then move on.

There's a huge learning curve for doctors when it comes to transgender youth and I think that it's a big challenge to find professionals with that kind of experience. We were very lucky when we were in (the other southern state) to find a physician who is not only gay herself, which helped because she is part of the broader community that has been very accepting of transgender individual, but was working on building a specified transgender practice. She spent quite a bit of time in visits that we had with her and she referred us to a pediatric endocrinologists who was also her practice was divided about 75% to diabetic use and 25% to youth with special cases such as being transgender. Both of them could work together with transgender youth cases so it was a big deal to have that expertise in place. It literally is the difference between night and day when you're talking about going to a doctor who understands and going to a doctor who doesn't. Being able to find these resources is just huge. It made a big, big difference. Down here we have struggled like crazy.

It was a situation where we're having to tell them everything that previous doctors had said and kinda guiding them through. They're not familiar with the medications that she's taking and I'm thinking, "And this is my issue? You're the doctor, so figure out what you need to figure out." That's never a good sign when you're having to educate the professional on how to deal
with your child because you're coming to the professional with the hopes that you're gonna be able to get your child taken care of without too much trouble. When the opposite of that is true it is just incredibly frustrating.

We just found a counselor down here so Bonnie is about to have her first meeting with the one down here. It's knowing the resources that you need to be able to get in touch with. When Bonnie first came out to us as transgender, we called the counseling services at a local university and said we need referrals to people who deal with transgender. And it just happened to be that there was a practice across town, which was not convenient in any way 'cause it was 30 miles from where we live, but it was a practice that specifically dealt with transgender youth in-depth. They had a support group and they had a youth group, so it was cool that we got involved with them and then naturally we left. But, the counseling was good. I think it was very reaffirming for Bonnie that she had made the right decision. I think it was good for her to have a counselor who is also transgender, at least considered herself gender fluid, and so she was able to address a lot of the concerns or questions that Bonnie kinda had from the beginning. I still think that it is a long process because Bonnie’s a very open outgoing individual with most people. But when it gets real personal, she clams up. So, it just becomes a big challenge if you don't have any therapist then you're very lucky in that regard to have a great therapist.

One of the big issues though that I do see is we wanted Bonnie to be treated by therapists for more than just dealing with her transgender nature. She had serious ADD issues. She was having trouble in school. So, we really needed to develop a plan that was separate from just sort of counseling her on who she was and her gender choices to move into dealing with some separate issues related to her performance in school and general well-being and dealing with
depression. Some of the issues could be related, but for the most part, they were separate. So, just trying to make sure you address both those is a challenge.

When you're dealing with a transgender youth you're dealing with a duality at the end of the day. So, whereas normal teens have umpteen problems that they deal with and have emotional issues that they've gotta get past, transgender youth have the same problems but they have that transgender aspect added to it. You really need a treatment plan that deals with those separately. While they're addressed in tandem in the counseling session, you need to make sure your therapist is focused on improving both the emotional welfare of the child as related as to them being a child and then the welfare of the child as them being a transgender child.

No, I didn’t get counseling for myself. I recommend it and it wasn't that I was trying to avoid it in any way. We were dealing with so many other things at the time that I just didn't feel like I particularly needed it. I didn't feel like I was struggling. Because of that I didn't really see myself as needing to go get counseling the same way. Now, our first counseling session was together. It was Bonnie and myself and the counselor. I think there is some advantage to that and I would think that would be true for any kind of plan for treatment that you really need have an understanding of what kind of treatment the kid will be going through. You just want to make sure that you're on top of that. So, being there in those initial sessions, I think any therapist is gonna insist on that anyway, so I'm not sure that's something that's truly a recommendation. But if not, you really have to be involved in these considerations because you just gotta know what's going on with the treatment plan and what their thinking about in terms of your child is dealing with. The first sessions were surreal. It's definitely something that a number of times I've said to myself, “I really never thought I would be sitting here talking about my daughter or my son and his choice to become a woman. But, it was what it was.”
Therapists really need to know their stuff. If it's not something that you have experience with, and I know that it's tough to say, "we don't trust you if you don't have experience." Then how are people supposed to get experience if they never treat a patient who is transgender, but I think it's one of things that you have to know that in your career that's something you're gonna be focusing on. So, I think that one of the things that makes a good therapist, even with transgender kids, is that they have to have experience dealing with transgender kids. So, the way that they get that is that they've got to be available in their training while they're in school to actually go forward and work in a practice dealing with transgender youth because they've just got to get that experience.

I have a great deal of trepidation because we're meeting a therapist on Monday and she's not worked with transgender youth before. This is truly going to be a situation where she's gonna sit down with Bonnie and decide whether or not she's gonna be able to treat her and Bonnie is gonna have to decide whether or not she's going to be available to this woman. That's one of the things that has me filled with a little bit of trepidation as we get into this once again. I'm moving towards working on a high wire here hoping all this works out, as opposed to having some knowledge that it's all gonna work out just fine. That's definitely a challenge for me and dealing with all sorts of issues. We want to get this done. We really want to get her into regular treatment. The problem is just taking time off from work and going to these meetings and if they don't work out then you gotta go find another therapist and it's just not a simple process by any stretch of the imagination.

My main thing at the moment is that I really hope that she is really happy with who she is. The big problem that we had was that she was denying who she was for quite some time. I don't want her to ever have to feel like that again. It's really one of these things where I was very
depressed to find out that this was a consideration for her from the very beginning. I didn't want her to ever have to have gone through something that she had to hide from us and she had to hide from other people. It's just very unfortunate. Mainly I want her to be happy, I want her to be successful and basically comfortable in her own skin.

She is transgender and gay and so she's going to have a lot of challenges with what people perceive about her lifestyle. My hope is that she doesn't let that aspect of what other people think of her really bog her down too much. Right now she says a lot of this stuff doesn't bother her, but I think it does. I think she doesn't want to admit it. So, my hope is just that as we go forward that she is fine with who she is and feels good about who she is and that everything is gonna work out in her favor; whether it does or not.

I hope that I just continue to love her the way that she wants to be loved and I hope that I never get frustrated with her in a situation that is beyond her control. I don't think that my goals as a father have really changed because my daughter is transgender. I'm still dealing with it a lot of the times and the struggles of raising two teenagers. So in that respect, I just hope that I will continue to be a good dad and that I will continue to be someone that they look up to and that in the future when they run into various obstacles and challenges in their lives. I hope that they think back on how I dealt with things and hopefully say, "Oh, my dad had this licked. So, this is exactly how I want to deal with it."
CHAPTER 5

“Why God chose to put this hammer in my bag to carry, I have no idea. But, if I can help teach some people what the truth is, what's going on, then the hammer won't be put in my bag for nothing.”

Jack’s Story

Jack is 52-years-old, White, heterosexual, married to the mother of his MTF child, Jill. He reports Jill is his biological child. Jack reports he is, “Catholic but taking time off for bad behavior/ Christian but not church going.” He reports having completed high school and having 8 years in the US Navy. Jack’s reports he discovered his daughter, who uses the pronouns of she/her, was transgender at around age 15-years-old. Jill came out again at age 25-years-old due to Jack believing that Jill had been cured of her transgender identity at 15. Jack’s daughter is currently 28-years-old. I met her briefly at a transgender themed conference a few years ago and still had her card. I contacted her to ask if her father would be willing to participate. She agreed pass on the information of the study to him.

From the initial emails, Jack appears to be somewhat hesitant to participate. He reports he is very willing and happy to participate in this study, but makes it clear that he is VERY protective of his child and her friends in the transgender community and wants to make sure “...this is a genuine thing.” After sending an email explaining the purpose of the study, Jack agreed to speak with me over the phone for all of the interviews. Jack has a noticeable southern accent. He appears slow to open up at first, but becomes more open during the latter stages of the first interview.
The Fatherhood Experience

I'm very close to my dad, always have been. Never really had a big falling out with my dad that I can ever think of. One of my memories of my dad was when we moved down here from New York in '68. He was working for a company and they told him, "Rent, buy a new house, you'll be set for life." And we moved down here in '68, he got laid off. And I remember my dad working two jobs during the week and one on the weekends and trying to keep the roof over our heads with a house that him and my mother just bought. We never knew how hard he was working. Except we knew that we'd always see him at little league practice. So I mean he was still around. He was still there. He wasn't an absentee dad. I just try to do what he did.

I raised my kids like my dad raised me. You say yes sir, no ma'am. You open the door for your wife. You pull her chair out, not out from under her. You know? Raised my kids to be that way. And Jill was no exception. And, you know, it was the kind of thing that I saw my dad do. You know? Just work hard and try to do the right thing. You ain't gonna hit the ball over the fence every time but you at least gotta step up to the plate.

Well that transition (from man to father) happened a really long time ago. 'Cause you gotta understand my daughter is almost, she's 29. I was in the Navy. Having kids was a conscious decision between my wife and myself. We got married really young. But we decided before we got married we decided we were gonna have kids young 'cause our goal was to have children so we could be young enough to enjoy them and young enough to enjoy grandchildren if possible. 'Cause we have a lot of friends and guys that I was in the Navy with that were in their 30's having kids for the first time. By the time that you have kids when you're approaching middle age, by the time your kid is an adult, you're usually not able to do much with them. So we wanted to have kids young. And we did. And it was really cool.
But, to go from not having kids to having kids, before we had children I was coaching baseball, football. Because I always enjoyed being with kids. No parent has all the answers to their questions. I taught my kids. I coached my kids in baseball and football. And I was a really good coach, everybody, except my own kids. I was super hard on my own kids. I was everything I hate in a little league coach when it comes to my kids.

I was very hard and I would question, "What the hell am I so hard for? Why can't I just let my kids have fun?" I just wanted them to be the best they could be. Never mind the fact that they didn't really give a shit if they had to be good or not. They could be good or not. And we didn't see this coming till Jill was about 14 or 15 years old. I mean, my kid grew up playing baseball, football, basketball, soccer, wrestling, martial arts. Just all this heavy contact and loved to fight. Jill was probably the best pure fighter I ever trained. She was like my best friend. We did stupid shit together. We played music together. And I would go off on the weekends and play with people. I would get Jill to go and do lights for me.

We did all kinds of stuff together. We use to go on motorcycle rides together. I guessed I coached her in baseball and football and taught her in karate. We just had a blast. We had a freaking ball. We use to travel a lot. Got to go to some really cool places and just have a lot of fun. I have such great memories of her growing up. It hurts that all she can think of is the one night I made a mistake. That's what hits home with her. She can't remember going to Antigua and Barbados and St. Lucia and all these great places and going diving, and going on overnight motorcycle rides and you know. She was forced to be a boy. We didn't freaking know.

Southern culture to me, and Southern culture to people that aren't Southern is probably two different things. I was raised going to school with multi-cultural people, with multi-racial people. I never had a problem with anybody like that. Did I use words I shouldn't use? Yes
absolutely, just like everybody else did. Do I now? No, I'll start an argument over it. Don't use that word in front of me. In fact, I did that at work just a couple weeks ago. So, I think Southern culture is mind your manners, eat food that's not necessarily good for you, respect your elders, work hard. As far as that goes, yes, Southern culture has influenced me a great deal. As far as being a racist or the narrow minded CNN version of what Southern culture might be, I've never gone into that kind of thing. It's never influenced me one inch. I've always been pretty hard headed. I'm not influenced by much. I just don't give in to peer pressure. I never have. You do you, I do me, we'll have a good time. If we can be friends, great; if we can't then have a nice life. As long as you don't hurt me or mine you don't have a problem with me. So, as far as the culture goes I like to think I wasn't influenced by it. But when we found out about the gender dysphoria, I guess it was some of the culture that I've grown up around. Some of the influence of being around other people like at work and stuff and in the Navy. Nobody I knew had to deal with that kind of thing. So I didn't know how to deal with it.

Two things specific that helped me stay a father. One I got out of the Navy after 8 years because Jill was 3 and had no idea who I was. We had her when I was on sea duty. And although I had pretty good sea duty, I was still saying goodbye to my wife and kid an awful, awful lot and I was gone all the time. And we were doing search and rescue, which isn't the most safe thing to do in the world. So, when they wanted to send me back to sea I said, “No, send me somewhere where I can take my wife and kid. I'll go anywhere in the world. But I want to take my wife and kid with me.” They said, “No you're going to go back to sea.” I got out so I could spend time with my kid. Well, as I said, I'm a musician. I started working at the airline and playing on the weekend. Which was from 2 nights a week to 5 nights a week. Which, turned to we're all quitting our jobs and going on the road. I just got out of the Navy for not seeing my kid so I quit the
band, I let them go. You guys go on, have a good time. I'm gonna spend time with my wife and kid, we're going to have some fun.

To prepare myself to be a father, Lamaze classes was about it. I think anybody can be a sperm donor. That doesn't make anybody a father. I think if your kid knows that you have their back, I think that's huge. And that's at any age. When Jill was young, she stayed at a daycare center that I would pick her up from and she was maybe 7-years-old. Anyway, came to pick her up, kid picked on her and threw a rock at her and then kicked her in the chin real hard. Teacher's sitting there didn't do anything. I literally snapped my fingers and said lock him up. Jill grabbed his arm put the kid in an arm bar, had him on the ground screaming, just about to break the kid's arm. I snapped my fingers and Jill let him go. Kids squalled. Teachers losing their mind, "You can't have your kid beat somebody up." I said, "Lady, if you don't protect my kid, my kid will protect themselves. So do your job." And it got pretty bad. In fact, we wound up taking Jill out of that facility but Jill knew I was there for her. That I stood up for her. And allowed her to stand up for herself. So, I think to be a good father it's important to remember birthday's and things like that. But that's all pretty much cookie cutter stuff. I think taking a genuine interest in whatever your kid's chocolate is. Jill’s chocolate aside from music was like skateboards. So every time we'd go somewhere we'd find a skate shop, or I think one time we drove about 2 1/2 hours out of our way to find a mountain board range so she could ride her out door skateboard down a mountain. But things like that. Just represent, let your kids know you care. I think it's most important that a kid knows that you have their back. And that can be in a little league or that can be a going through life as a Trans woman.

Especially when I fly out to see her and her boyfriend. I try to do that at least a couple of time a year. There was a hotel one day when somebody kind of staring my kid down and making
her very uncomfortable. Which is really hard for me because my kids were raised to be very, very confident people. And to see her have her confidence shattered because it was in her former life, is really hard for me. This guy tried to stare her down in a Holiday Inn breakfast bar. That'll go damn near the hospital 'cause I just about got up and went and beat his ass. He saw me starting to get up looking at him like I was gonna get him and he got up and left. She knew I had her back. Nothing was going to happen when dad's around. She's gonna be safe.

Jill had a job interview. And she had phone interviews and they said, "Yes, come on in. We want to get you a start date and all that." So she came in and she said that when she walked into the office had 3-4 brand new shirts in plastic sitting there on the desk. When the guy looked at her, clocked her immediately, put the shirts back in the drawer and said, "We'll call you if something comes open." I wanted to fly up there and burn him to the ground because he hurt my kid. Not that I would do that, that would be endorsing violence, well I do endorse violence but, I just have to be good at it. I don't want anybody to hurt anybody. I just don't want you to mess with my kid.

My kid’s just trying to make their way in life just like anybody else. Everybody's got a bag of hammers to carry and not everybody knows the hammers that are in each other’s bag. And some hammers are damn heavy. This hammer in my bag is probably the heaviest I have carried. But, it's heavier in my kid’s bag. The hammer in her bag is way heavier than the one I've got in mine. But everybody's got a bag of hammers, that's just mine.

**Being a Father of a Child who Identifies as Transgender**

Experiencing life now as the father of a trans(gender child), I’m worried, constantly. Worried for her safety and worried because she's across the country; because I can't get my hands on her when I need to; I can't protect her like I want to. Fear. Fear. Worried about my kid.
Worried about their health. Worried about their wellbeing. Worried if they're gonna kill themselves or not. Worried for their future. I'm still worried for their future. I'm afraid they're never gonna find happiness. I know they're happy. I know she's happy with her boyfriend. I know that. I know they're happy. But, she gave up an awful, awful lot to be this.

Disappointed. Not because she's trans, but because everything in the world that happens now is because she's trans. She has to go out and find a job, it's because she's trans. Somebody looked at her funny on the bus, it's because she's trans. People won't hire her because she's trans. Now I'm not saying those are not all valid reasons for her life being hard, but it's hard to see, when your kid was making $85,000 a year before transition to go and transition, and choose to live destitute. So, that's kind of hard. You hear all this crap on the news, Facebook's probably her worst enemy. I try to stay away from anything doing with anything with politics, things like that. Donald Trump's trying to send rights of LGBT people back to the individual states is, in my opinion, asinine; the reason being, that's a civil rights issue. That's an equal rights issue. That should not be different from state to state. That should be every state you go to, you should have the same protection, the same laws, the same rules.

Well I got on the computer and did some research on something. I don't know what I was looking for, but I found stuff I wasn't expecting. And when I confronted her about it, that's when she said, "I think I have gender dysphoria, this is what it is, and I'm doing research about it trying to find out about it." When she said I have gender dysphoria, I said, "Well, you're a little faggot that want's your dick cut off." That was just the most horrific thing I could have said at the time. And I didn't even think about it. I just popped right out with it. Her and I have since had many conversations about that day. And she's told me on numerous occasions she forgives me and to quit worrying about it. But I love my kid and I would have never hurt them on purpose.
Although, it was pretty purposeful when I said it cause I didn't understand what was going on. I was ignorant. That's not an excuse, that's just a fact. That's why I think all these people that are talking bad about Trans people and all that. They just don't know. They haven't had to deal with it. Why God chose to put this hammer in my bag to carry, I have no idea. But, if I can help teach some people what the truth is, what's going on, then the hammer won't be put in my bag for nothing.

Anyway after that, she said, "Well, there's a doctor in town that I can go see that's a psychiatrist." I just came off the road (as a musician) and I had a pocketful of money. So I took her to her appointment and she was still referred to as her former self at this point. We went up the elevators and she said, "Dad, I want to talk to them by myself." I said, "Okay. No problem. I'll wait in the waiting room." So I waited in the waiting room, and 20 minutes later she comes out and I went up and paid for the appointment. I paid it in cash I had in my pocket. So we got in the elevator, and I said, "So do you feel better? Are you cured?" And she goes, "Yeah, I'm better." I said, "Oh cool," and I didn't think anything else about it. I come to find out later in life, after all this transition stuff started, she was offended that I paid in cash like in some, "back alley drug deal," in her words. I paid in cash because I had the money in my pocket.

But she saw different. And of course there I go again saying something awful hurtful, "Are you fixed? Are you better? Are you cured?" I didn't know what to say. My kid just saw a doctor, "Do you feel better?" Hell, I saw a psychiatrist for several things. I didn't think she was crazy or anything, nothing like that. Her ex-wife asked the same question, "Are you better?" and she told us both, "Yes, I'm better." Eventually they decided to get divorced because her wife didn't want to come home to find her hanging in the bathroom one day. She got real suicidal. She attempted a couple of times.
It was a complete shock to me. Looking back, my wife says she saw it coming. She can
tell things. Jill didn't wear normal kind of kid underwear, so I'd pick at her about it. Hell, I didn't
know any better. I was just making fun. Evidently that was really hurtful. I knew she wore fancy
jeans, but I had no idea she was going to the ladies' department and buying her jeans. When she
told us, I'm choosing to transition, she had divorced her wife, which was not her choice. She left
the home they bought together, left the two new cars that they had, left all the money behind, ran
off.

My wife, myself, and my son, we all three got the same email at the same time (telling us
she was definitely transitioning). But she said, “My psychiatrist tells me you should take two
weeks and let this digest before you try and contact me. I love you but I understand that you
don't want to be associated with me. I have to make sure I can live on my own, live without you
before I did this. It's the reason that I left, and blah blah blah.” I emailed her back immediately, I
said, "I don't care who you are or what you are, you're mine, and I love you anyway. I don't need
two weeks to know you're my kid. I've got your back. Call me if you need me.” She was very
happy to receive that email. But, understanding when she first told us about her gender
dysphoria, and she was about 15, I didn't react quite as understanding to it. I said some really
hurtful shit. And I'm sure she was expecting the same. Why wouldn't she? But I told her, I said,
"You're my kid. I love you. I've got your back no matter what you need to do. You tell me what
we need to do from here, and I've got your back. Let's go."

The hardest thing to do was we flew up to New York to see her. I never saw my kid like
that. It broke my heart when I saw her. She was pale, she looked sick, she was gaunt, just looked
horrible. Had her head hung down. My kids don't have their head hanging down, they stand up,
they're cocky as crap just like their old man. They command presence when they walk into a
room. But when I saw that my heart just sunk. I was real glad to see her and we had a great time.
Went to the theater and just spent a lot of great one-on-one time. Sent her off on the train the
next day. But we were worried about her mental state and worried she'd kill herself, try again,
but she didn't. She did pretty good. That was the first time we saw her after she started hormones
and all that. I don't do everything right, but I try. I try to do things for my kid.

The most rewarding part is just the privilege of being a dad. I've always taught my kids if
you want something then to go after it and the hell did she take me up on it. If this is where she
needs to be to enjoy life, then I hope she finds her place there. I'm so proud of my kid. When I
picked her up off the train, I got to sit through three shows and watch her do her job. She the
shots and called the lights and called the pyrotechnics that went off. I was just so proud of her.
There's numerous things that I'm proud of.

The most challenging is family acceptance. Friends can go bum. They'll be my friend if
they want. I've lost friends over this. I've lost family over this, but not much. Not enough to
worry about. For instance, my sister's husband and oldest son will not call Jill by her name. They
won't call her by her old name. They just won't join in the conversation about her. They won't
ask about her. If she does something great and I brag on her, they won't say, "Good job." They
just politely stay out of the conversation. I can live with that. If you're going to start talking trash,
then somebody's going out to the woodshed and I'm gonna whoop their ass.

I sat everybody down and I told them the same way. And I told every one of them, "I love
you. I've enjoyed knowing you. I've got to tell you something that might affect the way you
might feel about me and my family. Before I tell you, you've got to know that I support my kid
100%. And if you can't be accepting, then you need to just shake my hand and walk away cause
you won't like it any other way.” I told that to everybody, to my mom and dad, to my wife's mother, to all the aunts and uncles and cousins and all that.

Everybody in the family, with the exception of my wife's husband and oldest son, were very accepting. My sister is accepting. It's not that other relatives are not accepting, they just refuse to talk about it. Their silence speaks volumes. But as long as they're not disrespecting, I can cope, but the minute they're disrespectful, it's gonna come down. We talk about Jill in front of them. They just politely stay out of the conversation.

With the family, it was a very hard conversation to have. All of them jumped straight to the same fears that I had and have. Are they gonna be okay? No matter what, are they gonna be okay? Not okay as a man, not okay as a woman, but are they gonna be okay? They still make mistakes. My dad will still looks at Jill and says her birth name, but my dad's 78-years-old. Knew her as a boy for 25 years, knew Jill for just a couple years now. Jill’s not very understanding of that, but people do make mistakes once in a while. We try not to.

(Friends or other people) can be ugly to me all day long. I couldn't care less. I don't care what people do, say to me. I don't care how they act to me. Family included. If you can't handle this, leave me be. I'm not a nice person if I don't like you. I won't bother you, but if you bother me, it's gonna get ugly. The only thing I care about is them showing my child respect. My kid earned respect and is going through a very hard time. Hopefully my kid will get back to a place where they earn respect again. They sure as hell earned it up to that point and I think they're earning it right now because they're being true to themselves. So I got a lot of respect for that anyway.

The challenges of being a father of a trans person, holy shit. Worrying about their personal safety all the time does not stop, day and night. Constantly worrying if she's going to
get beat up on the bus because some jackass doesn't like the way she looks. Worry that she's going to go into a public bathroom and somebody think that she's in there doing something other than trying to pee. It's heartbreaking. Go out to town with your kid and she's got to pee so bad that she doesn't pass well that day so she just holds it and holds it and holds it and holds it. I mean, damn near in tears before she'll break down and go to the bathroom. The challenges would push me close to physical violence, and not at her, at the people that want to hurt her.

I just, constantly worry. She can't find a job. She's living with her boyfriend, who by the way is trans, but he passes. You would never know he started life differently. And he's a great guy. I think the world of him, and he's crazy about my kid, so he gets points for that too. Even when we go out there to see 'em, I see people trying to get a better look or stare at them. I confront 'em. I'm not gonna put up with that shit.

I'm always afraid of making mistakes. When we're talking or messaging or we're together, and these interviews are not helping, no offense but they're not. This is pretty difficult because I have to think of her as her former self and I have to think of her as her current self. And it gets me confused. I just hope I don't get confused while I'm talking to her because if I call her 'him', she will lose her mind. I mean, hard. And I don't blame her because I haven't made that mistake in a while.

My wife, we talked about that this afternoon. I was talking to her about these interviews and told her how hard they were because we mourn the loss of our son. My son was a really cool kid. Really freaking cool kid. My son turned into a huge, raging asshole, okay, with all these issues that they were dealing with that nobody knew about. Which I understood why he turned into an asshole, and now he's, now she's, there I go, now she's a little different than that now. But there was definitely grief. I grieve the loss. I miss my son every day. I grieve for my son every
day. Every day. As well as most parents that lose a child. Now I hate to say that this is like losing a child. I hate to compare it to that because it knows that pain. I do not know that pain. Because I can pick up the phone and call my kid. I can call up and have a conversation, but my son is gone. My son's gone. So, there is absolutely a grieving process. And psychologists helped us with that.

Well before my daughter told me (about her gender dysphoria), I didn't think about them (transgender people) much. I didn't know much about them. I knew there was gays. I knew there was lesbians. Really didn't care either way about that. My opinion is that, you do you, I'll do me. We had a trans person at work and the guys in the shop would make fun of her. I would partake in that bad joke making. I was one of them that did it. But that's about as far as that went. Not to minimize that, but I know people that would probably get violent just because somebody was trans. I would not have done that; however, I would have used bad language and disrespected them by misgendering them. Now that my child is trans, and I've been slapped in the face with this issue, I've been forced to find out about it.

I've also been forced to find out how big of an asshole I was. You've got to kind of turn to Jesus. I look at how many kids I know just from trans house and the kids that used to come here. We got a pool and a hot tub out back and the backyard's fairly secluded so. The kids could come here and they called this their safe house. They said, "I'm going to the safe house," and they'd come here and we'd cook out and Jill had a girlfriend live here before. I like to think I'm an ally. I like to think I'll do anything to help that I can.

The same day I found out about Jill, I lost it. I read the email. I could feel the pain in the email that my kid is going through. And absolutely lost it in my pew in the office. I went in to tell my boss that I needed to go home and she asked me to come in and close the door and asked me some questions and I just came out with it and told her about it. Come to find out her
husband of 17 years is trans. He is a trans woman. And we've talked so many times over the
course of the last several years. She's helped me through issues with Jill and I've probably helped
her through issues with spouse. The biggest one being, who gives a crap what society says, so
you're married to a woman, who cares. It's your business. If you love 'em, you love her. That's
the end of it. And kind of, solved that bit.

My beliefs and opinions are 180 degrees from where they were before. I would never try
to disrespect anybody. I have a whole new respect for those, I don't want to say 'those people',
for trans people. I mean, they're people. I don't even like calling them trans people. They're just
people. I see that now. Believe me when you think you're doing a lot of things right because a lot
of people appreciate what you do and then you figure out deep down inside you're really a
fucking ass and you're really an asshole. That's the kind of Jesus meeting you really don't want
with yourself. I had it.

But I know so many of those kids whose moms and dads just disown them. Just disown
the hell out of them. Every one of those kids who used to come to our house. Their moms and
dads wouldn't let them come home unless they were presenting as their birth gender. You can
come here and do what you want. Be respectful of me and my own, you're gonna be safe here.
Nobody's gonna harm you here. They used to call the safe house.

I'm sure Southern culture would have a lot to do with the way that some people respond
to me and my family. I'm sure that it will. I believe it influenced me when I was younger and I
made some mistakes. I've gotta live with those every day. I do not let it influence me at all. I
think a lot of my friends don't know. They don't ask, I don't tell. If they ask, I tell 'em straight
out. I'm not gonna lie about it. I'm not gonna lie about it because I feel like, if I talk around it or
lie about it, then I feel like I'm disowning my child. I'm not gonna do that.
I promise you this is not the easiest thing in the world that I've ever done. It's probably the hardest. I mean living as the parent of a trans person whose life was going so straight and them doing so great, to wind up here. That's very difficult. It's not any easier for her. That's what I think about. When I think, wow this is difficult being a trans parent, being the parent of a trans kid. Well it is a little bit harder being a trans kid, so I don't have anything to bitch about.

**Making Meaning as a Father of a Child who Identifies as Transgender**

Being a father of a transgender kid is probably the hardest thing I've ever done in my life. You fear for their sanity, fear for their health, fear that somebody might kill them and I'm not there to protect them. It's very, very difficult. But I wouldn't give my kid up for anything in the world. If they told us she robbed a bank, I'd say, “See you when you get out.” But this is not a choice. This is choosing not to kill themselves today. So I try to be there for her.

The most influential thing in acceptance happened to be another transgender female. I have a good friend whose spouse is a transgender female and was going through transition long before my daughter. When I got the email at work about Jill, I went in to tell my boss. I didn't even go home. She asked me what the problem was, and I, for some reason, laid it all out to her. And she confided in me that her husband was exactly the same way. We were already friends as well as we worked together. My wife and I, went to dinner with them, and I saw how well adjusted she was. We sat and talked for about four hours at a restaurant and I figured out there is hope out of this.

'Cause all that a parent really wants for their kid is to be happy and healthy. Loving my child is all the influence and acceptance I needed. The more I learned about other kids that didn't have their parents to love them anymore. They don't have their back. I just can't fathom that. I just can't understand how you can give birth to a child and that child come across, obviously
something that is so incredibly hard for them, and you're going to abandon them? No, I don't think so. Not in my lifetime.

I was very closed-minded to the whole transgender thing because I really didn't know anything about it. Didn't really care if you're gay, if you're lesbian. The world could use more love. But I was very closed-minded. We told everybody from my mom and dad to brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles, everybody. If you can't get along with her, fine. It's been nice knowing you, but do not cross the line. It's influenced me to have more compassion for people, but I can be a handful. Like I said, I didn't care, if people are gay that's great. If people are lesbian, that's great. I didn't think much about that, but until you are confronted with having to deal with a transgender relation, most people just don't take the time to learn about it. Maybe that's why God put that hammer in my bag. Maybe I needed to be taught a thing or two. But I'm not going to lose my kid over it.

Advice for another father finding out their kid's transgender. Get over yourself. It's not that big a deal in the grand scheme of things of the life of your child. It's a huge deal. I don't mean that it's not, but my relationship with my daughter and the relationship I had with my son is different, but the relationship I have with my kid is not different. My kid's still in there. My son is gone, but my kid's still here. My daughter, now, is my kid. The kid is still in there. The soul is still there and is vibrant and interesting and wants the same things in life. All of that kind of shit that too many of them, my daughter included, just don't get the opportunity because of closed-minded pricks that won't give love a chance because they don't consider their little box of what they should look like, or what they should think they are, or be, or anything like that. So I would tell the other father, step back, take a breath. And then do some research. Get it in your mind that the relationship is more important than anything else and find out what the kid's going through.
Most parents, they don't want to know what their kid's going through. They're making that choice on their own, then live with it, bye, boom. That means living that same nightmare by the people that they are then pissing off. I can't understand that. So fathers need to just step up. Most fathers, they just need to take a breath. And when you realize that your kid is hurting and you need to do what you can to help them because you can't change it. You didn't cause it and you can't change it. So, that's very difficult for a father to realize 'cause dads are fix-it people. Most dads are fix-it people. And we're used to fixing everything. If we can't fix it, it ain't broken. Well, Jill’s not broken. She's just a little different. So, a father has to realize what a kid carries in their pants doesn't mean what they carry in their heart and in their head.

Any parent, not just fathers, 'cause mothers have a hard time with it too. Any parents that are facing this situation need to go and talk to a therapist. They need to seek that information out. And they need to find somebody that has knowledge about transgender and transgender community and that is not in the transgender community. Because a lot of those within the community, I hate to say, maybe prey on transgender people, but some of them do. Some of them prey on transgender folks because that's how they make their living. But there are a lot of very honest people that are just trying to help. We found one we liked a lot. And one reason I think they should see therapist is because suicide is very real in a transgender community.

And me and my wife went to see a doctor here in town. And she said, “Look, there's nothing you did to cause this. If they harm themselves, there's nothing you did to cause this. Yes, it would be tragic. Yes, it'll be horrible. But it won't be anything you did. It won't be your fault.” So, I think finding good counseling is very important. But I don't think you've got to continually see a counselor. If you've come to grips with it, I think the most counseling you can do is have
that open dialogue with your child, an honest dialogue with your child. And most parents don't like to have that honest dialogue with their child.

I don't think there's anything I did to cause it. I know I caused more hurt than meaning to, that I said some very bad stuff, just not thinking seriously about it. I could have been better at handling it. But I can't beat myself up over mistakes. I can just try to apologize and move on. And that's what I've done. And she's forgiven me. And we still have a pretty good relationship. I mean, if she needs something, I'm the first person she calls.

My wife and I talked about it a lot. And we talked about it with our youngest child. He never went to counseling on it. Would like for him to have, but he accepted it right away. It was like one day he had a brother, the next day he had a sister. It was like turning on a light switch for him. But he was a little younger when he found out about it.

My wife and I talked about going to therapy, should we go by ourselves, should we go together? We went together from the jump. But we looked at two or three different doctors before we found the one we liked. I liked her honesty. And she was involved with transgender people. But she wasn't in the transgender system. She wasn't making money off of transgender people. And she wasn't trans herself. No, not that I know of. But it wouldn't have mattered to me if she had been. She could have came from Mars for all I cared. We went to a couple of different therapists. And didn't like them. Nice people, but it's hard to talk about your transgender daughter with a dollhouse in the room. One lady advertised that she discussed transgender issues, but when you got to her office, she didn't handle transgender issues. She handled pediatric issues. She handled children. And then you'd say, “Well, throw up your hands. Your website and your office said you counsel transgender parents.” They’d be like, “Oh yeah, I counseled one.” Have a nice day. You know? I mean, on a nice term, we didn't just walk out. You could see in her face
what we said shocked her. And with the therapist we stuck with, nothing shocked her. And she was very forthcoming with advice and information. And was actually kind of repeating what my friend's transgender wife said when we had dinner with her and found out that people can be happy.

But the company I work for was real good. We talked to them and they have different suggestions for doctors. Although this doctor that we wound up seeing wasn't on the list, we did find them through that service. But we saw her probably off and on for about a year. And when I say off and on, it was probably three or four visits. I think the most important counseling you can do is listen to your child. Don't hear your kid talk. Listen to what your child has to say. There's a huge difference between listening and hearing. If you're listening, you're getting what's being said. If you're hearing, you might not really understand it.

Therapists should listen to what the families have to say. Encourage them to have a friendly open dialogue with their child. Not to shut any thoughts. Not talk in absolutes. Just listen and be compassionate because those parents are hurting. Those parents are hurting. I know all too well the pain that the parents are going through. They mourn their child and they lose their child. But I can still pick up the phone and call, but it's different. And those parents, they do their own kind of mourning. So a therapist should just be compassionate to that. But weed through the BS. Therapists need to know the facts. Understand the mourning process for the parents.

My hopes are my child will get back into lighting design, which she loved, and she's great at. Whatever she chooses to do, get back into something and make a run with it. She's got a really good boyfriend. I really like them a lot. My wish for them is they get married, adopt children, and move along. Really make a long run of it, and die old, slapping each other on the butt like me and my wife are going to do.
What my fear is that transgender will continue to define my child. And they will continue to use that for an excuse in the world that happened is because she's transgender. This happens to so many of these transgender people. And of course, people like Donald Trump don't make that any easier. But policy-makers, they need to understand the rights, the civil rights, human rights and quit looking at them as transgender people. For God's sake, they're people. That's all the are. They're just freaking people. People keep calling them transgender people. That's kind of crappy. The bottom line is, my daughter may be a transgender girl, but she’s still my kid. She’s still a person. She’s still a human freaking being that loves and laughs and cries and hurts.
CHAPTER 6

“Love your kid unconditionally because that's the best thing you could do for them.”

John’s Story

John is 49-years-old, White, heterosexual, divorced to the mother of his MTF child, Coley. He reports Coley is his biological child. John reports he is, “Catholic by baptism. Not in agreement with some of the Catholic church's positions. I consider myself less religious/more spiritual. I attend church periodically because the setting sometimes helps me get in a mindset where I can walk away an hour later having accomplished what I went for spiritually.” He reports earning a Bachelor’s degree. John discovered his daughter, who uses the pronouns of she/her, is transgender at the age of 11-years-old. John’s daughter is currently 16-years-old.

John was referred by his ex-wife. She saw my study’s information on a social media post and forwarded the information to John. John appears very willing to share his story and emailed me believing his experiences in the past 5 years as a father of a transgender child could be helpful for this research project. John also shared artifacts of a picture of his children and an email he sent to family and friends about his daughter’s transition.

The Fatherhood Experience

I grew up in a very normal, close family. Not sort of like a Walton’s, but not sort of like Married with Children. But, my family was a lot closer to the Walton’s with emphasis on family. My maternal grandmother loved us and we generally made time to all be together around the dinner table for family holidays. When we became teenagers and started playing sports then there was a lot of focus to have that family time. We had to be very deliberate.

My parents were teachers and so we didn't have extravagant vacations. We had each other and we did things that we all enjoyed, but there were the modest vacations. We didn't have
the money to spend, but now in retrospect as an adult, I think to myself that was certainly something that made us very close as a family. I still talk with my mother four times a week. I talk with my dad probably once every other week, but we're texting regularly. I've got a brother that I talk with three or four times a week.

When my ex-wife and I started a family, we had a very similar approach to our family, doing things as a group together, focused on the kids, uber focused on the kids. That's where we got the good and satisfaction. I had a very intense job and had a lot of opportunity to produce and get the satisfaction of accomplishments, but it didn't compare to the simple satisfaction of watching your kid stumble down the stairs on a Saturday morning and just want to hang out with you. I've always sort of made my career decisions around being available for my kids. I never wanted to be the guy who came home and have the kids say, "Now who's the guy in the suit who just walked through the front door?" "That's your father."

Have you ever seen the movie, *The World According to Garp*? It was made in the middle '80s with Robin Williams. Robin Williams' character was a writer and he made a statement to his wife in one scene, he said, "There's only two things in the world that come naturally to me: writing and being a father." And, I think there's only one thing in the world that comes naturally to me and that's being a father. So, it's just something that's always been this wonderful source of satisfaction. One of the things that really sticks out to me to this day is when we started telling our friends and family that Coley was transgender, it was almost a natural thing because I had the security of knowing that my family was unconditionally loving. And, Coley’s mom's family was the same way. And so, we knew that she had certainly could at least have safe zone within family.
Sort of the best way of describing how I became the father that I am was just being raised in a family that was always supportive. I remember my grandmother the night before my chemistry final my junior year in high school, I stayed up most of the night studying and she was the last person I saw that night and she was the first person I saw in the morning. She would come out and check on me ad ask if I needed anything. She was wonderfully supportive and loving about her perspective. I always think how she impacted whenever I'm making a parenting decision or reacting to a parenting situation. I always just think to myself, "How are the kids processing this? How will my response impact them and what's the most beneficial way of dealing with this situation?" If it's a celebration I want them to feel like they're the center of the celebration. If it's a problem that we're trying to solve, I want them to understand that all problems are solvable. A lot depends on my response.

My mother and I talk about these things a lot more than my father and I. He’s quiet. He certainly is a good listener. But when we talk, I'm contributing more to the conversation than he is. He comes down for some time between a week and 12 days. This time of year he drives down from Connecticut. He just wants to immerse himself in whatever it is that we're doing and watch his grandchildren in their natural habitat so to speak.

When we were kids, my dad built these bird boxes with us. We were all terrible woodworkers. We'd fashioned together these things that the birds would come to because there was food in them. So, I remember the making bird boxes with him. I remember loving to help him work in the garden or rake weeds in the yard. He was always at our baseball coach until we got to an age where baseball got competitive. I remember we would stand on the other side of the centerfield fence and watch the game because it bothered him to listen to the parents who really didn't know much at all about baseball, but were happy to flap their gums the entire game about
how much they knew about baseball. Rather than dad stressing out to the point where he didn't enjoy the game, he just watched it to get inside of the outfield fence.

No one in my family places that sort of emphasis on traditional roles. No one ever used the term be a man or this is what a man does or this is not what a man does. Everyone in my family cries and so I don’t think in the traditional sense that men are supposed to be the tough ones or men are not supposed to cry. We were a very hugging, physical family, even my dad who was just quiet and sort of the least emotional of the bunch. But, there was never any expectation that men were supposed to be one thing and women were supposed to be the other. My brothers and I are all exceptional cooks and pride ourselves in that. I've certainly not packed any sort of expectation around tradition roles for my children either.

It was tough (transition from being a man to a man who is a father) because I was working. I wasn't gonna be in that career forever and it was actually two years later when our child, Coley, was about a month away, and I left the world of public accounting. Because I just didn't want to be that person who was just a breadwinner and didn't have an active role in parenting. So the transition was a wonderful thing. I mean I was sick to my stomach the first week I actually went back to work that I couldn't be home to just stare at my newborn in his cradle.

I wouldn't say I did anything specific to prepare to be a father. We had a book in the house, *The First Year*, and some others on how to be a parent. But, I like to use the expression, "they don't come with a manual," and, “You have to roll with it." Two of my siblings had children at the time, so we would see my siblings and their children regularly. We had been a community living in a whole pile of young families and young kids. So, we would hang out
together at the playground. Our family had small kids and neighbors had small kids too. But nothing in particular that I did to deliberately prepare.

I'm very biased when I think of what makes a good father. Someone who doesn't profess the traditional role of a man. When I say traditional, I'll go back to the common thing we did earlier about everyone having defined roles and men work and hang out with their sons. And the women don't work and they hang out with their daughters and cook dinner. That's just not what I believe. You'll never hear those words come out of my mouth. I consider a good father's role to be involved in every aspect of their kids’ lives. I think a good parent, forget about father or mother, the parent is someone who is effective in ensuring that their children are loved unconditionally. That nothing that they could do, as horrible as it may be, as selfish as it may be, a good parent is still going to love them unconditionally. I want to certainly help them to see a better path or a better team, but at the same time, the parent is one that, when their child succeeds, it's the child that is celebrated and they earned it and they deserve the spotlight. They don't need the parent encroaching on their success and dropping in so to speak. Those are sort of the things that guide me as a parent because I think those are the things that good parents do.

I've kept this record for when kids have kids of their own. I don't think there's any journal entries with Coley as her birth name there. I think I stopped before Coley told us that she was transgender, so all the stories are of her as her birth gender. A lot of them are of her dressed up as Cinderella and hanging out with so many of her sister’s friends. But that's who she was. So, I think it's important to have the ability to help your children understand their childhood and your interaction with them. I think one the reasons I do this documentation is selfish and I want them to know what my relationship with them was. How I thought about them.
Being a Father of a Child who Identifies as Transgender

I guess "fortunate" is the word that comes to my mind as being an all-encompassing word around the experience. For a couple of reasons. One, Coley came to us before she had gone through puberty. I'm just so glad that she did and she had that awareness and said, "I identify as girl." That way, we could do something about it before he started going through physical changes. I was at a conference last year at college, speaking on the parent panel, and I remember asking her if she wanted to go to the conference because the woman organizing it said, "Bring Coley down. There's a whole pile of teenagers down here." Going to that conference, I had this thought and remember walking in the door and I could feel Coley was scouting things out, trying to figure out if she made the right decision coming down. The organizer came up and grabbed her and said, "Coley, come over here and let me introduce you to my friends." That was it. That was the last time I saw her for like three hours. I came out of the parent panel discussion and saw her out in the courtyard with some kids her age. She just gave me the nod, like, "Hey Dad, what's up." She's just totally cool in that environment. On the ride home, she said, "They told me I could pass." I thought about it for a second and I clarified it with her. I said, "What do you mean 'pass'"? She said, "I could pass for a girl." I guess I learned that day that that's high praise in the trans community. "You could pass." Coley’s a beautiful girl, and I’m fortunate that Coley came to us and said, "I am transgender."

The way this all came together is Coley was watching a special on Anderson Cooper about transgender people and went to his mother and said to her, "In that special that I watched, that's me. That's who I am." What's interesting is when Coley was growing up, he was always surrounded by girls. He loved to play dress-up. He loved to dress as a princess. He loved to play with dolls. In our house, that was completely cool. Outside of the house, he was more reluctant
to do that. We would not have been surprised in the least if Coley had come to us some day and said, "I'm gay."

Anyway, her mom called me and said, "Here's what's going on." The first thought that went through my head is, "How am I going to put this into words because this is life-changing? How do I explain this? How do I describe this to people when I didn't even know what it was?"

Thank God for Google. I consider myself generally a smart guy, but I didn't know what transgender was. I thought there were three categories: gay, straight, and bi. That was my shallow perspective on the world and I was happy to embrace anyone who was gay, straight, or bi. I immediately started reading and researching and I found a book called *The Transgender Child*. It was written by two doctors. They bounced back and forth between what felt like almost a medical textbook approach to real-life stories where the names had been changed to protect the innocent. The part that was always most wrenching to me was that we met with Bill who was the father of a transgender son who identifies as a girl. Bill said, "You start acting like a boy or I'm going to beat your ass until you act like one."

I've grown up in a family where love has been unconditional. We've raised our children in a family where love has been unconditional. Part of me was very aware of almost a temptation to feel superior because I was accepting. I thought that because I realized of all topics, this is not one where I'm going to change people's minds. People have a value set. They have a mindset. They have a religion. They have a framework that they operate within and live within and I'm not going to change that and it's not my place to change that. All I want is people to treat my kids fairly and to treat them like decent human beings.

I do remember writing a letter to my friends and talking about not knowing what transgender was. I felt the clinical side of me start to explain, "The brain as a gendered organ."
All of these things that I had read in *The Transgender Child*. "The fetus starts to identify with it, and the starts identifying with a sex before the baby is even born," as I recall. But beyond the clinical side, there was the practical side.

Thinking back I didn’t know Coley was transgender. I thought Coley likes to do girl things and maybe he's gay because in my limited knowledge, a boy who acts like a girl might be gay, but couldn't be transgender because I didn't know what transgender was. In fact, Coley’s brother was not allowed to talk about the fact that Coley liked to dress up as a princess. That was Coley's private thing and Coley was very much allowed to do any of that stuff in the house and mom and dad were completely cool with it. Basically, our other kids were not allowed to not be cool with it, at least not openly. We talk respect and if Coley wants to dress up as Cinderella, Coley can dress up as Cinderella and just because he's a boy doesn't mean he can't do that.

Of course, my initial thought was fear. While my family's embraced it, I thought, "Coley’s going to go through hell." Teenagers are awful to begin with and she’s going through middle school. She had gone to sixth grade and she broke here story in May of sixth grade. During the summer, she got hair extensions put in and started dressing like a girl. Then, we talked about homeschooling.

We homeschooled her through an online program for the first semester of seventh grade because her mom and I agreed and she with us, that that would have been a tall order to leave school as Coley in May of sixth grade and come back as a girl in fall of seventh grade. As the first semester wore on, it became clear that homeschooling is very, very isolating, and we had been warned of that and talked with a therapist. Coley started saying, "I want to go back to school in second semester." We worked with the administration at the middle school here, and again, I was concerned because even talking with the principal, she was expressing some
reluctance. One day, Coley’s mom and I were there with the principal and the vice-principal and the counselor and the head nurse. There were probably six people around the table and the two of us. I was sensing some fair reluctance, and I said, "What is the issue?" I don't remember her exact words, but the principal spoke as if this is something that Coley had chosen. Part of me wanted to lose my mind and part of me just said, "We have to help this school prepare itself for her return. It's what's in Coley’s best interest."

The year that Coley told us that she was transgender, I had bought the Christmas card. I held up a Christmas card and I said, "I send out about a hundred of these every year and up until this point, I've sent out a picture of two sons and a daughter. This year, I'm sending out a picture of two daughters and a son." I said, "There'll be 40 people that get this card that'll never notice. Then, of the remaining 60, some will notice and think, 'What happened?' but I don't know them well enough and I send them a Christmas card annually and I want to keep a connection to them. Then there are family members who all know. Then, there's a core group of people that I'm very close with, but this is a story that you don't just stick on an email and say, “Oh, by the way, FYI, Coley’s transgender.” I authored this very, very lengthy email, and it started with, "I wish I had the opportunity to talk with each of you individually about this. It's not something I wanted to communicate on email, but my Christmas card has a different look this year." In fact, I think that was the subject line. I explained what was going on in Coley’s life and in our lives and how the other kids were reacting to it, how I didn't know what transgender was when Coley told us that she was transgender.

I still have every single note that I got back. On person said, "My youngest wrote me a Christmas card this year and she said 'you're the best dad in the world!'," and he said, "I'd like to think that I am, but I think you deserve that title, John." Another was just thanking me profusely
for telling him and telling him everything about it. At that point, I said, "I'm fortunate. We are fortunate that we chose our friends wisely. We associate with people who are accepting and unconditional."

I was concerned just given the people that I met when I moved to the south for work. We have some neighbors down the street, and I thought, "Coley's been hanging out with their twin daughters for the last three years and their mother's going to freak when she hears this. You know what? If their mother freaks and she doesn't want Coley hanging out at her house, I don't want Coley hanging out at her house." She made a very simple statement. She said, "We love Coley, and we will love her as her (birth name) just the same." It was a wonderful thing. But I'm fortunate. I could go on and on and on with the stories, but that's why I chose that word to describe our experience. For the most part, I think Coley would agree. She doesn't talk outwardly. She doesn't say things like, "I'm so glad that you and mom love me unconditionally, even though I'm transgender." But there's things that she does, ways that she responds. After we got off the phone the other night, you and I, I told her that we had had the conversation. I told her before we got on the phone that we were going to have the conversation. I think she feels a sense of relief or pride that she has parents that are so supportive of her. Again, fortunate is the word that just comes to mind, especially again reading The Transgender Child book and some of the detailed accounts that the doctors were relating in the book.

There's a guy I worked with him another company. We've been friends for 10 years, so he knows because I told him way back when we were working at our last company together. It was interesting, four years later, he texted me and he said, "You got a second?" He never does that. I sensed some urgency in there. I called him and he said, "I just wanted to tell you that my son told us he's gay." My friend is very conservative. I was the first person he called and told, and he said,
"I'm looking for some perspective, buddy. I watched you go through something like this, and I really admire the way you handled it." He was looking to me for some perspective. "How do I get my head around this?" I said, "You know what? That's up for you to figure out, but let me tell you that he needs right now is just simply to know that you love him unconditionally." He started telling me his game plan. He had already thought of it. He had already figured that out that that's what he needed to do and it was so cute to see it.

The only thing that I remember that was sort of a negative situation was when she first went back, second semester, seventh grade to middle school. A kid, some little puke teenager passed her in the hallway, and he said, "Hey (Coley’s birth name). What's going on, (Coley’s birth name)?" Just making a big to-do about it. Coley came home and told her mom and her mom called the principal. The principal called that kid in the next day and she said, "If you ever want to step foot in this school again, you'll treat people with dignity and respect around here." The same principal who I had my concerns about and I was convinced that she thought that either sexual orientation and gender identity were a choice.

Coley’s mom and I had a chance to go to an adult transgender conference in the south. We got invited to just sit on a panel of parents of transgender people. Coley and I were driving to the grocery store and I said, "Your mom and I are going to that conference today," and she said, "What are you going to talk about?" I said, "Whatever people want to know about." I said, "If there's crickets and people are waiting for me to talk, what should I tell them? What should I talk about? What three things come into your mind?" She said, "People are ignorant. Number two, they don't make good underwear for trans girls." Very practical. And then she said, "There is nothing in my life, absent having a child by myself, that I can't do."
Then there's those little issues of using the girls' bathroom. We got through that one. Back in middle school, she used a staff bathroom. The following year, she went back for eighth grade and we had a meeting with the chief operating officer of the County Public Schools. He said, "My brother's gay. I grew up and I watched people ridicule my brother." He said, "I want you to understand that this is a decision that I need to make professionally and for what's best for this County Public Schools. This would be precedent setting. Personally, I have nothing but respect for your daughter." I just didn't like the combination of words and where we live. We left there and I was feeling like this isn't going to work out. I got an email from him. He said, "I gave it thought. Again, this is precedent setting for the school. I want to let you know that I've reached the conclusion that Coley can use the girls' room." I almost just went through the ceiling with excitement. Just a wonderful day.

Well, initially out of the box, it was her brother (that was the most challenging). He had some concerns and refused to call her Coley for a little while. Then, her mom did something that was really, I thought, genius in a way. She called the mother of one of our son’s friend and she said, "We'd love to have him come out to the lake with us this Saturday. We've also got a significant change in our family. Coley is transgender." The mom said, "Well, Brian is totally cool with that. In our household, everything is unconditional." When our son got to see that his friend was cool with it and he wasn't going to lose his friends because his brother is now a sister, it was almost like an overnight change. It was an obstacle, but it was a short-lived obstacle.

Then there was one semester Coley had to take phys ed. When I was a kid, you had to take phys ed all year, every year, and now in high school, it's an elective so they take it one semester. We met with her counselor when she went to the high school and we had told them, "We have a child that's transgender and we're not asking for any special anything. We just think
you should know because a lot of the kids that go to the school here know." They were very
good about hand-selecting teachers for Coley to be in. The counselor that she got assigned to was
someone who the administration thought would be the perfect counselor to be available to her for
any issues that you might not get from a straight kid, or even a gay kid. When she took phys ed,
they had an arrangement where she used a staff locker room to change out every day. There was
never a hitch. She always changed out for PE and always changed out afterwards and got an A in
class. There's really nothing coming to mind that have been huge obstacles.

The obstacle we're dealing with right now is getting our insurance company to cover her
surgery. Typically, doctors hadn't been performing surgeries on kids this young. I flew Coley up
to Phoenix this summer and we met with a doctor. But we collected all the requisite letters from
therapists and medical professionals and endocrinologists and provided it all to the surgeon's
office. They reached out to the insurance company to seek approval for the surgery and we got
the great, great, great news last week that they approved her surgery. Then when I got the mail, I
read it very closely because I know that my company's health plan does not cover this surgery.
What the authorization says is, "Based on the information from medical professionals, we're
approving the surgery. Coverage for the procedure is still contingent on your contract." They're
basically saying, "We'll approve the surgery, but it doesn't mean we're going to cover it." I'm
thinking to myself, "Well, then you have no right to tell me she can't have the surgery if you're
not paying for it." I found an advocate inside the insurance company and this has to be a year and
a half ago. In anticipation of this, I called and I got ahold of this claims adjuster and she said,
"You do have an appeal process." I told her Coley's story and she said, "I will write the appeal
for you if the claim gets denied." Now, we're at that point, and I want her to help me navigate the
process. That's plan A. Appeal and see if the insurance company will cover it.
Plan B is something I learned a bit from the surgeon. He said in New York, employers of more than 500 employees have to provide this coverage as part of their health plan. My company has 1,200 employees, and they're headquartered in New York, so on the surface interpretation is the fact that this procedure is specifically excluded in my health plan is a violation of New York State law. I don't know if anyone else in my company's ever tested it, ever brought it to the company's attention. I'm frankly not looking forward to having that battle with my employer, but I will if I have to.

My plan is to just contact an attorney in New York to ask what does the law say and I confirmed that my plan is not a self-funded plan so they don't make their own rules. All of our doctors' letters stated this is medically necessary, which is the requirement. If it's medically necessary and the law says it needs to be covered, then my company's just going to have to provide that coverage, or the insurance company is going to have to provide that coverage. I'm not sure where exactly that's going to go, but (in June), whether it's covered or not, Coley’s having her surgery. She is just over the moon about it.

I think being prepared and being informed and being knowledgeable is a great solution to a lot of things. It's a great de-stressor to arm yourself with information or be prepared. In this case, the more I read, the more I thought, "All right, now I've got the words to have the conversation with my family. Now, I've got the knowledge to understand what Coley might be processing, or what she might be experiencing. Now I've got the reference point. " It's not my place to change someone's mind about how they feel about transgender people. I'm not going to do it. I'm not even going to try to do it. They can feel whatever way they want, That's their right. They're entitled to feel any way they want or believe anything they want to believe. I would take exception if they did something to deliberately hurt me or offend me or my child, my child
particularly. I think I'm a lot more durable and I'm the third party here. I would never want to see anyone say or do anything to my children for that matter. We would never create an environment in our house where any one of us would retaliate using the same ammunition that someone used to launch the attack on Coley or her siblings. I have never had any issue with it. Part of it is a lot of people don't know because I want to be respectful of what Coley wants. She wants to be a girl. She doesn't want to be a transgender girl.

The people that I did not tell kind of showed their stripes a little bit, which was a little bit disappointing. I think what happened was I had changed companies at the time and someone I had worked with at my prior company when Coley came to us and said, "I'm Coley." This woman's daughter and my youngest daughter were best buds, so I told my co-worker because our kids were hanging out together. I told her and she said, "It's absolutely wonderful and you guys are a great family." Then I left and I went to work for a different company. The kids really didn't hang out together anymore and I really didn't see that woman anymore. But then I know that my next company, there was some rumor percolating. "John's got a transgender kid." I thought, "How the hell did that get into this workplace?" Because I had just started at that company when Coley became Coley, so I hadn't even put up family photos in the office. I was able to trace it back to this woman at my prior company who was friendly with this woman in the current company. I was like, "Oh, the soap opera here." I just thought to myself, "I don't have a problem with that former co-worker saying, 'Yes, John has a transgender daughter.' I think the more appropriate thing would be, 'That's John’s story. John will tell you that. Why don't you ask him if you're concerned.'" What was distasteful to me was that the woman who was working with me at this company, who was walking around and telling people, "He's got a transgender kid." Who cares? How did he influence your ability to do your job? I, as your boss, could fire you for being
discriminatory. I don't bring that stuff into the workplace. It has no place in the workplace, so why are you talking about it like it's a scandal? Why are you whispering about it in hushed tones as if there's something weird or wrong about it? I would prefer that you keep that out of the workplace. It just doesn't belong here.

One of the reasons why I wish that I had been more committed to the support group because I didn't go through that. I didn't grieve and I didn't even think on the inside I grieved. If I were to grieve about anything, it would be about losing something. But I didn't lose anything. I told you about my journal. I had those wonderful memories and I committed them to writing. I can go back and play them back and it's not something I shouldn't do. It's not that it wasn't my child. It's not that it wasn't Coley or it wasn’t her birth gender. It was Coley before Coley recognized what transgender was and was courageous enough to come to us and say, "I'm transgender." It's still a part of our life.

I've heard other parents of transgender people say the same thing. One of the things we talk about when we go to those panel discussions is, "Do you have pictures in your house of your kid when they were presenting as the other sex?" and I do. I have two and they're in my bedroom. I don't want people coming to the house and seeing these pictures of Coley when Coley was little all over the house. I don't think that would be fair to Coley. I have not grieved. I don't get the sense that she's ever felt anything other than exhilaration that she can be who she identifies as. I do see other parents dealing with that. They're parents may be dealing with something I never had to deal with because of the way we raised a family. If you think what's really important is to have a little girl that I can go to dance recitals with or go bridal shopping with or it's really important to me to have a son that I can play catch with, the very traditional view of things, which I never really had anyway, I've got to think that maybe that's part of why
they struggle; in part, not entirely. Maybe they had this vision that son is going to hang out with
dad and daughter is going to hang out with mom and every now and again we'll do something
really special and dad will hang out with his daughter. Now they can't because there's no
daughter. I've never had to deal with that. I can still have a relationship with daughters and a son
and the reality is my three kids are very different from each other. I'm parenting three different
kids in three different ways, so I think that that must be a source of grief for some people. It must
be. I don't feel that and I've never really grieved anything. I can look in the mirror and ask myself
the question, "Have you ever grieved because of this?" And say no.

I do wonder, though, how I'm going to feel on (the day of Coley’s surgery). I'm a guy
who will never get a tattoo because it's permanent. I will never do anything that's irreversible.
While this is the most amazing opportunity for Coley, I just think to myself, "This is a body of a
young person that I co-created and she's making this irreversible change." I don't doubt that it is
exactly what she wants. Initially, I guess before I knew what transgender was, I thought, "When
Coley goes through puberty, she'll feel differently." Again, that shows you the shallowness, lack
of depth in my understanding of what transgender was. In my mind, there's no one more certain
of what she wants than Coley. (The day of the surgery) is going to be an amazing, amazing day,
but I can't help but think I'm going to be emotional, not because my child is physically changing
the sex that she was born as, but just because I cried the day my kids were born and that's a good
thing, right? Your birth is a wonderful thing. So, I can't imagine how I'm going to feel on (the
day of surgery). But there won't be any mourning or any sense of loss. I'm fairly certain of that.
But given my own personal perspective on irreversible change of any sort, I can't say how I'm
going to feel, but I know it'll be a very emotional day.
The fact that Coley feels completely comfortable and safe and knows exactly how I feel about her (is the most rewarding part of having a transgender child). I think that's the best part, but it's also the feeling of accomplishment and satisfaction there because I've got to think that someone in her situation would be scared to tell their parents that story or reluctant. But she's never known anything but complete acceptance. I hate to say an accomplishment because it makes it sound like it's about me or her mom, but to be able to say with complete confidence and honesty that my child knows that they are unconditionally loved, and every act, every word in our house underscores that. That, to me, is one of the best experiences of being a parent and being a parent of a transgender child, which I think, is arguably a little bit more challenging sometimes. Every kid has their own issues and every adult has their own issues, too. Having been able to go through five years of feeling fortunate, I guess is probably what I would say is the best part. She's certainly a wonderful source of pride. Again, I think back to the comment, "There's nothing that I can't do because I'm transgender."

**Making Meaning as a Father of a Child who Identifies as Transgender**

It means an opportunity to certainly reinforce what I always kind of knew and that's that I love my children unconditionally. It's maybe an affirmation. Certainly being more focused on how another person is thinking about something. I think I've always had a very open mind and a very broad perspective and the family I was raised in is very unconditional. There's no sort of grand epiphany of, "I was the parent of three straight children. Now I have a transgender child so my eyes have been open to religion." It really hasn't been like that and I think part of that comes from just the very fortunate; the word used last time, the very fortunate experience that we've all had through this here.
Having lived in the north for long time, I think it's a more open-minded state. Again, I can't point to the rate of services provided to transgender people in the north versus the rate of medical services provided in trans people in the south. It's just my perception of what is happening here versus there. (To find information about medical services) my ex-wife dialed into a network of parents of transgender children who are all looking to each other the people who have succeeded getting insurance companies to cover this surgery or provide any sort of medical service to their kids and sharing information. Some parents couldn't find a surgeon that was willing to do that. We took Coley to Boston to have it done. He didn't actually implant the hormones in her arm, but one of his colleagues did. We had gotten status temporarily at this support group, because they were like, "How did you do that?" because they were paying thousands of uncovered dollars to get these oral puberty blockers or hormone suppressants. So, those support groups were very helpful to some people because they were accessing ways to access healthcare for their kids. Particularly for those whose insurance company didn't provide coverage.

I think the support group was probably the initial source of referrals to (counselors). Part of the counseling was me and my-ex wife and Coley. Then part of it was my wife and I stopped and Coley and her sister went for a while. It was part of the process of certifying Coley as transgender. Which was important ultimately for things like getting a prescription for Estrogen. Coley very much wanted a body that was consistent with her identity, so the first step was getting some Estrogen into her system. It's certainly a thorough process, but I learned a lot about the process and I certainly get it. I was the guy who admitted to you last time that I just thought, "Hey, if we gave Coley a chance and he hit puberty, he would realize that may like girls." Again,
I think of myself as a generally intelligent person, I was just woefully under informed about the fact that there was more categories than gay, straight and bi.

The access to healthcare could exist here in the south. I know if there was a surgeon who would do gender reassignment surgery here, I think my ex-wife would've identified that through her network of people on the Facebook page. She's very dialed into the transgender community and I don't think we have anywhere around here who performs that surgery. My ex-wife found the counselor and I don't know if that was through the support group or not. I doubt it was a Google search. That's just sort of not the way we've approached any care for any of our kids. If you're going to take the time to do your research to find a plumber, you're certainly going to do that for this, right?

I asked the counselor, I said, "Can I come and talk with you because I'm in the process of educating myself on this and I don't feel like I need support. I feel like I need education." I could see how someone with her training might say, "Okay, I know what you're going through. You're a dad and you're in denial. Or you wanted your son to stay a son." That wasn't me. I made that clear up front. Maybe in her own way she was probing and testing to see if she could find a whole in that story and I don't think she did. One of the things I learned about The Transgender Child was the clinical aspect of it. Help me understand how this works and when I understand why it happens or how it happens, then I can get my head around it. I just remember walking away feeling like, "Okay, it makes sense." Not that I would never get fully behind it, but it just helps me to understand everything a topic. Then I felt that much more passionate about it. The counselor was clearly very knowledgeable and the way that she communicated with us was what I thought very, very appropriate and we got more than psychological services from her. She prepared us for the things that we would have to do. So, the care exists in the southeast.
Hurtful is the wrong word. It sounds a little bit soap opera-y when I say it out loud, but to change Coley's name we had to go through the County legal system. My ex-wife was established as the plaintiff and I was established as the defendant in order to change Coley's name. It had to be publicly posted for the requisite amount of time if public took exception. So, I just didn't like being in there as the defendant because it suggested that I wasn't supportive of it. It was kind of a little bit of a bummer.

I took Coley to the DMV and we were filling out her application for a driver's license: name, social security number, gender. So, we checked the F box. The clerk is not going to look at her and go, "What do you mean F? She's a boy." But, the other documentation we were providing included a birth certificate. We had changed her name legally in all the places you can change your name, but her gender marker was still male. I handed her documentation and I think she was just comparing names. And the names lined up between the documentation and the application, but the gender did not. And my role was to leave there with a driver's license that said Coley was a girl. A female. And we did.

That was kind of a big step forward because even now Coley’s been to more countries than I've been to. But god forbid if her passport says male and god forbid she was trying to get back into the United States or leave another country and they would say, "Wait a minute. Your passport says you're male. You're not male." You can only imagine how that situation could play out and probably not well. We've got this alignment through the documentation, the legal paperwork process, but are all part of a more complex web that sort.

My framework was straight, gay, bi. Now I know what transgender is. I don't I know all about it. I'm not an expert, but I know more than just about anyone I talk with about this topic. I know that I can impact how other people think about it and that's different from what I had said.
to you early on that I don't see it as my place to change people's minds. People are entitled to their own framework and their own value set and I'm sure some of it is learned in your household growing up.

I get to this point in my life and I think to myself, "I've got a lot to learn." And I'll get that through books or I'll get that through current events on the television or I'll get that through interactions with other people. This was not a topic I was really expecting to learn a lot about in my life because I didn't know what it was. I realize now the impact I can have on other people just by knowing something about a topic that other people know nothing about. Now I've got my elevator speech, the abbreviated version of the brain identifies with a gender in utero and kids may start presenting sort of indications that their identity is different than their biology.

Being the parent of a transgender child, I see that I have the ability to help other people just simply by talking about Coley. If they want to know my story, it's not my story. It's Coley’s story. But if they want to know how I, as her parent, processed it and dealt with it, I'm happy to tell them that story. I'll back it all up by saying, I realize our story may be a little bit unique because it's been fairly smooth, but I think that's a great story to hear if you're a parent and you're scared, or you're confused or uncertain. If you can hear a story that, "Hey, I know dude and dude and dude's family turned out just fine," that's got to be a comforting feeling.

Probably the same advice that I would give to the parent of any child who is straight. My youngest just turned 15 and I don't know where the time went. I thought I had them all until they were 18 and I realized that you don't have them that long. So I said, "Enjoy it while you can." I would give the same advice to a person who came forward and said, "My child is trans and I understand you have trans kid. What's your advice?" My advice would be, "Take advantage of the fact that you have your kids and they love you now and they're around and be with them and
be present." I think the greatest thing for Coley is just to know in my mind and her mom's mind she's not different. She's our daughter. She was born our son but she's our daughter. I think that, just unconditional. If all our actions are unconditional and all of our words are unconditional that helps. If a parent came to me and said, "What's your advice?" My advice would be treat your kid just like you treat your other kids. Love your kid unconditionally because that's the best thing you could do for them.

Counselors should help my child or help a transgender child understand that they're not a freak. I think to do that, you'd have to strike that balance between clinical speak and practical speak, particularly with someone like Coley who is nine or 10. You've got to speak in age appropriate terms but help the child and the child's parents that the child is not a freak. This is a thing of nature and your child is just as beautiful as any straight child or a gay child, for that matter. I personally would not have responded well to a psychologist who was in any way intimating that my child needed to be the poster child for trans kids. That would not have been appropriate at that time when we were all trying to process what that was and what it was all about.

I don't want to stop being a father, that's the problem. I don't plan on dying for a long time. I consider myself to be in exceptional health and state of mind. But I do sense that my time actively or having the opportunity to actively engage and parent my children is coming getting shorter. I watch their independence and I think to myself, "Okay, life is going to be really, really different."
CHAPTER 7

“I think about doing the opposite of what my father did.”

Harvey’s Story

Harvey’s is 54-years-old, Hispanic/White, heterosexual, divorced to the mother of his FTM child, Kenneth. He reports Kenneth is his biological child. Harvey reports he is, “Not religious but somewhat spiritual.” He reports earning a Master’s degree. Harvey discovered his son, who uses the pronouns of he/him/his, is transgender at the age of 15-years-old. Harvey’s son is currently 19-years-old.

Harvey was referred by his ex-wife. She saw my study’s information on a social media post and forwarded the information to Harvey. Harvey reached out to me directly and stated he, “...would be willing to participate in the study only if it has positive consequences to the LGBTQ community.” After sending an email explaining the purpose of the study, Harvey agreed to speak with me over the phone for all of the interviews. He appeared more succinct with his answers than the other fathers.

The Fatherhood Experience

I think about doing the opposite of what my father did. He's still around. He's Mexican-American, from a machismo type of environment. That was his way of doing things. When my kids were babies, I was changing diapers. To him, that's just not something that men do. As I was becoming a parent, every time that I had a question or how do I deal with something, sometimes I would say, "What would my father do?" and I would do the opposite. I still do that, as we speak.

The other thing is that he was in the military and he was deployed several times. At two different occasions, he was gone for a whole year when I was very young. I remember reading
some comments that my elementary school teachers had that said something like, "He seems to be doing much better now that his father's back," things like that. What I got out of that, is that being a father you have to be there. I've painstakingly tried to make sure that if I had to go on a trip or do something, I wasn't gone. I've never been gone for more than a week or 10 days on those sort of trips. I wanted to be around. That was my philosophy on how to do things. Before I had kids, it was more of an ambivalent thing. I thought, "Either way, whether I'm a father or not, I'll be fine." I'm not going to lie, it's a royal pain in the ass, but it's like anything, you would be at some future accomplishment and during the process, it's hard, but then you feel good about when you come out the other side.

We were living in Key West, Florida for four years and my dad took us on a couple fishing trips. I'm trying to think of something else. Like I said, he was gone a couple times. Also, he would go on extended tours for several months because he would go to some training. Twice he was gone when I was seven the whole year and then I was a freshman in high school when he was gone for another year at that point. Then, all throughout that period, he would sometimes go for anywhere from a few weeks to a few months. He took us to go fishing. One time, he took me on a trip to Key West to go catch lobsters because some friend of his invited him and it was like, "Bring your son" type thing, so we did that.

I also remember, when I was a Boy Scout, he helped out in the troop. He was a treasurer. It was kind of a passive role. He just took care of paperwork and that's about it. My younger son is in Boy Scouts. When he joined, I became one of the leaders. I'm still one of the assistant Scoutmasters. I go on a lot of camp-outs with him. Like I said earlier, I want to be there. I think that's important. Going back to the earlier question, as far as if I wanted to be a father, it crossed
my mind in the past. I thought, "Yeah, that would be cool." Whether it happened or not, it wasn't really a big deal for me at the time.

Spankings were prevalent. Beatings were prevalent. I'm, 55 and when I was a kid, it was not uncommon for that kind of stuff to happen. It was not looked at the same way as it is looked at now. I remember something he told me when I think I was five or six-years-old. We were living in Tampa, Florida and we were both looking out the front porch. There was a park across the street and there was another boy there that was crying about something. I don't know what he was crying about. He says, "You know, boys don't cry." I don't agree with it now, but I did back then. You have to realize, and this is the other thing I think about all the time, kids are very impressionable. When you're a parent and you tell your child that this is the way it's going to be, a child, to them, it's like, "Okay, there's no if, ands, or but. It's going to happen."

The funny thing is, one of the things that I think the reason I got into skydiving is because of my dad. When I was really small, being on an Air Force base because he was in the military, we went to an airshow. I don't remember how old I was, I could've been four, five-years-old. There were skydivers. There were military jumpers and they were jumping out and stuff. He pointed up and he says, "Hey, check that out." He was joking, he says, "Later on, they're going to take civilians and I'm going to sign you up." It's scary, but I thought, "If my dad says I'm signed up for that, I have no recourse. I have to do it because he's telling me that that's what's happening." Like I said, I took it seriously. I didn't understand that he was joking. Anyway, to make a long story short, I think he planted the seed in the back of my mind for later to do that.

That's the only thing I can think of because everything else is he just wasn't a big talker. He wasn't a touchy-feely kind of guy in that sense. I can't think of anything else that he might've said to me. He used to harp about going to school and if I didn't get good grades, I was going to
be a ditch digger. He was always pushing me to do well in school. That's all I can tell you about being a man that he has imparted to me.

My dad doesn't talk much. They live in California. Whenever I call, I usually call to talk to my mom because he and I, we've really never had a heart-to-heart. I did try and have one with him years ago and you could tell he was pretty awkward. Most the time when I call, if he answers the phone, he'll just say to my mom, "Oh, hey, it's your son. Here," and pass it on. I do hear from second sources that he feels that I never talk to him, which is kind of ironic, because every time I try to talk to him, he runs away. The reason I had the heart-to-heart with him a few years ago, was a matter of fact when my transgender son was born. I analyzed the relationship between my daughter at the time and myself and I looked at my dad and my sister and the kind of relationship it was. To me, I didn't think it was a good relationship. My sister got pregnant when she was 17 and she just went wayward, in a way. He's never forgiven her for that. This is years later and I'm trying to tell him, "Hey, dude, it's over. It's in the past. Let it go," but you could tell he was still harboring some resentment. He even mentioned, he goes, "You don't understand. It's like she betrayed me." I'm like, "She was a kid and it's done. Let it go." I can't talk to him. The only thing that we talk about is, "Hey, how's your car doing? How's your bank account? Do you need money?" That's pretty much the only conversations that we have.

I remember very vividly when my oldest, my transgendered child was born. It was a C-section and his mother was recovering. It was kind of traumatic. I was looking at him, thinking, "Wow. Man, my life isn't going to be the same again." Just looking at this little thing that we had just given birth to, I was scared. I wasn't sure whether I'd be able to deal with it.

I'm a skydiver and I also have a rigger's certification to pack parachutes. When I was changing diapers, I just looked at it like it's just like packing a parachute. It's actually like
packing, only it's dirtier and it's easier. I had no problems figuring that out. I was the first one to change his diapers. In the hospital, I was really nosy. The nurse picked him up and was taking him somewhere and I said, "What are you doing?" She says, "I'm going to change his diaper." Then, she just looked at me and says, "Do you want to do it?" I said, "Yeah, sure." She walked me through it and I figured it out pretty quickly. Pretty much, from that point on, I've changed his diapers until he was out of them.

To be honest with you, I kind of look at becoming a father like I look at death. I have no idea what's going to happen. I know it's going to be different, but I have no idea what it is. I didn't really think about what it's like. I never planned it. I just felt like, "Okay, whatever happens, we'll deal with it." I can't think of anything I did to prepare for the birth. We did read that book, "What To Expect," the series, seeing what to expect when the baby's born, that kind of stuff. Then, we did Lamaze and talked to my sister. She had kids pretty early in her life, so I was an uncle and I was taking care of my nephews when they were young. I was still relatively young back then. I think I was in my 20s when I did that. I didn't have kids until I was into my 30s. I had a little bit of a window-view there of what it would be like. The big thing that I remember is that this child would be 24/7. Where, if you're babysitting, if you're an uncle, then you have them during the day. Then, at night, it's like, boom, you pass them out and you pass them over back to their mom and you're done with it. With this, it's like they're with you 24/7. Just being around (makes a good father). I think if you're doing something, even if you're not doing something, you're just together. I think it's a good thing, just the mere presence.

**Being a Father of a Child who Identifies as Transgender**

It went in phases and the first part of it did not go over well. I think I mentioned that I grew up Catholic. My dad is Mexican and is very traditional Hispanic, and for me, I just took it
as something was wrong with my child. He had been going to therapy, so on several occasions I was like, okay, I'm going in there to talk. I want to be in this therapy session too. I would basically tell his therapist, “Hey, something's wrong with this kid, fix him.”

I thought, and I even told him, I said, "This is messed up, this is not right." We drifted apart. I tried to figure out. I basically just tried to analyze the situation and what was going on. Like I said, every time I'd go into the therapy session, I would say, “When is this child going to be fixed kind of mentality?” The therapist gave me a book. It was called, The Transgender Child. She just said, “Read this.” I'm like, “All right, fine, I'll read this.” What I got out of it was and the one thing that stuck in my mind was, there was a choice you have to make. Do you want a transgender live child or do you want a dead child?

When I read that, that was kind of like the turning point. And I started to figure out maybe it's not him that's messed up. It's something that's wrong with me. I thought about it for a while and I came to the conclusion that the reason I had a problem with it was because I was embarrassed for myself. I felt very disappointed in myself that I would be superficial. At that point, that's when I said, “You know what? This has got to change and I have to change. I have to change the way I think about this whole thing.” Rather than keeping it secret, I started talking to him more and asking him things. You're going to be a guy, I'm going to call you a boy. I'm going to refer to you as a he or him. If that's what you want, I'll do that for you, that's no problem. It was kind of almost like an empty promise and so I was still kind of in the discovery phase.

I would ask him something like, “Well what happens if I'm with some friends and I introduce you as my son and then later on my friends come up to me and say, ‘That's not a boy, that's a girl’?” He looked at me and said, "Well just tell them I'm transgender." The way he said
it was like, so what, that's no big deal. That's when I picked up steam in this whole process and I said, “Well, I'm just going to have to be open about it. There's no reason to be embarrassed about it.” And so it felt like a big weight was lifted from my chest. Pretty much ever since then it's been really good. We have a really good relationship. He's in California now and so he talks to me a lot. We talk about things that sometimes I can't even talk to my own dad about.

I guess you could probably say it was probably religious thing at first when I had difficulty accepting it. The reason I hesitate to say it is because I'm not a very religious person. I was brought up a Catholic, and I don't believe it, but when you're indoctrinated to all that stuff, then in the back of your mind, you believe it. My first notion was, “Hey, this isn't right. Men are with women, and women are with men, and that's it. You're born with what God gave you.” But that's the way I felt. I think that just understanding this whole situation has made me open my mind a lot better.

His mom kind of broke it to me because he hesitated to tell me because he kind of knew I would take it this way. His mom is the one that mentioned it to me. I think the hardest part is, you want your kids to be happy. You want good things for them and what comes up in my mind is I think about other parents. He dates. I mean, he's pretty outgoing, so he's always had girlfriends. My biggest concern is always are the parents of the girl that he's dating. Are they okay with this? That worries me sometimes. I kind of feel bad. When they were younger, I remember somebody would say they're going to come up and visit. We'd tell him somebody's coming over and he'd be all excited. He was just like a toddler. All excited and then all of a sudden the people would say, “We don't have time to stay.” I'd get really pissed. I'm like, “Hey, you told us you were going to stay here and we told our child and now our child is going to sit there and won't be able to play with somebody he's expecting to play with.” I would get really
mad about that. Well, that same thing is happening, only now I'm like, kind of wondering is this parent, the parent of this other kid, is that parent okay with it? Nine times out of ten I've been pleasantly surprised that the other parents are okay with it. They have no problems with it. Most of the time, that's the case. Again, that's to me is the hardest part. Are the other parents going to accept my child? I see that on the basis on how I first reacted when I first learned about this. It took me somewhere between maybe six months and a year to come around.

I would say no (about any grieving). I've read a lot about that where people are saying, “I no longer have a daughter” and stuff like that. I actually have not really felt that. I was kind of expecting to feel it, but it hasn't happened. I do have pictures of when he was little and wearing dresses, smelling flowers and that kind of stuff. It's not really mourning for losing a daughter. It's more like when my kid was small and I could hold them. I don't think it has anything to do with the transgender thing.

I don't have a problem with (transgender population). I accept it. It's something that I know is around and I want it to flourish. I'll be honest with you, I still have kind of a hard time. I remember going to one of the meetings and there were a lot of transgender people and if you can kind of tell that they're really male, for example, and dressed like a female. I still do feel uncomfortable. I have not gone to see *Brokeback Mountain* because I know I'm going to cringe if I watch two guys kissing themselves. I mean, those are things that I kind of have no problem with, but it's not something, I don't know. Like I said, I accept it, I just visually, I don't know how to explain it. It's just kind of hard to look at sometimes. I was pretty much clueless (about transgender people). In fact, there's a teen show, I think it was called *Degrassi*, and there's a transgender kid in there. And my thought was that he got the idea from that.
I did know a trans person before my son. At the drop zone, there was this guy that I used to jump with. He was like a Marine who fought guerrilla warfare type stuff; the meanest, the baddest, toughest guys out there are the Marines, right? I used to jump with him. He was a good guy and everything and then he disappeared. A year later or so, he showed up again, and he had long hair, he had boobs, but he still kind of looked the same. The thing that was, he was a tough guy and he kind of walked like an ape almost. He has this strut, kind of like an ape. He was, kind of like a bodybuilder or something. Now he's wearing a dress and he's got long hair and he still has that walk. It was kind of comical and I remember we were at this bar at the drop zone and he looks at me, and he says, "Hi, Harvey," with this feminine type inflection and stuff. At first I was like, "oh no." I didn't even want him to talk to me, but he did. Then I went over and we had a conversation and I still thought that it was very, very odd. This was back in '93, '94 time frame. It's kind of like, he was a friend of ours, we knew him, and we kind of let it slide because we knew him beforehand. I think if I would have met somebody who just out of the blue was transgender, I probably wouldn't have been as friendly towards him.

(My son) never wanted to wear dresses. We figured it was just a tomboy thing. Now, and this is one of the reasons why we get along so well, because I feel like I can trust him. I got that trust for him because I realized that when I sat down and analyzed, he didn't want to wear dresses, but because we told him, he did anyway. His parents want him to wear dresses and he'll wear them because his parents are demanding it and he will not disobey them. That's one of the things that he would not want to wear dresses. He always wanted to wear pants.

I'm a pretty big guy, so I kind of having a feeling that they don't want to argue with me (about my son being transgender). Probably afraid I'm going to pounce on them or something. Like I said, I openly tell people. I post thing sometimes. I haven't been on it lately, but I post
stuff on Facebook and I don't get any flack. I know I have a lot of friends. I'm sure that they're very conservative Christians. I'm sure that they're not kosher with it, but they don't say anything to me because I kind of have a feeling that I intimidate them and they won't say anything. As far as I'm concerned, I'll use that to my favor, so what the hell?

(Disclosing my son’s gender identity) felt like a huge weight lifted off. It's like you've got a secret. It’s like that Edgar Allan Poe, *The Raven*. You've got this secret and then you're spending so much energy trying to hide it. But then when you don't have to spend that energy to hide it, when you're open about it, it's very freeing.

None, whatsoever (negative reactions). I think people are just intimidated by me. It gives me more confidence to say it. That's fine, I have a transgender son. I know there's been cases where a conversation was going in that direction, a negative direction, and I would just blurt it out, “Well so you know, I've got a transgender son.” Then the conversation kind of ended right there.

(Son’s safety) does cross my mind, but it seems to me, I haven't seen or felt or heard of anything that has gone in that direction. Anyway, he's in southern California now, which is a lot more accepting for that stuff. A lot more than in the south. There was last summer, he went on a church charity trip for and they go down to North Carolina to help fix poor people's houses. He dresses and identifies as a male. There was some worry that one of the other kids would out my son. That did kind of concern me, although his mother went with him on that trip so that to me added a layer of security. I'm not sure if it would have in the long run, if there would have been any problem, but still it gave me some security, some level of security. That was pretty much the worst that I've ever felt. I was worried with him being in a less favorable toward LGBT community. I worried about that. Other than that, I haven't really worried much.
(Because of my son being transgender) I kind of feel like I've been given the key to open up a door that opened my eyes into a whole new world that's just amazing. I thank my son for doing this. I think it was something that I needed to grow. It was a challenge, but again, once I accepted it and figured it out, I just feel so much. I could use the word blessed, but like I said, I'm not a very religious person. I'm more of a scientific person.

Making Meaning as a Father of a Child who Identifies as Transgender

It's kind of hard to put it in words because the whole notion has opened my mind. I'm awakened into a whole new world that I just didn't think I knew until this happened; until I accepted it. To me, it means happiness. I don't know how else to put it. My thought process has been that whatever my dad does, I'm going to do the opposite. I don't know if I've really changed how I look at (gender or privilege).

Well I'm actually kind of passive in that sense (finding a therapist) because his mom would find the therapist and I would just kind of go along. In fact, we have been going through marriage counseling in California and we went with her choice. Then when we got here, we also went to a therapist here in the south. The therapist, we started using, my son and his mom did not like her. So she worked with another one. I've never really picked any therapist. The one that was picked, I went and saw her. She was the one who told me to read that transgender child book. They didn't like the one that we initially found. The woman, she was very old. There's a term for something that needs salt, which people will also say if they're bland. I guess they figured she was very bland or something. They didn't feel like she was effective. I'm not a therapist type person, so I didn't have an opinion about her at all. I think it’s because she just sat there, listened, and just said, "Uh-huh, yeah, yeah, uh-huh," and then never offered any information. She was
very passive, maybe? That's my impression. She wasn't specialized in trans stuff, but she had delved into it.

There was the first one (counselor) they didn't like. The second one, they did like, but she moved away. Then the third one specialized in trans. I was in sessions with the second one. I like the second one more probably because she just seemed more engaging. She is the one that talked to me about, "Hey, you should really read this book (The Transgender Child)." I liked her too. I don't have any problems with any of the therapists. Now, my younger son is seeing a therapist that I didn't find him, but because of all the issues that we've been having with him with everything, my ex-wife, she procrastinates a lot, and I don't want to wait on those types of things, so I've actually been more proactive at finding therapists. It's more like if I find one and then my kid goes and sees that therapist, if my kid likes him or her then that's fine. I hardly ever talk to them anyway. I actually don't believe in seeing therapists. I have my own form of therapy. It's called jumping off of things. I base jump and I'm a skydiver too. For me, in fact, recently, this winter, it was kind of cold and I haven't been jumping. I've been really busy working on my house, because I'm going to sell it. It contributed to me being very sad and kind of depressed. I went one weekend to the drop zone and made a few jumps and then I snuck out with a friend of mine one night. We jumped an antenna. Now I feel much better.

Another reason why I'm not too much into therapists, I think that therapy is an ongoing thing. I prefer the doctor prescribes you some antibiotics and once the bottle is done, then you're off. Most therapy is not that way. It's an ongoing thing. I know that now. I just didn't realize it back then. You'd go to therapy. They'll fix you up. Then you don't have to go anymore. Me, personally, I just don't accept the situation where I have to do something for the rest of my life. Me learning to accept him in therapy was more like I read that book (The Transgender Child).
Then I sat down and kind of reflected about where my mind was and how I was thinking. That's when I decided, “Okay, it's me. I'm the one that needs to change.” I think that was with the second therapist. It's the one that they liked that moved away. I don't know when exactly that was in the timeline. I would think there was probably anywhere from six months to a year where I just was really banging my head in the wall, thinking, what is going on? What is wrong with this kid? Why is he doing this? This is wrong. Until I came to the conclusion that no, this is the way it is and I have to accept it.

Well at the beginning (of counseling), we would go in together. Then there was a point where he didn't feel comfortable with me being in there, so he wanted to go in alone. I would guess maybe about half a dozen sessions I went to. The biggest thing (advice for counselors) is make sure that both parents are on board with it, are okay with it. That would help tremendously. If one parent can't do it, then at least if there's one parent that will accept it. Kids are very impressionable. I remember the first time I heard somebody talk bad about my aunt. I was devastated as a child. It was like my own parents were talking bad about my aunt. An older person that you respect is being, for a lack of a better word, shit upon. As a young boy, that was very impressionable to me and it shocked me. As a transgender child who's young and impressionable, I could see them, even if one of the parents, that's probably not a good idea either. I think it would be better if both parents are on board because they're going to need both parents to fight for that child in the school, with teachers, with other parents. Both parents have to be there for the child. I think it's important that both parents are on board. They need to be told. They need to understand that it doesn't matter what they think or how they interpret the situation. They might not agree with it, but they just need to back the child up.
Well the first thing I'd do (if another dad came to Harvey for advice about their transgender child), is I'd smile at them and I'd tell him, "Hey, congratulations. You don't know what a great gift that you've just been given." That would be the first thing I'd tell them. Then I would say, "Accept it. You don't have to agree with it. You just have to accept it." It's a very, very big mind opening experience.

What are my thoughts and hopes for my child? I guess that they be happy. My dad, his whole idea is find a good job that you'd get good money. It just seems like, yeah, I'm making good money, but I'm not really that happy with my career and things like that. Find something that makes you happy. That's what I want. Right now, Kenneth is working on something that he may not do well, but I'm encouraging him. His grandfather keeps trying to talk him into changing his major. I'm like, "You know what? Grandpa's old. Just ignore him. Just agree with him. Say, "Yeah, yeah, grandpa. No problem. Yeah."

Well I was kind of hoping that I would relinquish, my responsibilities (as a father). I did my best to put this person out into the world. He's out there on his own. I still want to have a relationship with him. That I could come visit him and he can visit me. I'm not a religious person, but I don't own those children. In a way, I guess a Christian would say, "The children belong to God and we're just borrowing them." Well I don't agree with that. It's like they don't belong to me. I'm here to guide them. I can guide them to a certain point and then at that point, they have to start making those decisions on their own. My hope as a father is that that I can relinquish those reigns to them and feel that I've done my best to put them on their way.
CHAPTER 8

“I used to love being southern. I don't like being southern anymore.”

Bob’s Story

Bob is 50-years-old, White, heterosexual, divorced to the mother of his FTM child, Elliot, but is remarried. He reports Elliot is his biological child. When asked what his religious/spiritual orientation (or indicate none), Bob reports he is, “Hopeful 😊 (none).” He reports earning a Bachelor’s degree. Bob discovered his son, who uses the pronouns of he/him/his, is transgender at the age of 16-years-old. Harvey’s son is currently 17-years-old.

Bob was referred to me via a fellow counselor who I met at a transgender themed conference a few years ago. Bob helps to facilitate a monthly support group for parents of transgender youth within this counselor’s practice space. We talked on the phone each time. He appears very willing to answer all questions and rapport was built easily.

The Fatherhood Experience

I would say a lot about my father. He was really involved. I grew up in a traditional two-parent household--had three siblings. But my dad was always involved with what we were up to. He was very much the alpha, and very much a man of his generation. Born in 1941, but he was involved and he enjoyed doing things with his kids, so that was a huge influence for me. I never really thought about who my influence is as a father. I would just say a lot of my family, my grandfather, who I grew up admiring. This was my maternal grandfather. He was a very special person to my mother. He died when I was younger, but always grew up with a lot of stories about him, and he was a very thoughtful, sensitive person, engaged in the community, and I always felt that if I had known him that I would have been a lot like him.
My dad, he passed away at an early age. He was 54 when he had a heart attack and I was out of the house and had just gotten married and had not had a child at that point. He was the type of dad, that on the weekends, he always had activities planned. We'd jump in his Jeep and go exploring. We were very fortunate to always live in places that were mountainous in particular: western North Carolina and in Colorado. We would go on picnics, and go on hikes, and just four wheeling, and exploring. He was kind of an explorer. He was a type of person that liked to take the off-the-beaten path type routes, and I do a lot of that now. I like to take small highways instead of interstates, and take time for the journey, over the destination type philosophy. My oldest sister died in a car accident, when I was nine, and he changed a lot after that. And even though I was nine, now, as an adult, looking back, I see how he changed a lot. I think he kind of withdrew more into being involved with the family unit. When you go through a tragedy, sometimes the response is to circle the wagon, to protect whom you have.

And that's been very applicable for my life and going through what I've gone through with my son. I've noticed that we've done that, when my son came out, because a lot of the conflicts that he had with his family. My dad, he was a good guy. He was a hot head. He had a really bad temper. Like I said, he was the alpha of the household, and he was the type of person, if he said, "Do it," you'd do it, and if you gave him a bad look, he would let you know that that's disrespectful. So there was a little bit of a fear factor with my dad, but he was never abusive or anything like that. But you knew who the boss was in our household.

He was a huge influence, as far as his interests go. He was big into history and geography. As a kid going through his book collections and ended up kind of becoming a history buff myself and an explorer like he was as far as exploring local areas. And as a child I was trying to be a part of what he was interested in, but it became kind of a passion of mine and that
was always a real connection for he and I. We always could talk history and talk about places and things like that. And academically and intellectually he was definitely a great role model for me.

I would say I'm more involved (than my dad). They were very traditional roles in our household; as far as male female roles, mom dad roles, and I'm a bit of a Mr. Mom. I do a little bit of everything and a lot of that comes from the fact that I went through a period of divorce and was a single parent. So I had to do cooking and cleaning. My mom was really good about teaching me those things and expecting those things from me. I'm really involved, like he is, but I'm even more involved. I never remember him going to school meetings. There were just certain boundaries. He worked and he would come to my sporting events, but I'm involved in all aspects of my child's life, from top to bottom. I'm much more patient than he is. He was not a very patient person. He was like a lot of men in that generation in particular who grew up in the South. He was racist and sexist and I'm not that way at all.

My mom was very open minded, very liberal, very involved in politics. I always gravitated towards that too. I moved around a lot as a child. I guess the most the significant move was we were living in western North Carolina when I was 12, and we moved out west to Colorado. This time period of my life exposed me to other people. In particular, going out West where there were no African Americans. I saw a lot of the racism in Colorado primarily because there was just very limited exposure to other cultures where we lived. I often wonder how I ended up a little bit more open minded. My dad wasn't. He grew a lot as he got a little bit older. I would hope that he did, but there was always that part. Hard to shake that. Where you've been and where you come from, in particular, that generation.
As far as that transition into adulthood, a lot of my relationship with him regarding that was about the sports. He was a really good athlete and there were a lot of expectations for me to engage in sports. I was reluctant, but then I really came to enjoy it. I’m more intellectually influenced during that transition period than anything else. He was the type of guy that he didn't act as a plumber; you call the plumber. If he needed a carpenter or someone to paint your house, you called someone and you paid them. I never grew up with tools and I never grew up with things like doing kind of the traditional male type hands-on type projects. My dad was kind of an intellect. He was very professional in his job. A lot of his approach to parenting a son was let me fly.

It was challenging (transition from being a man to man who is a father) in that I was married to someone that I was not happily married to at the time. We had a child a lot sooner than I had wanted to. I don't know if I was ready. I don't know if anybody is really ready to have a child. My ex-wife was on bed rest for the majority of her pregnancy. She had a difficult time of getting pregnant and we had actually lost our first baby a year prior to the birth of our current child. For her, getting pregnant was the whole focus of life and living. For me, I'd lost my dad and lost our first baby right around the same time and I was just trying to take care of myself. So my ex-wife, her focus was in getting pregnant, having a baby, and kind of going and doing, step-by-step, all the milestones that everyone should be doing at certain ages.

I don't know if I was necessarily ready when we had our child. Our child was premature. It had no health issues. But was in the hospital for about a week because my ex-wife was on bed rest for so long. After our baby was born, she decided that she had been home enough and she wanted to go back to work full-time.
I worked at home. That's when I became Mr. Mom to allow my ex-wife to go back to work. That’s when I started to really enjoy being a father. I didn't really have anybody there to show me what to do a lot of trial and error. I would say really the first two years of Elliot’s life I was kind of the involved more than mom was. The transition was a little bit challenging, but it was primarily just on a basis of the relationship that I had with my ex-wife.

How did I prepare to be a father? No, not a thing. I was fortunate that I'd been working with children. I worked in a wilderness camp for kids with behavioral problems. I worked in a group home and I was working with foster children. So I've always been exposed to children. Not necessarily infants or toddlers or babies, but I've always been very much involved with kids. We were kind of surrogate parents for kids that did not have family or were not able to live with their family at the group home. So I'd always had that exposure and that experience. I think that experience certainly was helpful.

My experience as a father has been amazing. The first two years were challenging in that I was working at home and was taking care of our child. My ex and I split when our child was two years old, so that was really when my whole world changed and our child's whole world changed. My role changed. I moved out and we split and she had primary custody so I would have Elliot for weekends. When I had my child, I was by myself. So, I was a single parent and of course that creates a lot of challenges. Soon after we split, my ex-wife moved away. She moved about 40 miles away, which created just enough of a drive that it was very challenging.

I had been very much involved for two years, and I wanted to continue that, but I had to fight a little bit more so to do that. That was challenging. I was involved and never missed school meetings and was involved in all activities and had as many overnights as I possibly could. I had been involved as a stay at home dad, there was a bond there. And it was established, so it
continued even when we were not married. We remained close even then. And now we have an incredible relationship and I feel like his comfort level and coming out when he came out as being a transgender person. I was the first one he came to. So he and I, we've had a pretty special bond. I attribute it to just me being involved even after the divorce, being involved as much as I can. We have very similar personalities.

I don't know if the (southern) region has influenced me as a father. I think it's influenced me in my mind set, how I think, primarily trying to show that the South can be an open-minded place. When we moved west, it was very apparent that there were stereotypes of what a southerner was, and what they believed; and I didn't like that because I didn't feel that way, in particular, about race.

What makes a man a good father? I would say, time. Spending time with your child and being involved, in all aspects of their life. Whether it be healthcare, education, activities. Getting on their level, getting on the floor and playing with them. Sometimes, there's a stereotype that dads are kind of gonna be involved so much less than, say, mom. I like to show my son how to cook and how to fold clothes and how to make his bed. I think just really that involvement and that time and as many aspects of their lives as possible.

The involvement is just the key. There are times I can remember as a child not seeing my dad around because he was always working. It was always mom at the ball field or mom at my game, so there was times when I was like, "wow, where's my dad?" I always said that I wanted to be as involved and as active as possible. Now my son is 17, and our relationship is reflective of the approach that I took. In particular, since we're continuing to go through his transition. If he didn't have me right now, I would be really fearful for him. I've taken soul custody and actually,
legal custody and went to court over the summer so that I could make decisions without any kind of harassment or ramifications.

Then just trying to be non-judgmental. I grew up in a household where if my dad didn't believe in the things I was talking about, he would say, "you're wrong." If I know that my child is wrong, I want to listen to what they have to say and allow them the opportunity to formulate their own opinion. Now, if they're wrong, and it's a safety issue, that's a different thing. But if it's just general thinking, then I want him to develop their own interests or their own likes or wants. I think that they should be free to do that. Very much unconditional love.

**Being a Father of a Child who Identifies as Transgender**

For me it's been I guess educational. I'm very much an advocate of groups of people who are discriminated against or that maybe need someone to look after them. Now, I have been opened to a world that I had no clue what transgender was. I had no idea about anything about it. I mean, we all knew about Caitlin Jenner and her coming out as transgender and all the controversy of that. So, my experience was very limited. When my son came out as being a transgender male, I had to do a lot of homework and do a lot of research. He provided me with a lot of tools for that. I did a lot of reading. For me, it kind of opened up a whole new world. It exposed me to a group of people that I will always probably advocate for because I see a lot of discrimination going on now. The misunderstanding.

Initially, you're in shock. You're just like okay, I don't know what this is. But when Elliot came out to me, he wrote me a letter. We actually went to the beach and I asked if he wanted anyone else to go with us that day. He was like "No dad. I just want to spend time with you." We were laying on the beach and just hanging out. He handed me a letter and the letter kind of explained who he is and what he wanted and needed. So, I read that and I was kind of in shock. I
just looked at him. I was like "What do I need to do? What do I need to do?" After that point, I had became a student of transgender issues and needs. For me, it's just been kind of opened up a whole new world of understanding of a group of people that are very misunderstood. Certainly, the challenges were with Elliot’s relationships with his mother and his maternal family.

My whole thing up front was when Elliot came out was for me it was a safety thing. I just saw how in pain he was. "Dad I hate who I am. This is who I want to be and who I am and I feel. I think about hurting myself. I think about not wanting to live." So, for me, it just clicked. I was like I need to do everything I can to keep my child safe. So, then, that's when the research came in to. I was like okay, I don't know anything about what a transgender person is. Fortunately, he provided me with the information and YouTube videos, just links to really understand. Unfortunately for Elliot, his mom and his maternal family they're very traditional. He came out to me first before he came out to his mom because I think he knew I would be a little bit more understanding. Their response was very shocking in how aggressively against it they were to the point that Elliot’s grandfather, during our first family meeting about this, basically damned him to hell.

And said he was sad that someday he would be sitting in heaven and Elliot wouldn't be there and how it was unnatural. In the meantime, Elliot’s mom just sat there and just shook her head and let him do that. That's when the battle lines were drawn. She wanted to have Elliot go through spiritual counseling and conversion therapy. So, Elliot moved in with me full-time right away after he came out because he just didn't feel safe there with his mom or maternal grandparents. The lines quickly were drawn as far as who's going to accept this and who's not. It's just been a lot of conflicts family wise since then.
The first thing when he came out was he knew the therapist in town who was specializing in counseling for transgender teens and adults. The only name in town as far as we knew. I reached out and talked to her. It was really important to him for me to look at information about what a transgender person is and the whole process. There were a series of YouTube videos that he shared with me of transgender guys that were basically talking to the camera and saying "Okay, your child has come out as being transgender." And basically speaking to a parent as a transgender person whose come out talking to a parent as far as what is best and what is the best way to approach this? I watched those immediately and they were really helpful to me because I had no clue.

And I assure you there was a period of sadness for me. To have your child come out to you and say, "Well, this is not me and I want to be a guy." Or "I am a guy. Not that I want to be a guy. This is who I am." Elliot wanted to get his haircut right away. This was in August before his junior year and he said, "Dad, I really want to go into the school year and I want to change how I dress and I want a hair cut." He had been begging his mom to get a short haircut for the last year unbeknownst to me. She would say no. His grandparents would say, "If you get your haircut, we're going to disown you. We won't give you money." So, he was like, "I really want to get my haircut."

I took him to get a haircut. That was a huge issue with his mom and his grandparents because I did that without their support. It was really weird because after he got his haircut, I looked at him and I was like "Yeah, this is my child. This is perfect for him." When he had long hair and he was dressing the role of a girl, he just didn't look right. He didn't take care of his hair. He always wore a beanie. He was always hiding. Hiding I guess that feminine aspect of being a female.
When we got his haircut, I took a picture and I just never seen such a smile. Ever since then, we went to stores and we got guys underwear. Of course, he had been doing that for a while. He had been getting friends to give him guys' underwear. He had already obtained a binder. So, he was already doing those things on his own. But, I made it clear right up front that those are things that we can do as a family.

The mom thing, though, they were just angry. They blamed it on me. They said that I was enabling because I was accepting things. Again, a different parenting style. Elliot’s mom's a bit authoritarian, my way or the highway type parenting approach. She threatened to take Elliot out of school. I made the decision to basically file for full legal and physical custody. I took Elliot’s mom to court and now I have full legal and physical custody. I did that because it was a safety thing. I just felt like they were going to do some things that were against what Elliot’s wishes were or needs were. I didn't want to get the courts involved, but we were at a point where we needed to make some decisions regarding testosterone and things like that. Therapy. I just went into protect mode. I wanted to protect my child.

Elliot’s mom is very feminine and very dresses and bows. I just knew at a young age that Elliot, when he would walk into my house, the first thing he would do is he would strip of the bow, take off his dress. He loved the fact that I would let him wear whatever he wanted to wear, even at three years old. And not that dress is anything regarding being transgender person or anything like that. But, he wanted to wear what he wanted. Generally, that was hiking boot and tee shirts and overalls and hats. Those are the things that his mom would never allow him to do. I always felt like that in my household he felt a little more comfortable to let his hair down and be who he was. He was a traditional little girl. He played with dolls and that was the hard thing for his mom. She didn't see any clues. She's like, "Oh, he played with dolls and wanted to dance and
do that." But, I always had a sense that he just never really felt comfortable in his body. That really became apparent when he was a teenager. A lot of that was just how he took care of his hair. The hair was long. He just didn't really take care of his personal care very well. His hygiene was good, but personal appearance, they just didn't seem like they were in tune and that's just changed ever since he's cut his hair. And he dresses now as a guy. He just takes so much pride in his appearance now compared to when he was really made or pressured to be a girl. When he cut his hair and started dressing like a guy, I just looked at him and said "Yeah. This is my son." This is who he is and it all made sense at that point. And then, you start looking at hindsight and what were the signs. They were there. I saw them, but you don't really equate that to gender because you don't know. Again, I wasn't educated to understand what gender roles are. So, my god, he's taught me so much about that. It's crazy.

The grief process was very personal. I kind of hid it because I was in protective dad mode and I just wanted to make sure that he was okay. There was such a quick conflict with his mom and his grandparents that I needed to keep him safe and in particular because he was talking about feeling like he wanted to hurt himself or that he didn't feel good about his life. So I went into protective mode.

But me personally grieving, and my wife even talks about that, but everyone's like, "You handled everything so well." I'm a private person when it comes to emotions. I dealt with it at that a time the best way I could. I slipped back into a little pattern of drinking a little bit too much, primarily at night when everybody was asleep. I slipped back into a pattern of sneaking cigarettes every now and then, which is something I used to do when I was stressed. I think I went for about four or five months where I just delved into some unhappy patterns of coping. Then, at one point, I was like, "Okay, I'm over this. I need to move on."
It did make me sad, but I don't think I was ever sad because Elliot came out to me and said, "I'm a guy." It was primarily the hurt that I saw him and the struggle that he was having internally and also with his mom and his grandparents. It hurt me to see that and the effects that it was having on him. It was extremely difficult. He hasn't seen his mom since December of 2015. My struggles were I don't want to see my child mad or upset or wanting to hurt themselves or my child to think about killing themselves. But, I coped in the way that I've coped in the past and going through stressful times, and that's maybe, like I said, alcohol and nicotine.

He's the same person. That's it. He's got the same interest and that's what I tell his mom. Who loves drama, loves the same music, who loves to do the same things. It's the same kid. For me, Elliot never changed. Even he said the other day, "You know, dad, you only slipped up on my pronouns a couple times? How is that?" I was like, "I don't know. I just don't know." It all just seemed to make sense for me, but I never was the type of parent who thought about, "Oh, I'm going to have the big wedding day where I'm going though walk my child down the aisle." I don't think like that. I'm not a real traditional person, so I don't know if I'm really a great person to talk to. I'm just real loose when it comes to traditions and things like that, so I never really thought I was losing anything because I just have gained so many different things in a different way.

When you live it, you understand. It's not something you read about in the newspaper. People have a total misunderstanding about what it's all about. People think it's about sexuality and about sex. And that's the thing we deal with in (this state) about the (legislative bill) thing. There's this thinking that transgender people are going into bathrooms to pick up other people. This is not about sex. It's about gender identity. So, I've learned that gender and sex are two
different things. I realized, wow, what a polarizing issue this is more so than I ever realized. A misunderstanding. So, it was a lot of learning.

My experience was you were either gay or straight. You were attracted to girls or you were attracted to guys. Elliot initially came out as being gay and had a girlfriend. That was all cool. His mom and his grandparents reluctantly accepted that. I was like, "Okay." But there's just a huge difference between your sexuality and your gender. Again, for me, it was a learning curve because I had no clue. I had a few gay friends in high school or in college in particular, but I had never been associated with anybody who was a transgender person.

That was challenging (telling other people about son’s gender identity). I found that we kind of isolated ourselves as a family and initially. I just wanted to deal with it as a family unit. So, initially, it was just kind of circle the wagons. Me and step-mom and stepsister said, “We're here and we're going to take care of you.” Then, there came a point where okay, it's time to reach out. That was challenging because I just was fearful on what people were thinking. Were they going to understand? I reached out to my mom and to my brother and my sister and they were all fantastic. They were very understanding. My mom passed away over the summer and the last time Elliot and I went to visit with her, early summer, my mom was sitting there and using the pronouns. My Uncle, he's a retired Episcopal priest, he was understanding and they were using pronouns properly. So, when my mom died, it really hit Elliot very hard because he was like, "Dad, she's the only extended family member that really was understanding and supportive of what I was going through."

It probably took a couple months after Elliot came out, for me to come out to my family. Friends I did the same. It took a couple months. Just like, "Hey, this is what's going on." And then, when we had the court hearing for custody, my friends were there and they came to court.
They had seen what my role had been. I know people in my life that I'm just not going to bring it up to because I just don't feel like going down that street because I know it's not going to get anywhere for them. I pick and choose. In particular, where I work my staff are all older. At work, I'm very private at work. I believe work is to be profession. It was my supervisor in particular, and another co-worker I talked to just for support reasons. But, I don't feel like it's necessary for me to come out to everybody. But, the people I feel like they could be the most supportive for me and for Elliot, I do.

The school's been wonderful. It was in December of that Junior year he came to me and said, "Dad, I really want to meet with the principal because going into my second semester and I want my teachers to respect my pronouns and utilize my pronouns." So, I arranged a meeting with the principal and Elliot and I met with him. He was just like, "Okay." He goes, "What can we do for you? How can we help you? You can use the guys' bathroom. If you're not comfortable with that, you can use the girls' bathroom. If you're not comfortable with that, you can use the nurse's bathroom." It was really amazing, his response.

Elliot’s big into theater and his drama teacher, who he has multiple classes with each day for the last couple of years, is an interesting theater teacher because he's very conservative. You don't see that a lot in theater, in particular. But, Elliot was nervous about how he was going to handle it and he's been Elliot’s biggest advocate and one of his biggest champions and has been just fantastic.

The school has been a safe zone for Elliot and that's not usually the case. Especially, in light of the (legislation bill) situation. But, our school experience and his school experience has been phenomenal. There's been a couple of cases where people have made comments to him. "That kid." Or "It." He's been called, "It," a couple times. But, there's been no blatant bullying or
any intimidation or any threats of violence or anything. We've been very lucky. A lot of it because we came out and we communicated with them what's going on.

The South is where religion is still very important. I mean, very important. We are in a very the Baptist Belt area. The town that we live in there's not LGBTQ+ center. So, it's kind of slow as far as in this area, as far as support goes. But, fortunately, in this area we have a lot of influx of a lot of different people who have moved from a variety of different places around the country in this area. There's kind of a little more open mindedness where we live. Whereas, if Elliot was living with his mom, who lives about 40 miles from here, Elliot would be looked at as an alien. And would be looked at as kind of being immoral. So, that is a struggle.

Elliot’s made it clear he wants out of (this state). He's been accepted to college. That college in particular is a very strong school for LGBTQ+ people. They have a lot of support. It's a perfect spot for him, but someone asked him why he didn't apply for a scholarship to become a teacher in (this state) after graduating. He said, "I don't want to live in here." I think Elliot sees the south as backsliding. Elliot’s made it clear that this is not a safe state for him and it's not a good spot for him to be. Now, there are certain areas in the state that would be better than others, but the south is definitely more hostile than other areas as far as he's concerned and I'm concerned. With the legislations that just passed in Texas and Alabama, there's just a lot of people and political entities saying that we're wrong. I hate that for him.

I've lived in (in this state) the majority of my life and I love the state. I'm not very happy with my state. I'm not happy. I used to love being southern. I don't like being a southern anymore. I don't like being from (this state) anymore. I love the geography. I love the place, but there's some mindsets and some structures in the south that had gotten better.
People say, "He just looks like a little guy." He's small. He's short and he's petite. I don't use the petite word because he's a guy, but I'll say he's just a little guy. So, we're starting with the transition and also with the testosterone, which he started back in August. We're starting to see that others are not missgendering him like they used to. He texted me two weeks ago. He was in an English class where they're doing their senior project. He's like, "Yeah, everybody in my group didn't know I was a transgender guy." And he was just so happy about that. People see him more as a guy now. But his safety is always going to be a fear of mine. We just talk about making sure he's surrounded himself with important people. That's really why LGBTQ+ individuals, why there's such importance of that community, so there can be that protection. Living in an area, geographically, where you're going to feel safe. That's important.

I'm getting ready to have to give up my protection role in the fall of this year. My wife's like, "You're going to just see. You're in trouble. You're in trouble." I was like, "I know. I know. I know. But, it's gotta be okay. It's going to be okay." But, he's also going to a school. He applied for housing. He reached out to the director of housing at and said, "Hi, I'm Elliot. I'm a transgender guy. What's the situation with housing? I really don't feel comfortable housing with a female." He communicated with Elliot. He said, "When you apply for housing, let me know." And they actually have several designated rooms for transgender guys at the university. And so, Elliot’s already been assigned a room on a male floor, and a male dorm, and he will room with another transgender guy, and they will have their own bathroom.

A safe space was certainly something we looked into for colleges. There were schools that Elliot was interested in, but some were communities that we knew would not be as understanding or safe as we had wanted. We chose a school where we knew that there was a strong community of support for LGBTQ+ people.
Well, I guess, just because he's my child (is the most rewarding thing about being a father of a transgender child). It's the same child I've always had. I'm rewarded by being a father. I don't really care what he is. I just want him to be happy. The reward for me going forward will be that it's exposed me to a population that needs advocates and allies. I'm a part of this parent group right now. Elliot will go off to school, but I'll still be a part of this group. I've always been an advocate of people who needed to be looked after. Now, I see that this is a group of people that really needs someone like me to be a part of what they're doing and to look after them. That's been very rewarding. But, the most rewarding part has been that Elliot trusts me and says that he's safe with me and came out to me and wants to be in my life.

**Making Meaning as a Father of a Child who Identifies as Transgender**

It just means I'm a good father because I'm active and involved. Moving forward, I know there's barriers. I just take life like I would with any other child. Just try to take it each day and enjoy the adventure. I don't really look at it as being any different. That's my child. It's a different set of needs. If they had a health issue or if they had a learning issue or if they had red hair, you just love them and take care of them. The needs are just a little bit different.

My wife has been a great support. She was just very equipped to be very understanding, have a lot of empathy, and be very supportive for me and for Elliot. So that relationship was key for me. My family being very supportive and very understanding, that was really important. Mainly, the core of my wife and my step-daughter, who both were just accepting and have been there every step of the way. From there, it was my extended family, my brother, my sister, my mom and uncle and some other family members. Fortunately, got a good group of friends that have been wonderful and I've leaned on them when needed. A couple of them had some particular religious beliefs that I feel like maybe impacted how they would think about the
situation, but the fact that they know and knew Elliot and me, it was I think a good learning experience for them. It was eye opening for them to see that these kids aren't aliens and they're not cursed and they're not damned. They're just kids with needs. My work setting, I keep a real professional profile at work. I have one coworker who's been supportive, but otherwise, my work setting, I just kind of keep things professional.

Initially, looking into an endocrinologist, we reached out to a community 150 miles up the road of someone who really had the experience and expertise in working with transgender kids. We reached out, instead of going local to doctors who we felt like were just unprepared or not knowledgeable. We found that to be the case when we took Elliot to a psychiatrist when he was going through some really bad depression. We basically had to educate the psychiatrist on what was going on and what a transgender person is. That was really shocking to Elliot and a very different point. We had to find a safe zone and a physician who was experienced and understanding. We have that and it's been really good. It takes every three months me driving three hours, basically six hours round trip.

Elliot knew and had heard of (a counselor in the area). She was the only person in town that really was specializing in counseling transgender people. He had also heard that she had support groups for teenagers, adults, and for parents. That was the first step. He had the information, gave it to me, and then I reached out to her and set up the counseling and got us involved in the support groups. Then, through the support groups and also through therapies through her, we got the information regarding the doctor or the endocrinologist (in another town) that we would go. That was through therapy. Then, also just word of mouth from other families and other transgender kids in particular and adults.
My wife and I went with Elliot to the support group. We also got Elliot set up with a therapy appointment, but there was a wait to get him in for the intake. The support group came first. My wife and I went to the parent group and Elliot went to the teen group. Elliot’s mom came, actually, to the first parent group. She only attended one other, so she was not involved with that. Ever since then, I've been involved in the support group and facilitator the parent support group. I guess because of my background in working with groups and working with children, but also the fact that I was in a pretty good place with Elliot. Maybe it was to show an example of a positive father figure in the process. Initially, when Elliot needed psychiatric care, I set that up and attended and met with the psychiatrist.

I have not needed any individual counseling on my own. There were some times where I thought about it, but I have good support at home with my wife and good support with friends gave me outlets to talk about things that were going on and my mom. I had people that I could talk to, so I never felt like individually that I needed any kind of counseling.

Doing their homework, for one (is advice for counselors). We were a little shocked that a psychiatrist had no knowledge or really any good information about transgender issues. We kind of had to educate him a little bit. Just gaining some knowledge and research and educating themselves is the first and foremost step. Then, just sitting and listening to the child. Listen to what their needs are. Trying to be as open as possible. A lot of that, it does come with education and information. That's the key.

I guess it's blown all my earlier thinking out of the water (about gender) because you generally associate gender with sex and traditional roles of male/female. It's opened up a whole another world for me. It allows me to think and see people in a different way. It primarily allows me the opportunity to understand people who have a different gender identity than what they're
born with. For me, that's very enlightening because now I know, whereas before, I had no clue. You have your ideals and ideas and misconceptions, but when you're in it, you learn. It opens up a whole new world.

Advice for other dads? First and foremost is to sit and listen. Listen to what their child has to say. Listen to what they need. Keeping the child safe, of course, is important. Primarily just listening, keeping their safety in mind. Then, just like with everything else, do some research on your own. Look at YouTube videos. Research. Be careful about what's out on Google because there's good information and there's bad information. I relied on Elliot to really let me know what the good information was. Even when I do the support group, I run stuff by him. I'm like, "I'm looking at this website. Have you heard about this? Is it a good site?" It's either thumbs up or, "Hey, I've never heard of it." That was the first thing I did. Elliot’s like, "Dad, I've got these YouTube videos. Why don't you check them out?" They were three different transgender guys that were sharing their journey and basically looking at the camera saying, "Okay, so you're a parent of a transgender child. Here's what's going on.” That was really helpful for me. Again, just educating yourself and getting the information.

Even if you're not on-board, it's not terminal. Kids, generally, that come out as being a transgender person, they generally are. There are some that change their mind or it doesn't work for them. And if that's the case, okay. Even if they're not agreeable with it, protect their relationship with their child and don't give up on them. Don't turn your back on them. Unfortunately, Elliot’s other natural parent has done that. She turned her back on Elliot for a variety of different reasons. Just try to be involved.

I just want him to be happy and healthy, enjoy the college experience and have a great, great time in college. I want him to be loved and to have a great relationship some day, whether
it's with whoever it is. I want him to be an advocate, too. I know he will be. I want him to advocate for kids, transgender kids, and I hope that he's able to do that some day. He wants to major in theater, but there's a little bird in the back of his mind that says, "Maybe counseling or maybe mental health, something where I can really, really look after the community." They need someone like him. I plan to still be involved with the parent group and be involved even when he leaves for college. I want to be an ally. The community needs people like me, and I'll do what I can to help.

My hope for my future as a dad? Just to continue my involvement at a maximum level, which I plan to do. Even with him going off to college, I'll be involved. Always to be a safe nest for him to have if he ever needs. I just want him to always feel comfortable to communicate and talk with me about what's going on in his life. Just keep doing that. I know my role will change as he goes off and gains his independence. I just want him to know that I'm going to always be there for the support and love and guidance, if needed.
CHAPTER 9

“We had a boy all along.”

Bryn’s Story

Bryn is 48-years-old, White, heterosexual, married to the mother of his FTM child, Cayden. He reports Cayden is his biological child. When asked what his religious/spiritual orientation, Bryn reports he is, “Agnostic, free thinker.” He reports earning a Bachelor’s degree. Bryn discovered his son, who uses the pronouns of he/him/his, is transgender at the age of 15-years-old. Bryn’s son is currently 16-years-old.

Bryn was referred by his wife. She saw my study’s information online and forwarded the information to him. Bryn originally reports, “I may not have a lot to contribute, but that will be your call.” He appears enthusiastic to discuss child and would at times ask me what my ultimate goals with this research project and career-wise. He also would pause and want to know what the current literature reports about the transgender population. Bryn asked me to Google his child and welcomed me to read about the advocacy he is doing for the transgender community.

The Fatherhood Experience

I guess most people who are parents, your relationship with your own parents are influence your life as a child. That's what informs and what has informed me in how I deal with my own kids. Both pro and not con, but the things that you grow up thinking, "Mmm, I'm ever gonna do that." And there are things you grow up thinking that you really never want to do. Neither I nor my wife have any siblings. We're both only kids. And that means we didn't have that sibling relationships to help inform. We didn't do any babysitting. We didn't have any of that. I went into fatherhood completely as a leap of faith. Let's put it that way. It was not unwelcomed or unplanned, but it was pretty unprepared. I will tell you that.
Short of taking birthing classes, we did do a lot of things together through the nine months. I think that a jury of my peers would say that I was a very present father, in that regard. But no, I didn't read books. Short of having to know the applicable laws and learning how to put a car seat in, and things like that, I just used, again, common sense and input from the people that raised me.

My father was reserved. Neither of my parents were anywhere close to what today would be called, "helicopter parents." My mother and my father both were very much on the same page. I know they were on the same page, in terms of their parenting style and what was okay, what wasn't okay. They were in locked steps, with respect to me. I had no chance of being able to play one against the other, even if I'd ever wanted to try to do that that would never. That boat wouldn't have left the dock.

My own dad had a much worse temper than my mom. It never manifested in ill ways towards me. When he would get mad at something, you would know it. The whole house would know it. And, I guess I'm kind of the same way. I'm slow to boil, but oh brother, it takes that one last little thing, and I go off like a rocket. Now I don't know what he was like when was I was a toddler. I don't remember any of it. I feel like I'm more physically affectionate than my dad was. I get the sense now that he just wasn't. There was something going on there. It was hard for him to express a lot. He didn't let the guard down much. It was not a lot of emotion. Like tender emotion or anything like that. I'm not saying the feelings weren't there; I'm saying he was not great at expressing it. It would come across as he would chuck you on the shoulder and you know "That's my boy!" you know that kind of thing. And, I know what that meant, but like, "Don't worry, dad. I'll fill in the details in my brain. I know what you're saying."
I'm not like that. I am a big ball of emotion and it's not forced. We always were real. There was lots of hugs, lots of pats on the head, lots of just reassuring I guess you call it reassuring touch. My wife and I were not spankers. I was never spanked as a kid. It's not that my parents wouldn't have spanked me if I'd needed it, but that kind of aggressive touch wasn't done. So, I guess that's one of the big differences. There's no barrier there. We tell our kids we love them all the time. That's the biggest difference, I would say between my dad and me.

I wish I paid more attention when my dad would actually tell me about stuff. Now that he's gone, I realize I don't really remember a whole lot of the stuff he would try to tell me because I'm one of these people that's easily distracted. Well, one of the things that I think carries on even in me is that my dad and I share a similar sense of humor. We had similar interests I think. As I've grown, I'm becoming more like what I think he probably was like, as a man in his late 40s. He loved to read. That's one thing remember about him, lots of books that he was reading, but just a few that he'd actually read.

Absolutely terrifying (transition to becoming a father)! Daunting. It was sobering. We were married for a couple years and we knew we wanted to have kids and start a family. So, in that sense, it was not reckless. We didn't enter into it recklessly or lightly or any of that. And a little daunting because I think everybody is probably faced with the same. They have these same moments of, "Oh my God! What am I doing?! I'm gonna be responsible for this other human being. Holy crap! What the hell did I do this for?!" I always tell people like, "I wouldn't listen to me! I have to somehow direct this other person?! I don't know what the hell I'm doing!" I think my oldest child figured it out long ago like, "Mom and dad don't know what the hell they're doing! They're just making this up."
I was just full of apprehension as a new father. Along with that this awesome sense of wonder that, "Wow! Your life is getting ready to change." And, I was consciously aware of the fact that I had no idea what that's gonna feel like on the other side of it. I called it, "an adventure ride." You can't see before it. You can't go back and see what the conditions were before it or you can't see after. You can't predict after it what's going to happen. You've probably experienced friends and acquaintances all sharing anecdote after anecdote about this and about that and some that they went through. And it's all nice, but you know in your heart of hearts, "Yeah, sure. I'm just gonna file all this away because my experience is gonna be my own." You know it's gonna be unique and you also know you have no clue what it's gonna be. You strap in, you hang on, and you wait for the ride to start. That's how I saw leading up to being a parent. All those little whispering voices that said, "You don't know what you’re doing." I put all those just in the back of my mind and like, "Okay, I'm gonna figure it out."

Wow! Makes a good father? I think you have to speak from my own experience. Maybe be willing to have faults and say you don't know. I think it helps and it's probably a good thing if the father is equally present, or as much as possible, in the rearing of the kids. Stem to stern in all aspects, grocery shopping, housekeeping, rearing of the kids, changing the diapers, feeding the kids, teaching lessons, helping with homework, transporting to softball or music lessons or whatever, to the extent that you can. There isn't a one size fits all answer to that question. Maybe what it comes back to is just have that willingness. I think that having that willingness to jump in and contribute and maybe it isn't even a decision. Being aware that they're not just little people living in your house just running around.

**Being a Father of a Child who Identifies as Transgender**
Our child is kind of a challenging kid and that's outside of gender dysphoria. As far as being accepting, that was kind of the least of our worries. It made a whole lot of sense and a lot of things from the past kind of fell into place once he came out. You think about a little bit and it sort of sinks in. And you go, "Oh, yeah, okay, a lot of things are making sense now." And it's not something that his mom and I probably ever would have got to on our own. We were probably hands off in terms of let the kid be who they're gonna be within the bounds of the law. Let them define who they're gonna be, figure out who they are. So when our son was refusing to wear anything except boy clothing from about the third grade on, we never thought a thing of it. We're like, “Yeah, okay. Fine. No harm in that. You be yourself. You know, just blissfully.” All the clues were there. We just weren't picking up on it.

The other aspects of the experience are my general anxiety about my child's wellbeing. I think all parents have a certain amount of anxiety because you're never been there before. Of course you don't ever want anything to happen to your kid. There's always a little bit of fear in the back of your mind that they're gonna fall down the stairs or something's gonna happen or you're gonna get that call from the school. When Cayden first came out, I remember thinking like, "Oh boy, here we go." I didn't know what to expect. Is he gonna be beaten to death? And I still have those fears a little bit. But it’s been a couple years now, so it's not as bad. He has a lot of trans friends that are his age and older. So, my heebie-jeebies have come come down. But they're by no means gone. And I don't think they ever will be. There's been a lot of acceptance. Cayden’s family is accepting and his friends are accepting. Strangely enough, the only problem he really has with any of his friends are two are transgender kids. Maybe that's teen drama? Just kind of ironic if you ask me.
He was at a residential boarding school, a therapeutic kind of boarding school for ADD and LD (learning disabled) children. But he came home for Christmas break. This was in 2014. And was still our daughter at that point, at least in my mind. Over break we got to meet his friend, who was a female-to-male trans-boy. And we were introduced to this boy and it was never a thing. We try to just make our house a faith-welcoming space. Whoever you are or whatever you, are come on in. It was kind of no big deal. So, Christmas break is going on and Cayden would have been 15 and teenagers move in large groups of friends. Towards the end of break, right when he was getting ready to go back, during one of the nights when there was a pack of friends over, one of the friends came out and said, "Cayden wants a binder. You gotta get Cayden a binder." And I thought, "He's got tons of binders. What kind does he need? Three ring? Spiral? What are we talking here?" They were like, "No, no, no! A chest binder. He wants to have a chest binder."

And that was the first little flicker in my mind that went, "Okay." I said, "Chest binder. Huh? Let me talk to your mom about that. I'm not sure about the physiological implications of such a thing." I didn't really get into why and what's this all about. Age of experimentation? Everybody goes through it their own way. But he also wanted to get a cup, a groin protector. And at that point, I'm just like, "What for?" He said, "Because it makes it look like you've got a penis." I'm like, "Oh- Okay. Where is the harm? You know, I get it. Where is the harm? What they hey?" So, we got him one of those at the sporting goods store and his mom ordered him a binder and we had a couple of binders shipped over to the residential school.

Later we had a bowling party. And his trans friend was there and a couple other friends were there. He said, "I want to transition." He sort of mumbled it halfway under his breath. And I said, "Transition? What do you mean?" He said, "Well, I want to transition to a boy." Long
pause. I thought about it, and my response was really eloquent, something along the lines of, “Uh, you do?” He said, “Yeah.” So, I said something along the lines of, "Huh. That's gonna take some adjusting." But I tried to hold it together. That was how he came out. I was with him in the car and he was in the back seat. That's how it started. I don't wish this on you and I don't wish this on us. And are you sure? Well, you'll come to know now, if there's one thing trans people are sure of, it's that. He came out to me and not to his mom. I let his mom know the next day via email and I don't think she really got the memo. It took awhile. We had to get a passport photo and a passport ordered so that he could do some kind of out of the country excursion with the school. And part of the passport photo application, you bring in the birth certificate, and that led to discussions of what does it take to get a birth certificate changed. And can you get a birth certificate changed? And, actually you can, but it's not an easy process in (this state).

And by that point, I'd calmed down a little bit and realized the world was not going to end, but still, that was part of my experience that I tell people. I think that it's not unique to me. I think a lot of parents go through that. It's that sort of grieving process where if you go through the process of losing one kid and gaining and accepting another kid. And then once that had ended, what really made it easier for me when we got a call from residential school. And it was one of those calls where you get a call from school like, "It's Ashley from school and if you could call me back, just need to talk to you a little bit about Cayden. And, um, call us back as quick as you can. Everything's okay, but just you need to call us." So, we're thinking, "Ah crap! What has this kid done?" Is somebody missing a limb? Who knows? Maybe burned down a house? His mom and I are freaking out, and we get them on the line and hear, "Bryn, we're returning your call." And then they go through the whole protocol of, "Cayden came to us today, and told us he wants to go by male pronouns." And that was it. That was the big thing. His
mother and I are both like, "Oh, thank god, he's only transgender. Wow. Relief." And five-six weeks after he had gone back to school after holiday break, he called a meeting to have a talk to his instructors at school and said officially, I'd like for you to call me by male pronouns. And I want you to all me "Cayden."

And they were amazingly accommodating. They were great. I don't think they'd ever had a trans kid. The other kids didn't seem to outwardly have a problem with it. He was still just Cayden. He was their classmate. That's the sense I have. I don't know what discussions went on behind closed doors or if there were any shunning or ostracizing. He's not alluded to that.

But it was right around that time where it really sank into place was when I had that realization of, “Oh, a lot things are starting to make sense now.” The cross-dressing. And the boy underwear. And refusal to wear girls clothing. To the point that it was a fall on the floor if you had to wear something that was feminine. And we tried to never girly-up or boy-up or genderize our kid. But there were times when, you’re doing a piano recital, we want you to wear your nice, red velvet, little blouse, and, ugh, that was just agony for it. Although, of course, now that I know. So once all this started falling into place, I remember this thought hit me. We had a boy all along. We just didn't know it. Nobody knew it. And that's when I realized, “Ah yeah, okay, now I get it.” And once I crossed that hurdle, for me anyway, it was just a whole lot easier. Now I could work on doing things like acting supportive and being an advocate and making sure that I was on my kid's side.

I had (heard of transgender before Cayden). We’d seen stories of trans people. I don't remember the woman's name, male to female transgender woman in the forties. Was a soldier in World War 2 era and transitioned to a woman. I knew about that. The title of the book is *Conundrum*. I knew about gender dysphoria and transgender people and having your body not
match your brain. And even today, that's as much as I will even try to tell you that I understand. I have no idea what that must feel like. A pretty solidly cisgender heterosexual male. We all thought Cayden was going to be either lesbian or bi or something like that. I think that's the go to when you have a tomboy girl. Probably going to be gay. We just want to be here and be supportive.

You become aware of when something lands really close to home like having a transgender kid. You are now forced to confront and deal with it and be aware of your feelings and your thoughts have to change. I remember being an adolescent and a college aged kid and just being a jerk. There was a kid in our dorm, a girl, obviously female but just real tomboy. I was never outwardly abusive or mean to that person, but I remember thinking some things that I'm certainly not proud of. Having some feelings at the time, if I said them out loud, I'd be going, "Ooh, god, oh, sorry." That's where I think the biggest change and the biggest shift has been for me. And trust me, it's an ongoing process, a learning experience.

My wife founded a chapter of PFLAG here in (our state). There was not one here before because there was just no resources. She went to the school. This was back in seventh or eighth grade asking what resources there were for a kid struggling with questions about themselves. And the school knew of nothing. Absolutely nothing. So, that's when my wife decided there really needs to be something. She and another friend took action, and she took over the PFLAG chapter. You can't help but meet people and learn things and get exposed to stuff.

I found that it was a whole lot easier to call people I don't know by their preferred pronouns. I mis-gendered Cayden for the longest time. Weeks. And it still happens every now and then, I'll say "she, oh, he". But it's not a thing. You've gotta learn not to make a thing and just correct it and move on. No big deal. So, having a trans kid and having to now become more
aware you can't help but become more aware of the struggles of people on the LGBT alphabet soup.

I went to one of those breakout sessions on being an ally at a conference. What does it mean to be an ally? And the two women who were heading up this session said at a minimum, not doing any harm, that's the first step. Do no harm. Don't be hurtful. Don't be hateful. That's at the minimum. Most people who think they're allies, that's as far as they get and that's kind of where I was. I'm not going to bash you or disparage you or discriminate against you. I'm going to do my best to be accepting of you. Well, that's a minimum. That's kindergarten. So that was one thing I had to learn. Walk with me, if you would.

Challenging thing? It's hard to separate our son's other challenges from the parenting of a transgender kid. Because he's got a very high IQ and probably some ADD and probably some other things that are working against him. So, around about third grade, our son started really having challenges. It manifested at first in school. And then, as he has grown older, I guess the kids grow up and the brain chemistry does what it does and their personality evolved. And then, oh by the way, I'm a boy. I think the biggest challenge probably has to go back to dealing with my own self and working things out in my own mind. Knowing that you've got to get yourself together if you're going to be of any use to your kid. So, keeping my own fears in check, advocating, and getting used to advocating. Everybody's challenges are going to be unique. But, that's probably what it was, what it is, for me. It's the acceptance, coming to terms with my daughter now being my son; and, realizing he was your son all along. That wasn't the hardest part. It's dealing with everybody else; that's the challenge. That's where the effort comes in. Because people you’ve known all your life long or all your kids life long, they ask you how your daughter is doing? And those that we knew really well, luckily, have been really tolerant and
accepting. Nobody has stopped speaking to us. Really, really accepting. And probably going through their own steps of questions and feelings about how does that work and how does this work. We get the same questions over and over. Every trans person and parent of a trans person gets the same thing. Are you sure they're not just gay? There is nothing you can be more sure of. No trans person would put themselves through what they have to deal with on a daily basis if it were just a whim.

Gender norms, that's one thing I'll add. That's been a growth area for me. I was always fairly accepting. Once I got to be an actual adult out in the world, I started paying attention to things like, stereotypes. Gender norms, what is male? What is female? My wife sees gender as a spectrum. And, I, in the past year and a half, began to see where that is probably true. Not an expert, you observe stuff and think, “Huh? yea okay.” That's an area of growth.

I try to make it tearing off a Band-Aid (telling people his son’s gender identity). I don't hide it. To the extent that my son is comfortable with me disclosing, essentially "outing" him. I won't do it, if there is no reason to do it. But, when somebody who knows my kid, asks me about my kid or whatnot, I will say I have a transgender son. I'll just put that out there. Early on. Part of the process. But, by and large, people are pretty good.

Grief actually went away fairly quickly when I had that moment of, “Ahhh geez.” We've always had a boy. We just didn't know it. However, he ended up in a female body. It doesn't matter. But, we always had a boy. And that, you can call it a paradigm shift or whatever. But that realization was one that started getting easier for me. I look at him now; it's second nature. I don't even think about it anymore. Except for those times when, if I'm talking about him and I'm talking about something that happened in his life when he still was a she and our daughter. I can slip up and drop the wrong pronoun. That's how it happens. I don't have to consciously think
about it anymore. Usually, he acts like a he. He always did act like a he. That was the funny
thing, once it was like, “Oh it's okay to call you a he now; cause you sure always acted like it.”

Rewarding? I will talk to anybody who wants to talk to me about it. So, I like getting the
chance to talk and model what I think the behavior that we need to have more of. It feels good. I
hope it helps. We all like to helpful. So, I hope that it's helpful when I can show somebody that
it's not the end of the world. That's a funny thing, every now and then you get this reaction from
people when I say, “well our kid came out as trans,” and they don't mean to but they say, "Oh, I'm so sorry." Well no, no, no. He's not dead or he died. He's just transgender. And it's also, like
you have to help them. You can then help them with stuff that you personally had to go through
with your own kid. And you help other people broaden their minds. Maybe that's how change
and acceptance is going to happen. Thirty years from now it will be, or maybe in less, I hope
even less than that, it will much less of a big deal.

We’re very proud of our kid. He will put himself out there and speak his mind. And
speak truth like no sixteen-year-old I have ever seen. I just am gob smacked every time I see him
do it. That's pretty amazing to watch too. It's just, holy crap dude, you have no idea how strong
you really are. I think about myself at sixteen and the frail, shallow of a human you can be at
sixteen-years-old trying to figure your stuff out.

**Making Meaning as a Father of a Child who Identifies as Transgender**

I feel particularly special or different or unique. Having a trans kid is what I would call a
unique needs child like any other child that has unique needs. I think parents make up 90% of
their parenting as they go. This just sort of adds to it. It's another layer of complexity. It requires
that you raise your vigilance a little more. And you have to be willing, even if you're not willing,
even if you don't want to, you still have to be willing to go to bat in certain ways that you
probably wouldn't have if you didn't have a transgender kid. It means you might command an audience whereas a parent, or a father of a non-trans kid, might not because people will naturally have questions for you. They're going to want to know stuff because they're curious. Lord knows I would. It means you have to be ready for that and ideally it means that you would be willing to engage and to try and talk to people about whatever their questions might be. And it means you have to at least try and prepare yourself to have a little thicker skin. You're not always going to get acceptance across the board. Try as much as you can to not take it personally. I think you have to recognize, at least on some level, that transgender is now where gay was 25 years ago. The transgender awareness and policy and thoughts and feelings about it are very nascent in our culture at the moment. For whatever that might be worth, just realize that you're at this cusp.

For me personally, I feel fairly fortunate that my family is supportive, even if they might not get it. They're all supportive. At the lowest level of being an ally, they're not going to do anything to undercut or subvert. Nobody's going to write us out of their will or anything like that. For me, I don't think those things are going to be negative factors. My job isn't going to be a factor.

Yes (my ideas about gender and privileged have changed). Also, the person that I'm married to is real good about making me about stuff like that. I think back to a less informed me when I was 18 or 19. I look at that and I think to whatever degree I can, I'll take what I know now and try to just impart that however I can to my own kids and to anybody that'll listen honestly. Not even just kids. Teachable moments happen all the time. Having a trans kid, you do see things every now and then where the gender binary, or the classic gender binary is right in front of you, and you are suddenly aware how unnecessary it is, in that particular moment, "Wow why does there have to be this?" It might not be causing a problem, but why is it there?
I'd probably just try to listen (to other fathers seeking advice). I would try to at least give the opportunity for the other person to speak and for me to just shut up and listen for a bit. I think I would just try to get them talking. If it seemed like they were receptive to that and just kind of wanted to talk. Maybe something that they say will resonate with a feeling or an experience that I have. And if they don't even want to do that, I might say, "Wow, I bet you're feeling blah blah blah." Or, "you must be feeling a little overwhelmed right now." Or, "You probably don't know what to think do you?"

Knowing that there's somebody who's gone through it and they're further down the track than you are, that can be helpful. That can be supportive. You're giving that person support just by saying, "Yeah I was where you were. I remember those feelings." Even though I might not be able to articulate what the feelings are. It gets better. It will get better, they will smooth out. You're not going to have a core meltdown or anything. If they want to ask a specific question, then I'd give an answer. But if they don't know what to say or what to do, just kind of let them know that you're not alone and I think I felt the same way you do.

Our child didn't really need or even ask for any therapy or counseling. But he's actually away at a residential program right now. He's got issues that are outside of gender dysphoria. He's quite exceptional in terms of his IQ, ADD, there might be some personality issues going on. And these things are challenges for him. He's going to be discharged pretty soon and as part of him coming home, we have to have an aftercare plan in place. So we're at that stage, and we're trying to find a therapist. My wife and I were talking today and I said I think it's probably good to let a potential therapist know that just because our kid is trans, doesn't mean we are looking for help in dealing with gender identity issues. He's already secure. He knows who he is. It's all the other stuff. He's not sitting there questioning his sexuality or his gender identity and having all these
feelings that he needs help processing. In that regard, he hasn't done any counseling. He knows how much he wants to transition right now. He knows that that may change in the future. I don't even think we asked or offered therapy or anything like that. I'm sure we said in very general terms, "Do you need any help? Do you have any questions? If you need some, let us know." He just kinda kept right on trucking.

You have to at least be trans aware or aware of the gender spectrum (if you’re a therapist). You have to know about it and you have to kind of get it. You can't just have read it on paper, "Yeah I read about that once." You have to have training. We met with a therapist today who self-disclosed that while she considers herself to be very much an ally and very supportive, she's not had any formal training. That's when I thought, "Well we really don't care about that, he doesn't need help with his identity." He needs help with multiple personality and things like that. And who knows that may tie back in to a coping mechanism for feeling like you shouldn't be or the universe made a mistake from an early age.

As far as a therapist goes, it kind of goes back to the ally spectrum. At the very least, be accepting and fully supportive. The last therapist that Cayden had came right out and said, "I'm not trans knowledgeable or deeply knowledgeable about all the issues and things that trans people might have and they experience. But, I'm trans-aware and I'm fully supportive." And that was enough. It wasn't an issue with him. He looks at our son and, "Okay, that's your son. That's your son now." Because when you started with this therapist he was our daughter. I think at a minimum, you've got to be aware. You've got to get it. Willing to absorb new information or new paradigms, new modes of thinking. Open-minded.

Our newest psychiatrist told us, very matter-of-factly, that I've never treated a transgender patient. I don't know anything about transgender issues. He said, "But I'm perfectly
fine working with your son if you guys are willing to let me work with your son, I'm certainly willing to learn." We were okay with that. I don't magically expect every therapist and every psychiatrist out there to just automatically come educated. That's impossible. If you're willing to learn, that's enough in my books. Or at least that's a real big step in the right direction.

Most of my hopes for my child's future are two facets to it. They fall under two main headings. One of them has to do more with our society or more with where he ends up. My hope is that he finds a way to live. Not to risk putting too fine a point on it. I want him to choose to live. And rather than just fail until he dies, I want the apathy to abate. I want that to abate and for him to cope with it to the point that he's willing to give life a good hard shot. It can be okay. There's probably some reason for hope, and along with that I hope that he is willing to work on developing this skills necessary to cope with his own demons, and his own challenges. Because I think that's largely what it's going to be for him. My hope is that he able to see enough good in his own situation that it outweighs the bad and that he's willing to stick it out. And along with that, find a path that he wants to walk or try to walk in life. The second column heading sort of builds on that. My hope is that our society catches up, hang on a second here. I hope our culture catches up. I hope that it isn't going to take as long for trans to get to the point where gay is now. Not that life is great for all gay people, but a little better than it used to be. Those are my hopes.

My hopes as a father for the future? I hope my brain stays healthy enough that my cognition and my awareness doesn't just degrade in to a state of dementia that renders me completely unable to process my own reality. I'd love to be a helper; a helping hand to anybody else that needs is. If I can help other parents, I'll do it. If I can help other people I'll do it.
Chapter 10: FINDINGS, DISCUSSION, & IMPLICATIONS

Themes emerged from the data that addressed my three research questions: (a) How do men develop their perceptions of fatherhood?; (b) How do men describe their experiences as fathers raising a child who identifies as transgender?; and (c) What meaning do men associate and derive from this experience as fathers having a transgender child? Themes were derived from the three interviews each father participated in that focused on questions relating to learning about fatherhood, being a father, being a father of a child who identifies as transgender, and the meaning these fathers make of these experiences collectively. I used in-depth interviewing following Seidman (2006) to collect data and analyze each father’s answers while utilizing my constructivist paradigm worldview and McGoldrick, Carter, and Garcia-Preto’s (2011) Family Life Cycle Theory as the theoretical framework. Excerpts from the fathers are presented below to reflect on the identified themes. The identified themes are: paternal involvement,

The Impact Paternal Involvement has on Fathers’ Patterns of Behavior Theme

The first interview centered on the participants’ life history (Seidman, 2006). Fathers were given the opportunity to retrospectively discuss their experiences with their own fathers and the transition from being a man to a man who is now a father. This process elicited the major theme that directly addressed how men develop their perceptions of fatherhood. The theme was paternal involvement. The impact paternal involvement has on fathers’ patterns of behavior theme included of three subthemes: interaction with their fathers, interaction with their children, and paternal influence on manhood.

Paternal Involvement

Fathers discussed the memories that shaped their ideas about fathering. Alfred Adler (1931) placed great emphasis upon the interpretation of memories and believed memories were
the most revealing aspect of a person’s identities because they shape a person’s individual philosophy on life. Adler (1931) also argued that memories were never inconsequential and, instead, provided important insight into how people prescribe meanings to events. Therefore, memories these men attribute to their experiences are intentional metaphors of their lives and their understanding of it. I, therefore, interpreted the fathers’ discussion about their life histories and recollections of events and the feelings and thoughts that corresponded with them. Through this interpretation, the first theme of paternal involvement transpired. Involvement has been broadly defined as engagement with the child, availability, and being responsible for the child’s care, both the financial aspect of caring for the child and the arrangement of the child’s care and wellbeing (Palkovitz, 2002; Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2004). This theme paternal involvement is presented below by the three subthemes: interaction with their fathers, interaction with their children, and paternal influence on manhood.

**Interaction with their Fathers**

Each of the fathers reported memories of their interaction with their fathers. Focus was paid to the presence or absence of their father and how this impacted their thoughts about their fathering style. Clyde was raised by a mother and father and discussed the importance of having his father present and how that influenced how he raised his children.

We spent a lot of time together on the weekends when he wasn't working. We went camping a lot. We were always around one another. It was a very positive relationship… He spent a lot of time with me directly and I'm sure that that had a significant effect on how I parented my children. There's definitely all of the camping trips we took. There are incidents from those of him drinking around the fire with other dads while those boys and I just hung out and played.

Both Jack and Bob reported similar experiences. Each discussed memories involving their fathers being active in their lives and reflected how their own fathers’ involvement influenced them as a father:
Jack: I'm very close to my dad… And I remember my dad working two jobs during the week and one on the weekends and trying to keep the roof over our heads with a house that him and my mother just bought. We never knew how hard he was working. Except we knew that we'd always see him at little league practice. So I mean he was still around. He was still there. He wasn't an absentee dad. I just try to do what he did. I raised my kids like my dad raised me.

Bob: I would say a lot about my father. He was really involved. I grew up in a traditional two-parent household--had three siblings. But my dad was always involved with what we were up to. He was very much the alpha, and very much a man of his generation. Born in 1941, but he was involved and he enjoyed doing things with his kids, so that was a huge influence for me… He was the type of dad, that on the weekends, he always had activities planned. We'd jump in his Jeep and go exploring. We were very fortunate to always live in places that were mountainous in particular: western North Carolina and in Colorado. We would go on picnics, and go on hikes, and just four wheeling, and exploring. He was kind of an explorer. He was a type of person that liked to take the off-the-beaten path type routes, and I do a lot of that now.

John quantified his family as being a very normal family that grew up close. John was able to mention several fond memories of his interacting with his father.

My parents were teachers and so we didn't have extravagant vacations. We had each other and we did things that we all enjoyed, but there were the modest vacations. We didn't have the money to spend, but now in retrospect as an adult, I think to myself that was certainly something that made us very close as a family…When we were kids, my dad to build these bird boxes with us…I remember loving to help him work in the garden or rake weeds in the yard. He was always at our baseball coach until we got to an age where baseball got competitive.

Bryn reported his dad being reserved and mentioned his relationship with his parents informed the way he raised his own children. He stated that he would observe his parents’ interactions with him and implement this things that he thought were beneficial with his own children and reported, "Mmm, I'm ever gonna do that," about the things his parents did that he did not find fruitful. Although Bryn did not mention any examples of him and his father interacting by doing activities together, he did report memories of his father from a personality and emotion sense and how that played out within their interaction together and influenced his own childrearing.
It was hard for him to express a lot. He didn't let the guard down much. It was not a lot of emotion. Like tender emotion or anything like that. I'm not saying the feelings weren't there; I'm saying he was not great at expressing it. It would come across as he would chuck you on the shoulder and you know "That's my boy!" you know that kind of thing. And, I know what that meant, but like, "Don't worry, dad. I'll fill in the details in my brain. I know what you're saying." I'm not like that. I am a big ball of emotion and it's not forced. We always were real. There was lots of hugs, lots of pats on the head, lots of just reassuring I guess you call it reassuring touch. My wife and I were not spankers. I was never spanked as a kid. It's not that my parents wouldn't have spanked me if I'd needed it, but that kind of aggressive touch wasn't done. So, I guess that's one of the big differences. There's no barrier there. We tell our kids we love them all the time. That's the biggest difference, I would say between my dad and me.

Harvey had a different experience compared to the other fathers. Unlike the other participants who reported having fathers who were actively involved and reflected on shaping their own fathering style to match much of their own dad’s, Harvey’s response centered on the absence of his father and wanting to do the antithesis of how his father interacted with him with his own child.

I think about doing the opposite of what my father did… He's Mexican-American, from a Machismo type of environment. That was his way of doing things. As I was becoming a parent, every time that I had a question or how do I deal with something, sometimes I would say, "What would my father do?" and I would do the opposite. I still do that, as we speak. The other thing is that he was in the military and he was deployed several times. At two different occasions, he was gone for a whole year when I was very young. I remember reading some comments that my elementary school teachers had that said something like, "He seems to be doing much better now that his father's back," things like that. What I got out of that, is that being a father you have to be there. We were living in Key West, Florida for four years and my dad took us on a couple fishing trips. I'm trying to think of something else. Like I said, he was gone a couple times… I also remember, when I was a Boy Scout, he helped out in the troop. He was a treasurer. It was kind of a passive role.

Men learn their own childrearing styles through interactions with significant role models (Guzzo, 2011; Parke, 1995). As stated earlier in Chapter 2, there are hypotheses to help explain ways men’s interaction with their fathers influence the type of parental role they exhibit. These hypotheses include the modeling hypothesis and compensatory hypothesis (Parke, 1995; Sagi 1982). Modeling hypothesis is based on observational learning and social learning theories in
which men’s attitudes and behaviors are learned from their experience with their own fathers (Bandura, 1999; Guzzo, 2011; Parke, 1995; Sagi 1982). This theory, therefore, surmises that men look to their own experiences with their father as a mental prototype for developing their own parental approach (Nicholson, Howard, and Borkowski 2008). Within this theory, consequently, men who had a distant father will be distant themselves as a father and those men with good fathers are predicted to be good fathers.

The compensatory hypothesis states men attempt to offset their childhood experiences of an unavailable or unsupportive father by engaging in high levels of involvement with their child in order to makeup for their childhood (Sagi, 1982). Men with a perceived lack of a positive fatherly role model will, therefore, want to do things differently than their fathers did in order to makeup for their own fathers’ shortcomings and deficiencies they perceived in their own childhood (Parke, 1995; Townsend 2002). Their attitudes and involvement are developed in opposition to early experiences with their own fathers. Men with uninvolved or absent fathers, Daly (2003) notes, may have a need to step up as a positive role model in response to the lack of a role model they had growing up.

Consequently, Pleck (1997) suggests that if a man has a positive experience with his father, he is more likely to adapt his fathering style to that of modeling; conversely, if a man has a perceived negative experience with his father, compensation will more likely occur. Both Guzzo (2011) and Nicholson, Howard, and Borkowski (2008) found overall consistent results supporting the modeling hypothesis. While other literature, Pruett (1987), Radin (1988), Snarey (1993), found support for the compensation hypothesis. To complicate matters, however, additional research, Beaton, Doherty, & Rueter (2003) and Floyd & Mormon (2000), supports the idea of a combination of the two hypotheses. The common thread with each of these
hypotheses is the impact childhood experiences have on fathers. Attitudes and beliefs about parenting which fathers adopt are prone to be influenced by how their own fathers parented them (Daly, 1993; Krampe, 2003).

Five of the participants reported having involved fathers and one father reporting having a distant father. All of the fathers reported being actively involved their child’s life, which will be discussed further in the next section. The modeling hypothesis was consistent for the five fathers who appear to have modeled their own involvement with their children after their fathers’. The one father, Harvey, who reported having a distant father and adamantly tries to do the opposite of this father, does not fit this model. His self-reported active involvement with his child acts to offset his own childhood experiences of his often unavailable and uninvolved father. This making up for his paternal involvement deficit appears to mirror that of the compensatory hypothesis. Though both of these hypotheses touch upon some of the participants’ experiences, but not all of them collectively. Therefore, a combination of the two hypotheses, as suggested by Pleck (1997), appears to more comprehensively reflect these men’s experiences. The men that had a positive experience with their fathers tended to adapt their own fathering style by modeling their paternal interaction; conversely, Harvey’s perceived negative experience with his father resulted in him stepping up as a positive, involved role model for his child in response to the lack of a involved role model he had growing up. Beaton, Doherty, & Rueter (2003) and Floyd & Morman (2000) also support the idea of a combination of the two hypotheses. The familial cultural these men act a vertical stressor within the Family Life Cycle that, therefore, influenced the way themselves interact with their children.

It is important to note that men might not completely model their fathers’ behaviors and attitudes and instead may select certain attributes of the fathers to develop their own fathering
style (Masciadrelli, Pleck, & Stueve, 2006). This was seen within Bob’s experience as he discussed his father by saying, “He was like a lot of men in that generation in particular who grew up in the South. He was racist and sexist and I'm not that way at all.” Bob also mentions taking on a less traditional role (e.g., being more of a Mr. Mom, cooking, cleaning) compared to his father, especially after becoming a single parent. Bryn reports being unwilling to consider spanking as an option for punishment, unlike his father. He also reports his father not being an emotional person, whereas he reports, “I'm not like that. I am a big ball of emotion and it's not forced. We always were real. There was lots of hugs, lots of pats on the head, lots of just reassuring…” The *Family Life Cycle* theory stresses how the time period a group is in can greatly impact their experience due to living through different attitudes, expectations, and policies.

Bob and Byn electing to take on a less traditional role and being more emotionally expressive compared to their fathers might be attributed to the different generational expectations fathers now have for what makes a “good father” and the current political and social climate that help promote fathers’ roles. *The co-parent/involved father*, appearing currently, engages in more shared parenting responsibilities and has a more equal division of labor with his partner. Within this stage, fathers are also emotionally more available and intimately involved in caregiving of the child than ever before (Pleck & Pleck, 1997). In addition to the legislative influence, mentioned earlier in Chapter 2, contributing to this more nurturing and involved fathering, some trends have accompanied this shift. These include women increasingly entering the work force, increased absence of male figures in the child’s family, more participation of other fathers in children’s lives, and more cultural diversity within the American society (Cabrera, Tamis-LeMonda, Bradley, Hofferth, & Lamb, 2000). A contemporary father is now considered to be
“the good dad” when he can both provide financially and is a full, equal partner in the caregiving to his child (Pleck, 2004, p. 32). Cultural influence within the socio-cultural context of these fathers generation may influence their process of picking or rejecting things their fathers once did or did not do in order to adapt to new cultural norms.

The Family Life Cycle theory also makes an important notion that, “…it is impossible to understand individuals without assessing their current and historical cultural and family contexts” (McGoldrick, M., Carter, B., & Garcia-Preto, 2011, p. 5). Harvey mentions his father being a Mexican-American from a machismo environment. Machismo is considered to be traditional masculine gender norms within the Latino cultural characterized by aggression, domination, and anti-feminine mentality (Glass & Owen, 2010). Machismo attitudes have a negative relationship with paternal involvement and may attribute to, “emotional, interpersonal, and physical distance from their children” (Glass & Owen, 2010, p. 257). This disconnection has been suggested to be a defense mechanism that manifests in Latino men appearing angry and uninvolved due to the frustration and intrapsychic conflict that can come with experiencing racism (Cervantes, 2006; Glass & Owen, 2010; Neff, 2001). Taking into account the socio-cultural context within The Family Life Cycle theory helps recognize the potential community, ethnic, and oppression/privilege influences that might impact Harvey’s father’s interaction with him and will also shape the implications discussed later in this chapter.

Participants’ interaction with their fathers emerged as an instrumental influencer on their approach to fatherhood. Whether they had an active or distance father, all fathers reported having involved fathers in their children’s life. Their accounts of their interaction with their children will be outlined and discussed in the following section.

Interaction with their Children
Becoming a father has been characterized as one of the most definitive and dramatic stages of a man’s life (Carter, McGoldrick, & Petkov, 2011). Within the context of the *Family Life Cycle* (Carter, McGoldrick, & Petkov, 2011), fatherhood is viewed as a developmental horizontal stressor marked as a roller coaster of sleep deprivation, stress, chores, and balancing schedules. Despite the probable and perhaps inevitable stress to come with fatherhood, a vast majority of men will become a father within their lifetime (Snarey, 1993). Five of the six fathers reported entering this stage of their life with uncertain or trying thoughts and experiences. The fathers reported the following responses to their experience becoming a father:

- Clyde: “It's one of those things like riding a bicycle downhill for the first time. You have no idea. Here's it's going to go. You're just trying to hold on happening you don't crash.”
- John: “It was tough…”
- Harvey: “…I kind of look at becoming a father like I look at death. I have no idea what's to happen. I know it's going to be different, but I have no idea what it is.”
- Bob: “It was challenging…”
- Bryn: “Absolutely terrifying! Daunting. It was sobering… I was just full of apprehension as a new father. Along with that this awesome sense of wonder that, ‘Wow! Your life is getting ready to change.’"

Despite this universal stressful time these men reported having and sharing with other populations of fathers, they all, including Jack, responded to this horizontal stressor by being actively involved with their child. In order to be involved with their child, some fathers reported putting great emphasis on interacting with their children by making choices to ensure a better work/life balance. Both Jack and John reported trying to strike a balance between their work and family life, often by restructuring work opportunities in order to be actively involved in their children’s life.

Jack: One I got out of the Navy after 8 years because Jill was 3 and had no idea who I was... I was still saying goodbye to my wife and kid an awful, awful lot and I was gone all the time… So, when they wanted to send me back to sea I said, “No, send me somewhere where I can take my wife and kid. I'll go anywhere in the world. But I want to take my wife and kid with me.” They said, “No you're going to go back to sea.” I got out
so I could spend time with my kid. Well, as I said, I'm a musician. I started working at the airline and playing on the weekend. Which was from 2 nights a week to 5 nights a week. Which, turned to we're all quitting our jobs and going on the road. I just got out of the Navy for not seeing my kid so I quit the band, I let them go. You guys go on, have a good time I'm gonna spend time with my wife and kid, we're going to have some fun.

John: When my ex-wife and I started a family, we had a very similar approach to our family, doing things as a group together, focused on the kids, uber focused on the kids… I've always sort of made my career decisions around being available for my kids. I never wanted to be the guy who came home and have the kids say, "Now who's the guy in the suit who just walked through the front door?" "That's your father."

The roles of fathers over the past few decades have changed, matured, and evolved. Although mothers continue to be seen as the primary child caregiver, fathers have begun to be more involved and take on more child-rearing responsibilities (Day, Lewis, O'Brien, & Lamb, 2005). Contributing to this change has been more federal and state policy initiatives that have influenced the way the American public perceives the role of fathers in the family (Brothernson & White, 2002; Fagan & Palm, 2004). Additionally, socio-cultural context of what makes a good father has changed, as discussed in the previous section. Therefore, while women have historically been the ones balancing this work-life role strain more than fathers, fathers are now becoming less immune to this role conflict (Higgins, Duxbury, & Lyons, 2010). Increasing their interaction with their children is not only now considered part of being a good dad, but fathers must be make active choices to disengage with work and work opportunities to avoid spill over.

Domestic-child rearing responsibilities and career obligations are domains that have become less separated and are often muddled identities (Halford, 2006). Despite physically leaving one arena for the other, stressors, demands, and behaviors can still linger from work to home and vice versa. Spaines’ (1980) “spillover” theory postulates just this notion (p. 111). The demands placed upon employees due to a worldwide market and the need to travel and the advancements in technology that allow for constant connection via mobile phones, texts
messages, and emails, can make disconnecting from one domain to other increasingly difficult. It is, therefore, not surprising that both Jack and John chose to make decisions regarding their jobs in order to be more active in their children’s lives and establish a more balanced work and home life. Men attaining a work-life balance can help to promote satisfaction in both the domestic and employment arena (Evans, Carney, & Wilkinson, 2013).

This emphasis of interacting with their child was also discussed with the other fathers. Interestingly, each of the below fathers reflected the current cultural norm of fathers as the co-parent/involved father when describing what makes a good father:

Harvey: I remember reading some comments that my elementary school teachers had that said something like, "He seems to be doing much better now that his father's back," things like that. What I got out of that, is that being a father you have to be there. I've painstakingly tried to make sure that if I had to go on a trip or do something, I wasn't gone. I've never been gone for more than a week or 10 days on those sort of trips. I wanted to be around. That was my philosophy on how to do things. I think that’s important…. My younger son is in Boy Scouts. When he joined, I became one of the leaders. I'm still one of the assistant Scoutmasters. I go on a lot of camp-outs with him…Just being around (makes a good father). I think if you're doing something, even if you're not doing something, you're just together. I think it's a good thing, just the mere presence.

Clyde: The fact that my father was present all the time, the fact that my father was there for hospital visits and for weekends, and for just everything, that's just what I expected out of fathers. I saw so many relationships just completely fall apart. I saw so many damaged kids throughout my life. I said, "That is absolutely not what I am going to do to my children." …I think what makes a man a good father is being dedicated to his house and being dedicated to his children.

Bob: I had been very much involved for two years, and I wanted to continue that, but I had to fight a little bit more so to do that. That was challenging. I was involved and never missed school meetings and was involved in all activities and had as many overnights as I possibly could. I had been involved as a stay at home dad, there was a bond there… What makes a man a good father? I would say, time. Spending time with your child and being involved, in all aspects of their life. Whether it be healthcare, education, activities. Getting on their level, getting on the floor and playing with them. Sometimes, there's a stereotype that dads are kind of gonna be involved so much less than, say, mom. I like to show my son how to cook and how to fold clothes and how to make his bed. I think just really that involvement and that time and as many aspects of their lives as possible.
The involvement is just the key. There are times I can remember as a child not seeing my dad around because he was always working. It was always mom at the ball field or mom at my game, so there was times when I was like, "wow, where's my dad?" I always said that I wanted to be as involved and as active as possible. Now my son is 17, and our relationship is reflective of the approach that I took.

Bryn: I think it helps and it's probably a good thing if the father is equally present, or as much as possible, in the rearing of the kids. Stem to stern in all aspects, grocery shopping, housekeeping, rearing of the kids, changing the diapers, feeding the kids, teaching lessons, helping with homework, transporting to softball or music lessons or whatever, to the extent that you can.

Fathers are powerful influencers when it comes to their children and their children’s wellbeing. Fagan & Palm (2004) even argues that a father exhibiting a caring relationship is perhaps the most impactful experience in a child’s life. A father’s interaction can produce several beneficial factors for his children. These include: development of intellectual, work, and life skills (Allen & Daly, 2007); increased empathy (Hoffman, 2000); desire to engage in community service involvement and literacy (Swick, 2005); identify strengths (Sheldon, 2002); enhance self-esteem (NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2008); academic success (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999; Cooksey & Fondell, 1996); decrease in behavioral issues, delinquency, and addiction (Carlson, 2006; Hair, Moore, Garrett, Ling, & Cleveland, 2008); and enhanced emotional security (Ross & Broh, 2000).

The benefits of a father’s interaction with his child is not one sided. A father is also positively influenced by his interaction with his children (Lamb, 2010). Fathers engaging with their children have reported rewarding results such as developing a health sense of self, lower stress levels, higher life satisfaction that consequently enhances self-esteem, and increased empathy for society as a whole and towards other children (Eggebean & Knoester, 2001; Heretick, 2003; Ozer, Barnett, Brennan, & Sperling, 1998; Sheldon, 2002; Taylor, 2002). These positive effects are not limited to one type of father. Cross culturally and within several subsets
of fathers (e.g., unmarried fathers, teen fathers), fathers interacting with their children reported rewarding experiences (Rosenberg & Wilcox, 2006). The emphasis these men placed on interacting with their children and believing their paternal involvement makes a good father argues that they see the value for their children and they themselves are getting benefits from being with their children. Each one of these fathers demonstrated the importance their children are and spending time with them is for them and their families. With all the benefits of fathers interacting with their children, implications, discussed later in this section, will discuss ways to promote father involvement.

**Paternal Influence on Manhood**

It is essentially impossible to study fatherhood while ignoring the father’s identity as a man and what influenced his idea of manhood. Dowd (2000) supports this notion by stating, “Men’s identities as fathers do not exist in isolation from their identities as men” (p. 181). Transitioning from a man to a man who is now a father is dependent of each other. The role of fatherhood impacts his role as a man and the type of man he is impacts the type of father he becomes. Gilmore (1990) states that cross-culturally, the notion that, “men are made, not born,” is a prevalent idea regarding manhood (p. 106). Kimmel (1996) seconds this notion by stating, “manhood is not the manifestation of an inner essence; it’s socially constructed. Manhood does not bubble up to consciousness from our biological constitution; it is created in our culture” (p. 5). This also helps to explain some of the cultural differences of what constitutes manhood in varying societies. Participants discussed what their interaction with father taught them about manhood within umbrella of the theme paternal influence of manhood.

Clyde and Jack discuss the ways their fathers taught them about being active gentlemen and polite men:
Clyde: We embraced rules for what men did and didn't do. Those included treating women a certain way. He both demonstrated and there were times that he would reinforce this with words, but for the most part he's like, "You always open the door for a woman. You should always be dressed well. You should treat women with respect. You should stand when they enter the room. You should pull their chair out for them."...I think that is probably the most Southern thing about parenting, other than, "Yes, sir," and, "No, sir." I really promoted them saying, "Yes, sir," and, "No, sir," and, "Yes, ma'am," and, "No, ma'am," very young because I felt that it was important they show respect.

Jack: I raised my kids like my dad raised me. You say yes sir, no ma'am. You open the door for your wife. You pull her chair out, not out from under her. You know? Raised my kids to be that way. And Jill was no exception. And, you know, it was the kind of thing that I saw my dad do.

These participants’ discussing the way they learned to be traditional gentlemen from their fathers aligns with the literature. Johnson (1963) reports that the father is, “the instrumental leader of the family as a whole represents the outside world to his children” (pp. 322-323). It is, therefore, the father’s role via internalizing a reciprocal role relationship that he socializes and teaches both his daughter and son gender conformity and gender role expectations for their respected gender (Johnson, 1963). Fathers process and participate in their child’s gender identity development differently than that of mothers. Fathers tend to reinforce stereotypical gender roles and boundaries more than mothers, especially when it comes to sons (Maccoby 1998; Marks, Lam, & McHale, 2009; Ruble, 1988). Several theorists, including Mischel (1966), a social learning theorist, emphasized this influence parents have on gender identity by father’s teaching his children via these stereotypical gender roles and boundaries how to genderize themselves properly. Also, not surprisingly with a participant group living in the south that some of the fathers would mention the importance of saying, “yes sir,” and “yes ma’am.” Again, their fathers model society norms, specifically southern politeness norms (Ching, 2008). However, this politeness also reinforces the gender binary.
John and Harvey also reported learning what it is to be a man, but these two report different experiences with the messages their fathers conveyed:

John: No one in my family places that sort of emphasis on traditional roles. No one, especially my dad, ever used the term be a man or this is what a man does or this is not what a man does. Everyone in my family cries and so I don’t think in the traditional sense that men are supposed to be the tough ones or men are not supposed to cry. We were a very hugging, physical family, even my dad who was just quiet and sort of the least emotional of the bunch. But, there was never any expectation that men were supposed to be one thing and women were supposed to be the other. My brothers and I are all exceptional cooks and pride ourselves in that. I've certainly not packed any sort of expectation around tradition roles for my children either.

Harvey: I remember something he told me when I think I was five or six-years-old. We were living in Tampa, Florida and we were both looking out the front porch. There was a park across the street and there was another boy there that was crying about something. I don't know what he was crying about. He says, "You know, boys don't cry." I don't agree with it now, but I did back then. You have to realize, and this is the other thing I think about all the time, kids are very impressionable. When you're a parent and you tell your child that this is the way it's going to be, a child, to them, it's like, "Okay, there's no if, ands, or but. It's going to happen."

These experiences speak to the great influence father have on children’s ideas of what is expected of them. It is no surprise that with the emphasis in the research pointing to fathers as the vessel for teaching children about gender roles, that fathers would develop a sense of responsibility for it, especially when it comes to their sons. This responsibility can both be used to perpetuate the masculine norms, such in Harvey’s case, or, as seen in John’s case, can be reflected in a father not wishing to perpetuate traditional norms.

Bob discusses his memory of how sports was a central feature of their relationship as father and son:

As far as that transition into adulthood, a lot of my relationship with him regarding that was about the sports. He was a really good athlete and there were a lot of expectations for me to engage in sports. I was reluctant, but then I really came to enjoy it. I’m more intellectually influenced during that transition period than anything else.

Bob’s experience is not uncommon. The emphasis on sports, especially for boys, is often
used to perpetuate traditional gender roles of manhood and masculinity (ZhiCheng, Gang, Yong, JianHua, & JunXian, 2011). Encouraging or even at times pushing a reluctant child, like in Bob’s, to partake in sports not only allows fathers to give their son’s a platform to learn about masculinity, it also benefits the father. Coakley (2006) reports that children who excel in sports, has their success directly attributed their fathers. Also, societal norms have constructed the notion that fathers who do not advocate for their sons to take on their interest are not good fathers (Coakley, 2006). This cycle of promoting traditional masculine activities is not only encouraged within many families, but within the mainstream society as well. This is perhaps why many men do not encourage activities like ballet, but seek to sign their child up for baseball and football

Although the other fathers touched on their fathers influencing their thoughts and actions as men, Bryn also reported that his father influences his emotional expression as well:

My own dad had a much worse temper than my mom. It never manifested in ill ways towards me. When he would get mad at something, you would know it. The whole house would know it. And, I guess I'm kind of the same way. I'm slow to boil, but oh brother, it takes that one last little thing, and I go off like a rocket.

Just as manhood has traditional actions and modeling, men also express traditional emotions. Anger has been seen to be an emotion more easily expressed by men. Sharkin (1993) suggests that men are taught to be predominately inexpressive when it comes to emotions. The one exception, however, is anger. Byrn’s father modeling anger and, consequently, him responding to times of discomfort in a similar fashion reinforce the notion that, “for many men it is easier to allow themselves to experience emotions such as anger” (Heppner & Gonzales, 1987, p. 32). Changing societal expectations that men have a one-emotion channel is important. As the above section has seen, fathers are huge influencers on their children and working with these
men in both a micro and macro level to expand their beliefs and emotions about constitutes a man is vital for unhinging these ridged, unattainable expectations we place on men.

The *Family Life Cycle* theory highlights the stronghold society, cultural, vertical stressors of sexism, and familial relational and communication patterns has on influencing men and the way their fathers teach them how to be men. Just as becoming a father was a horizontal stressor for these fathers, they were once the horizontal stressor for their fathers. With that, their fathers had vertical stressors that either promoted or discouraged ideas of sexism that they may have passed onto these participants. Also, it’s important to note the influence of time. Many of the participants referred their father’s behavior or ideas as products of the time due to the cultural or societal demands of the period. This then affected the way in which their fathers communicated with the participants and how they developed relationship patterns. Now that the participants are fathers themselves, some of the residual interactions of their own fathers influences the ways in which they teach their children gender norms within the current cultural time period. The means in which these fathers influence their own children elicits several implications about their experience with fatherhood.

**Implications for the Impact Paternal Involvement has on Fathers’ Patterns of Behavior**

Fathers being involved in their children’s lives is beneficial for both them and their children’s wellbeing. Despite these benefits, heterosexual dads are still less involved than the child’s mother, even if they are in a committed relationship with the other parent (Lamb, 2000). The issue of fathers not being as involved appears to not be due to strictly the fathers’ attitudes necessarily, but with Western cultural and society’s expectation of fatherhood (Pleck, 1997). Historically, fathers have been seen as distant breadwinners and the sex-role models for their children. However, the current era has seen a change of fatherhood expectations in which dads
are expected to share parenting responsibilities equally. Despite this change in attitude about fatherhood, societal views of caregivers still center around female caregivers and the media reflects this notion as well by perpetuating men in incompetence stereotypes and infantilize them (Petroski & Edley, 2006). Television shows and other mediums reinforce this idea that men are not good caregivers by presenting them as inept, bumbling idiots, and needing the mother to come to the rescue; even when fathers are involved in the child’s life, they are seen as babysitting their own child, being mother’s helper, or simply just the baby’s entertainer (Petroski & Edley, 2006). Societal images also seek to genderize the responsibilities of fathers within the home. Continuing to equate them with the parent that shows and explains gender roles to the children. (Sanchez & Thomson, 1997).

Bob refers to himself as, “…I’m a bit of a Mr. Mom…” Clyde also reported being a stay-at-home parent while also working from home, as his spouse works outside of the home. Petroski & Edley (2006) argues to need to no longer refer to father who stays at home as, “Mr. Mom,” and instead replace it with Stay-at-Home Dads (SAHDs) as the preferred label due to the negative connotation Mr. Mom has. Petroski & Edley (2006) notes the importance of this change in wording because, “They are not mothering—they are parenting” (p. 1). As stated in Chapters 1 and 2 about the importance of language, it is important not to promote language that disvalues the role of the father. Having a label of Mr. Mom or referring to a father as babysitting his child only perpetuates the concept that fathers are essentially mother knockoffs and unequal to mothers. This verbiage gives the illusion that their involvement is not as valuable as it actually is. Changes in the way society discusses father involvement is key in shaping a cultural that more readily recognizes and expects father involvement.
There are also public, political, and organizational interventions that can be done to promote paternal involvement. The visual representations the public sees can influence the way our society and cultural learn what a father. We, therefore, need to restructure and hold media and public venues accountable for the images of fathers they show. It is imperative to provide an ongoing perspective of fathers that promotes the notion that men are caring, capable, and nurturing people (Groves 2002; Hargrave, 2003). Also, showing men in versatile gender roles can help society lessen their notion that men have strict gender boundaries and need gender police these roles.

In the United States, the amount of time, resources, and overall support that is offered to fathers has been characterized as, “…shameful” (Swick, 2013, p. 40). Although, the Obama administration placed great emphasis on programs focused on fathering that have helped to contribute to an increased interest in support for father involvement, there are still several improvements within the political and organization realm to encourage father involvement (Cowan, Cowan, & Knox, 2010; Fagan & Palm, 2004). Examples to promote father involvement are: increased paternity leave, work-family flexibility, and father education and networking programs (Fagan & Palm, 2004). Fathers having opportunities to take paid time off of work in once their child is born within the United States is limited.

The Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA or the Act) allows fathers to take paternity leave from work when their child is born without the threat of being fired (Halverson, 2003). This time off, however, is unpaid and fathers, who do actually elect to take leave it, are often forced to use up sick leave and vacation time to get a couple of weeks off (Fine-Davis, M., Fagnani, J., Giovannini, D., Højgaard, L., & Clarke, H., 2004). Not allowing adequate means for fathers to take much needed time to bond with their child tells fathers and society that this time
unnecessary and not a priority. There is even a stigma attached to fathers who do take paternity leave (Dahl, Løken, & Mogstad, 2014). This stigma was seen when professional baseball player, Daniel Murphy, chose to miss two games to be with his newborn son. Several sport outlets argued that Murphy should not have taken the time off and insisted his wife or a hired nurse should be taking care of the newborn (Dube & Raeburn, 2014). Messages like this reinforces the idea that father involvement is not valued. Despite the fact that when fathers feel valued in their fatherhood role, their motivation to increase their involvement increases (Pleck, 1997).

Therefore, federal and local government need to develop policies and laws that allow fathers to take more paid time off during this crucial bonding time for fathers and their infants. Having political leaders stressing the importance of this time may help to convey the necessity to the general public. Also, Sheldon (2002) suggests that private sectors could incentives fathers to be involved in their children by offering paid leave time for dads to attend school events and taking fathering classes. Fathers taking part in fathering classes and networking with other dads could strengthen desire to be an involved father as they learn new information and skills while connecting with other fathers (Bouchard & Lee, 2000; Palkovitz, 1997).

Mental health professionals can also contribute to enhancing fathers’ involvement cross culturally. As discussed earlier, Harvey’s fathers’ machismo attitude can be negatively related to paternal involvement. Machismo attitudes may be related to feelings of disempowerment and discrimination (Cervantes, 2006. Therefore, Latino fathers’ underlying anger maybe contributed to internalized messages of racism that impedes their connection with their children (Crouter et al., 2006). A mental health professional can help unpack and process these disenfranchised thoughts and feeling in order to promote positive coping skills for the betterment of the father’s mental health and his child.
Conclusion

Advocating for fathers and restructuring societal norms and expectations of them is vital to their paternal involvement. Implications and strategies for increasing fathers’ involvement were presented in the above section. In the following section, themes centered on the fathers’ responses about their experience as a father of a child who identifies as transgender will be presented. The implications for these themes will also be discussed.

Adapting to Child’s Gender Identity by Engaging in Advocacy Theme

The second interview focused on the details of their experience as fathers of a child who identifies as transgender (Seidman, 2006). The purpose of this interview was for participants to concentrate on their present lived experience as it pertains to the topic. This process elicited the major theme of adapting to child’s gender identity by engaging in advocacy that reflected the experience of these fathers. Each of these fathers adjusted to their experience with their child by taking action towards bettering their family’s experience. Becoming an ally to their transgender child, and in extension to the transgender community as a whole, was a product of how these fathers chose to cope with their situation. Jack, John, and Bryn discuss the notion of being an ally:

Jack: I like to think I'm an ally. I like to think I'll do anything to help that I can.

John: I want to be an ally. The community needs people like me, and I'll do what I can to help.

Bryn: I went to one of those breakout sessions on being an ally at a conference. What does it mean to be an ally? And the two women who were heading up this session said at a minimum, not doing any harm, that's the first step. Do no harm. Don't be hurtful. Don't be hateful. That's at the minimum. Most people who think they're allies, that's as far as they get and that's kind of where I was. I'm not going to bash you or disparage you or discriminate against you. I'm going to do my best to be accepting of you. Well, that's a minimum. That's kindergarten. So that was one thing I had to learn. Walk with me, if you would.
The importance of aligning and supporting with their children by being and striving to be an ally through advocating was a central way to adapt to their experience. Not only did these fathers adapt by advocating for themselves, but they also advocated for themselves to help preserve their own emotional safety by help seeking and self-evaluation. This adaption through advocacy emerged via six subthemes that focused on experiences with the healthcare system and safety. The six subthemes were: access to competent healthcare professionals, addressing other mental health concerns, fathers experience with therapy, physical safety concerns for their children, threats to safety within the community, and fathers’ emotional safety.

**Experiences with the Healthcare System**

The *Family Life Cycle* is complex model with multi-layered interactions that influence the ways families respond to life events. Families do not strictly exist within a vacuum and are not immune to social, historical, and familial influences. The manner in which these fathers responded to having a child who identities as transgender is no exception to these influences. Lev (2004) furthers this notion of greater societal impact by stating that gender variant behavior and expression has, “…social, political, religious, moral, economic, and familial repercussions” (p. 54). As stated earlier, men becoming fathers is a predictable horizontal stressor. Within this interview, fathers began to discuss the unpredictable horizontal stressor of having a child who identifies as transgender. Their experiences below reflect the interactions the vertical stressors (e.g., transphobia, sexism, beliefs, and practices) and the socio-cultural context (e.g., community resources, vulnerability, and safety). The first of these interactions centered on experiences with the healthcare system. This included three subthemes: access to competent healthcare professionals, addressing other mental health concerns, and fathers experience with therapy.

**Access to Competent Healthcare Professionals**
Bob, Clyde, and John reported having difficulty obtaining local healthcare professionals. Each father discussed having to travel several miles and to another state to obtain services.

Bob: Initially, looking into an endocrinologist, we reached out to a community 150 miles up the road of someone who really had the experience and expertise in working with transgender kids. We reached out, instead of going local to doctors who we felt like were just unprepared or not knowledgeable.

Clyde: And it just happened to be that there was a practice across town, which was not convenient in any way ’cause it was 30 miles from where we live, but it was a practice that specifically dealt with transgender youth in depth.

John: The access to healthcare could exist here in the south. I know if there was a surgeon who would do gender reassignment surgery here, I think my ex-wife would’ve identified that through her network of people on the Facebook page. She's very dialed into the transgender community and I don't think we have anywhere around here who performs that surgery…We took Coley to Boston to (implant the hormones in her arm).

Bob discovered that even though he had to drive 150 miles to obtain an endocrinologist, he was able to find a local mental healthcare provider who specialized working with transgender people. However, this provider was the only one in town. His options for obtaining various professionals were, therefore, very limited. Bob reports, “Elliot knew and had heard of (a counselor in the area). She was the only person in town that really was specializing in counseling transgender people.”

Riley et al. (2013, 2011) found similar results within their interviews of both transgender children and their parents. Participants expressed their disappointment and shock at the lack of local services available to them as transgender children. Treatment of gender dysphoria includes access to healthcare professors within the mental health and medical arena. Therefore, having a comprehensive team of professionals is needed to address the mental assessment of individuals and often to medically intervene as well.

The Family Life Cycle indicates that part of the socio-cultural context that interacts with the unpredictable horizontal stressor of having a child disclose they are transgender is
community resources. It is understandable that in order to cope and obtain direction when an unpredictable horizontal stressor occurs, such as the one these fathers experienced, they would look towards community resources for assistance. Therefore, when those resources are not there or extremely limited, this can be a very difficult and frustrating experience for these fathers leaving them helpless. Not having readily available competent healthcare professionals can force fathers to travel long ways to obtain these resources or render them unable to obtain adequate resources. It also makes referring these fathers to professionals very difficult.

The lack of resources might also impact other fathers’ beliefs that this is not an important process to seek interventions. Fathers could reason that if the professional population is not focusing on transgender people and their families, why should I? This scarcity of resources to help these fathers understand and assist themselves and their children is unfortunately seen throughout this theme in a number of different ways. Many of these fathers, as will later be discussed, never had the thought of having a transgender child cross their minds, let alone what resources were out there for a transgender child and their family. Consequently, when this unpredictable horizontal stressor did occur, obtaining resources was not something most of the fathers readily knew how to find and experienced difficulties in this process. Clyde and Jack reported having a challenging time finding healthcare providers that would either work with them or had worked with a significant amount of transgender people before.

Clyde: We've had the hardest time finding a pediatric endocrinologist because there's about ten times the number of kids out here than there were at (the other southern state). Most did not deal with transgender individuals…we've jumped through all these hoops and then finally decide, "Well, we don't deal with transgender so we don't really want to see your child."…Our current doctor that Bonnie has is very reluctant to prescribe (hormones)…She said, "I've never had a transformation before." She said, "I want to make sure that I make all the right decisions." She said, "I'm very skittish about doing it without an Endocrinologist looking over my shoulder." And so just trying to get the endocrinologist was difficult. There's a huge learning curve for doctors when it comes to
transgender youth and I think that it's a big challenge to find professionals with that kind of experience.

Jack: We went to a couple of different therapists. And didn't like them. Nice people, but it's hard to talk about your transgender daughter with a dollhouse in the room. One lady advertised that she discussed transgender issues, but when you got to her office, she didn't handle transgender issues. She handled pediatric issues. She handled children. And then you'd say, “Well, throw up your hands. Your website and your office said you counsel transgender parents.” They’d be like, “Oh yeah, I counseled one.” Have a nice day. You know? I mean, on a nice term, we didn't just walk out. You could see in her face what we said shocked her.

Clyde’s experience of being denied help from professionals unwilling to work with his child is not uncommon. According to Grant et al. (2010), this taskforce found that within their sample of 7,500 transgender participants, 22% of MTF transsexuals surveyed reported being outright refused treatment by either a doctor or medical facility due to their gender identity. This lack of treatment has forced some individuals to no longer seek the medical services they need (Grant et al., 2010). Increasing the amount of culturally competence providers within the healthcare system research is essential and critical. It is extremely unfair to fathers like Clyde and Jack to make the effort to obtain care and meet with barriers of competency. The importance of training professionals in order to better meet the needs of the transgender community has also been reflected within the literature (Kenagy, 2005; Sperber, Landers, & Lawrence, 2005).

Bryn had a similar experience to Clyde and Jack, but he appeared more willing to work with a healthcare professional that has limited experiences treating transgender individuals.

The last therapist that Cayden had came right out and said, "I'm not trans knowledgeable or deeply knowledgeable about all the issues and things that trans people might have and they experience. But, I'm trans-aware and I'm fully supportive.” And that was enough. It wasn't an issue with him… Our newest psychiatrist told us, very matter-of-factly, that I've never treated a transgender patient. I don't know anything about transgender issues. He said, "But I'm perfectly fine working with your son if you guys are willing to let me work with your son, I'm certainly willing to learn." We were okay with that… You have to at least be trans aware or aware of the gender spectrum (if you’re a therapist). You have to know about it and you have to kind of get it. You can't just have read it on paper, "Yeah I read about that once." You have to have training.
Hendricks & Testa (2012) acknowledge that there is a shortage of clinicians willing to work with this population. They therefore, mirror some of Bryn’s sentiments:

Because few clinicians have much experience working with trans populations, we suggest that clinicians (a) disclose their level of knowledge and comfort with issues of transgenderism and their willingness to educate themselves with appropriate resources, (b) consult with others who have experience with these populations, and (c) increase their familiarity with trans people and trans-related issues through accessing the many valuable books, videos, and educational programs on this topic (p. 465).

Although the above guidelines are arguably reasonable given the current lack of healthcare providers, some of the fathers found professionals that might have been lacking in the latter two suggestions. Bob and Clyde both looked to healthcare professionals for direction and help. They both reported, however, experiences of not having competent professionals and instead having to take on the role of educator to the professional.

Bob: Doing their homework, for one (is advice for counselors). We were a little shocked that a psychiatrist had no knowledge or really any good information about transgender issues...We basically had to educate the psychiatrist on what was going on and what a transgender person is...Just gaining some knowledge and research and educating themselves is the first and foremost step.

Clyde: That's never a good sign when you're having to educate the professional on how to deal with your child because you're coming to the professional with the hopes that you're gonna be able to get your child taken care of without too much trouble. When the opposite of that is true it is just incredibly frustrating. Therapists really need to know their stuff...So, I think that one of the things that makes a good therapist, even with transgender kids, is that they have to have experience dealing with transgender kids. So, the way that they get that is that they've got to be available in their training while they're in school to actually go forward and work in a practice dealing with transgender youth because they've just got to get that experience.

This notion is unfortunately not heard of as Bradford, Reisner, Honnold, & Xavier (2013) discovered 20% of the transgender participants reported they had to educate their primary care physician about their health care needs as it related to their gender identity. It is essential that providers working with transgender people and their families need to be informed on how to
treat this population. The parents within Riley et al. (2013) voiced the importance providers play in helping them. These parents highlight the need for competent counselors to diagnosis their children and work with their families to help everyone’s wellbeing. These fathers are going to professionals for directions and guidance to help them improve their own ability to cope and find answers for how to best support their child. Working with transgender people and their families is not just a psychological endeavor. The provider also needs to understand how to help them the obtain assistance with medical (e.g., HRT, surgery), legal (e.g., name changing), and help educate them (e.g., causality, blame, next steps for family systems). Some of the fathers reported relying on the therapists as a first line of defense to help understand the meaning of this situation and next steps. Providers that are ill equipped or informed and providing limited or even incorrect information can do harm to these men and their families. Therefore, implications for enhancing access to competent professionals will be discussed.

Much of the healthcare system is dictated by insurance and obtaining certification of services. Therefore, not getting insurance approval for services limits access to competent healthcare professionals. Unfortunately, even when healthcare professionals are located, John discovered the barriers obtaining insurance coverage.

The obstacle we're dealing with right now is getting our insurance company to cover her surgery… (The medical professionals) reached out to the insurance company to seek approval for the surgery and we got the great, great, great news last week that they approved her surgery. Then when I got the mail, I read it very closely because I know that my company's health plan does not cover this surgery. What the authorization says is, "Based on the information from medical professionals, we're approving the surgery. Coverage for the procedure is still contingent on your contract." They're basically saying, "We'll approve the surgery, but it doesn't mean we're going to cover it."

Transgender individuals’ healthcare needs, like non-transgender individuals, include psychological and medical care. Yet, healthcare insurance plans in the United States categorically deny medical coverage necessary for transgender individuals (Grant et al., 2011).
Traditional healthcare plans, both public and private, often do not cover many of the treatments transgender people need leaving them unable to obtain treatment or forced to pay out of pocket expenses. Insurance companies have viewed transgender people as risky enrollees and their medical needs to be either pre-existing, cosmetic, or elective (Walsham, 2012). Despite the fact that the most effective approach to care for this population is through individualized treatment plans that may require hormone replacement therapy (HRT), mastectomies, phalloplasty, vaginoplasty, psychological services, or other services (Coleman et al, 2012; Padula, Heru, & Campbell, 2016). This denial of services has been thought of as a discriminatory practice (Walsham, 2012).

Denying transgender people treatment seen as best practice is not only discriminatory, but also potentially dangerous, which will be discussed further in the implications. This denial also places transgender people and their family members in a situation in which they may have to essentially out themselves as a transgender or out their family member to their employer and the insurance company as they contest the denial, such as potentially in John’s case. As seen within John’s chapter, he has to obtain an advocate within the insurance company and come up with multiple plans of actions. Navigating insurance in general can be extremely difficult and complex. It is noteworthy to mention that John is a well-educated person and appears to be open about his daughter’s identity and is still having to go through numerous venues in attempt to get his daughter coverage. Therefore, people less knowledgeable and who are unable or unwilling to out themselves or their family member might have an exceptionally difficult, if not impossible, process.

**Addressing other Mental Health Concerns**
Some fathers reported their child needing additional services that did not solely focus on their gender identity. Both Clyde and Bryn recall wanting therapist to help with their child’s emotional issues that were separate from the gender dysphoria.

Clyde: One of the big issues though that I do see is we wanted Bonnie to be treated by therapists for more than just dealing with her transgender nature. She had serious ADD issues. She was having trouble in school. So, we really needed to develop a plan that was separate from just sort of counseling her on who she was and her gender choices to move into dealing with some separate issues related to her performance in school and general well being and dealing with depression. Some of the issues could be related, but for the most part, they were separate. So, just trying to make sure you address both those is a challenge. When you're dealing with a transgender youth you're dealing with a duality at the end of the day. So, whereas normal teens have umpteen problems that they deal with and have emotional issues that they've gotta get past, transgender youth have the same problems but they have that transgender aspect added to it. You really need a treatment plan that deals with those separately. While they're addressed in tandem in the counseling session, you need to make sure your therapist is focused on improving both the emotional welfare of the child as related as to them being a child and then the welfare of the child as them being a transgender child.

Bryn: It's hard to separate our son's other challenges from the parenting of a transgender kid. Because he's got a very high IQ and probably some ADD and probably some other things that are working against him. So, around about third grade, our son started really having challenges. It manifested at first in school. And then, as he has grown older, I guess the kids grow up and the brain chemistry does what it does and their personality evolved. And then, oh by the way, I'm a boy…He was at a residential boarding school, a therapeutic kind of boarding school for ADD and LD (learning disabled) children… We met with a therapist today who self-disclosed that while she considers herself to be very much an ally and very supportive, she's not had any formal training. That's when I thought, "Well we really don't care about that, he doesn't need help with his identity." He needs help with multiple personality and things like that. And who knows that may tie back in to a coping mechanism for feeling like you shouldn't be or the universe made a mistake from an early age.

Bob and Jack also reflected on the notion that their children also had other mental health issues that needed to be addressed. Bob reports, “We found that to be the case when we took Elliot to a psychiatrist when he was going through some really bad depression.” Jack recalls on his daughter’s mental state, “She got real suicidal. She attempted a couple of times.”
Riley et al. (2011) had four sets of parents that had children with special needs. They too thought this added layer contributed to further challenges to their children’s gender identity. Transgender individuals have life stressors that are universal to the general population (Hendricks & Testa, 2012). The transgender population, however, also often experiences these life stressors at higher incidence levels due to the increased stress they endure resulting in higher prevalence of psychological issues (Hendricks & Testa, 2012). These stressors can be analyzed via The Minority Stress Model (Meyer, 2003). Meyer (2003) focused the original model within the lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) population after witnessing higher prevalence of mental disorders that were believed to be due to hostile and stressful social environments based on their minority status. Hendricks & Testa (2012), however, examined the parallels of the transgender population with the LGB population and adopted the model to incorporate the unique experiences encountered by transgender people. Meyer (1995) underlines three processes the LGB population is subjected to: violence, internalized negative attitudes and prejudices, and expectation of rejection and discrimination.

The first process of the minority stress model unfortunately is present within the transgender community. Transgender people are subjected to physical and sexual violence. This will be discussed in greater detail within the safety theme outlined below. The second process of the minority stress model, internalized negative attitudes and prejudices, can be demonstrated through transgender individuals experience with transphobia. Transphobia is defined as, “the feeling of unease or even revulsion towards those who nonnormative expressions of gender identity and expression” (Lombardi, 2009, p. 979). Expressions of transphobia can either be viewed as direct actions, such as the violence towards transgender population, or more subtle ways. These subtle ways can be come in the form of microaggressions. According to Nadal
(2013), microaggressions are, “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative slights and insults towards members of oppressed groups” (p. 36).

These microaggressions can be seen as people not using the correct pronouns or using backhanded comments. For instance, “No one would think you aren’t a real woman.” Like acid to a rock, these microaggressions can slowly start to break down the spirit and wellbeing of the transgender individual. These internalized negative attitudes can manifest in transgender individuals coping in either negative or positive and resilient ways. These negative manifestations, nevertheless, can be attribute to the high rate of suicidal ideations and attempts and substance abuse (Clements-Nolle, Marz, & Katz, 2006; Finnegan & McNally, 2002; Kenagy, 2005; Lombardi, 2001; Mathy, 2002; Xavier, Bobbin, Singer, & Budd, 2005).

The third and final process adapted to the transgender community within this model is expectation of rejection and discrimination. Transgender individuals face discrimination within several aspects of their lives. Reback, Simon, Bernis, & Gatson (2001) found that almost 50% of their sample reported experiencing job discrimination. Discrimination also inhibits transgender individuals from entering or remaining in working sectors. A mixed-methods study found that 20% of the transgender sample surveyed reported being denied a job due to their status as transgender; as well as, 13% reported being fired for being transgender (Bradford, Xavier, Hendricks, Rives, and Honnold, 2007). In many areas of the United States, furthermore, there are no laws prohibiting this type of discrimination (Bradford, Xavier, Hendricks, Rives, & Honnold, 2007).

Discrimination also goes beyond the area of employment and can be experienced within education arenas. Approximately 61% of participants ranging in age from 18-89 years reported
experiencing discrimination as a result of their gender identity while either currently or when they did attend school (Grant et al., 2010). Lastly, some transgender individuals are blocked from obtaining housing. According to Grant et al. (2010), “One in five transgender people in the U.S. have been refused a home or apartment and more than one in ten have been evicted because of their gender identity” (p. 106). This inability for some members of the transgender community to sustain places of residency due to discriminatory practices can lead to higher risk of homelessness. Accounts of this community’s homelessness ranges from 19% to 25% (Bradford, Xavier, Hendricks, Rives, and Honnold, 2007; Grant et al., 2010).

With all of these stressors, it is not surprising that the transgender community has higher incidence and prevalence accounts of mental health needs. It is, therefore, imperative that mental health professors working with this population be well versed in not only gender dysphoria interventions, but also know how to address other mental health concerns. Sperber, Landers, & Lawrence (2005) mirrors the fathers’ experience by stating, “sometimes gender issues are central to mental health or substance abuse treatment, sometimes they are peripheral and sometimes they are unrelated” (p. 76). Counselors, therefore, need to develop treatment plans for fathers and their families that address them from a holistic standpoint. The ways in which these men chose to engage in therapy or not is outlined below and offers insight into ways to best work with them.

**Fathers Experience with Therapy**

Men underutilize counseling services for mental health issues (Schaub & Williams, 2007). The stereotype of men refusing to ask for directions when they are lost or the saying boys don’t cry are popular ways men are characterized in society. Men are often socialized to maintain a sense of autonomy, action-oriented, self-regulation, and achievement-based identities (Cochran & Rabinowski, 2000). Empirically men are less likely than their female counterparts to seek
professional help for various issues such as depression, substance dependency, and stressful life events even when men are experiencing comparable levels of distress (Andrews, Issakidis, Carter, 2001; Husaini, Moore, & Cain, 1994; Kessler, Brown, & Broman, 1981; McKay, Rutherford, Cacciola, Kabasakalian-McKay, & Alterman, 1996; Weissman & Klerman, 1997).

Three of the fathers did not seek therapy, Clyde, Bob, and Bryn. Each believed that were capable of coping with this unpredictable horizontal stressor on their own and due to having an already established support system that could help them.

Clyde: No, I didn't get counseling for myself. I recommend it and it wasn't that I was trying to avoid it in any way. We were dealing with so many other things at the time that I just didn't feel like I particularly needed it. I didn't feel like I was struggling. Because of that I didn't really see myself as needing to go get counseling the same way.

Bob: I have not needed any individual counseling on my own. There were some times where I thought about it, but I have good support at home with my wife and good support with friends gave me outlets to talk about things that were going on and my mom. I had people that I could talk to, so I never felt like individually that I needed any kind of counseling.

Bryn: I did not seek any counseling after Cayden said that he wanted to transition. I guess I didn’t need to because I found my path to understanding fairly quickly.

This discouragement of help seeking behaviors seen disproportionally with men is perhaps due to its perceived association with femininity. Masculinity is dominant and privileged, while femininity is devalued (Pascoe, 2011). Traditional masculinity includes, but is not limited to the following characteristics: power, dominance, independence, control, being stoic, and self-sufficiency (Mahalik et al., 2003; Möller-Leimkühler, 2002). Often these characteristics are seen as inconsistent with help seeking behaviors and feminine. Seeking help is often thought of in a negative light for men due to the vulnerability and weakness associated with it (Pederson & Vogel, 2007). Instead, the adage that continues to be reinforced is instead that real men can solve their own problems on their own and weaker men cannot. Men get these cues of what is
appropriate by looking towards the larger societal context. It is important to note that the literature on masculinity and the privilege associated with it is quite expansive and complex and goes beyond the scope of this dissertation. As seen above, many of the fathers discuss their fathers’ guidance and encouragement of masculine qualities. The fathers within this study were asked about gender and privilege, but none focused on this topic in an in-depth way that yielded to any themes or subthemes. Therefore, this topic does not relate the interviews with these particular fathers, but for further discussion on this topic of masculinity and privilege, please see Connell (2005), Gilmaore (1990), and Mahalik et al. (2003).

More so, overall there is a public stigma (i.e., what society views as negative) associated with men seeking help, especially psychological help, and, therefore, men are more likely to internalize this public stigma than woman and convert it to their own self-stigma (Corrigan, 2004; Vogel, Wade, & Hackler, 2007). Not only do men get these images that seeking help is weak or inferior, they actually start to believe it themselves and avoid behaviors or activities connected with obtaining help outside themselves.

Not seeking therapy was only true for half of the fathers. The other half, Harvey, John, and Jack, went to therapy to help them process their child’s transition. Each of them reported finding counseling beneficial.

Harvey: There was the first one (counselor) they didn't like. The second one, they did like, but she moved away. Then the third one specialized in trans. I was in sessions with the second one. I like the second one more probably because she just seemed more engaging. She is the one that talked to me about, "Hey, you should really read this book (The Transgender Child)." I liked her too.

John: I asked the counselor, I said, "Can I come and talk with you because I'm in the process of educating myself on this and I don't feel like I need support. I feel like I need education." I could see how someone with her training might say, "Okay, I know what you're going through. You're a dad and you're in denial. Or you wanted your son to stay a son." That wasn't me. I made that clear up front. Maybe in her own way she was probing and testing to see if she could find a whole in that story and I don't think she did. One of
the things I learned about *The Transgender Child* was the clinical aspect of it. Help me understand how this works and when I understand why it happens or how it happens, then I can get my head around it. I just remember walking away feeling like, "Okay, it makes sense." Not that I would never get fully behind it, but it just helps me to understand everything a topic. Then I felt that much more passionate about it. The counselor was clearly very knowledgeable and the way that she communicated with us was what I thought very, very appropriate and we got more than psychological services from her. She prepared us for the things that we would have to do.

Jack: Any parents that are facing this situation need to go and talk to a therapist. They need to seek that information out…And me and my wife went to see a doctor here in town. And she said, “Look, there's nothing you did to cause this. If they harm themselves, there's nothing you did to cause this. Yes, it would be tragic. Yes, it'll be horrible. But it won't be anything you did. It won't be your fault.” So, I think finding good counseling is very important.

The experience these men mirrored the experience of some of the parents of transgender children within the literature. Riley et al. (2013) had parents surmise their experience within counseling and its focus:

Counselling was identified as being a foundation to providing reassurance, understanding and guidance for parents as well as for other family members. Counselling helps parents with decision-making and provides a context within which they can discuss their values, fears and concerns without fear of judgement. Professionals emphasised parents need to know that they are not at fault, that it is okay to advocate for their child and that there are other families dealing with similar issues (p 652).

Men deciding to obtain help or not can be applied to the *Family Life Cycle* theory. As these men experience this unpredictable horizontal stressor, the vertical stressors and the socio-cultural context that influence the way they think, process, and go through life interact and impact the ways in which they proceed with this event. For example, those fathers that have been socialized that men do not seek help outside of themselves or their families, they might be more inclined to no seek therapeutic help. Also, vertical stressors such as transphobia or religious beliefs might impact a father wishing to not obtain help. Society and familial influence can be a very powerful deterrent and promoter of help seeking. Even if larger society and culture are influencing men to not obtain help within the socio-cultural context, immediate family can also
override those messages. This mirrors Brooks’ (1998) suggestion that men often enter therapy reluctantly in a reactive manner in response to external pressure and not by initiating changes with their emotions and interpersonal lives. This process has several implications for men obtaining or opting out of counseling.

The ways counselors can structure their interventions to improve their work with men is also an important element to discuss. This was highlighted in the mindset of some of the men that went to counseling. Although both Harvey and Jack reported finding counseling helpful for processing and accepting their child’s gender identity, they both also reported thinking counseling more of a temporary tool.

Harvey: I don't have any problems with any of the therapists… I hardly ever talk to them anyway. I actually don't believe in seeing therapists. I have my own form of therapy. It's called jumping off of things. I base jump and I'm a skydiver too. For me, in fact, recently, this winter, it was kind of cold and I haven't been jumping. I've been really busy working on my house, because I'm going to sell it. It contributed to me being very sad and kind of depressed. I went one weekend to the drop zone and made a few jumps and then I snuck out with a friend of mine one night. We jumped an antenna. Now I feel much better. Another reason why I'm not too much into therapists, I think that therapy is an ongoing thing. I prefer the doctor prescribes you some antibiotics and once the bottle is done, then you're off. Most therapy is not that way. It's an ongoing thing. I know that now. I just didn't realize it back then. You'd go to therapy. They'll fix you up. Then you don't have to go anymore. Me, personally, I just don't accept the situation where I have to do something for the rest of my life.

Jack: I don't think you've got to continually see a counselor. If you've come to grips with it, I think the most counseling you can do is have that open dialogue with your child, an honest dialogue with your child. And most parents don't like to have that honest dialogue with their child.

As discussed above, men have often been socialized to have action-oriented and achievement-based identities. It appears that like most things, this socialization also bleeds into the way some men wish to experience counseling. Even though Harvey and Jack saw the benefits of counseling, they looked at it as a temporary tool that is used to get answers to their immediate situation to obtain a resolution and then move on. This can produces difficulty for counselors as
Stevens & Englar-Carlson (2006) indicates, “working with men presents special challenges that are often contradictory to the manner that most psychotherapists were trained to understand both the process of psychotherapy and client dynamics. Many men appear resistant or reluctant to be in therapy, appear skeptical about disclosure, and seem evasive and uncertain about emotional expression” (p. 7). Because men experience therapy differently than how many therapist have been trained, adjustments in the training of counselors and the way we work with men needs to be addressed, and will be further discussed in the implications, so that we can provide culturally competent treatment for these men.

Taking steps to increase the number of competent healthcare professionals and diversifying the ways in which counselors work with men is a necessary step. Having additional community resources and therapists that can work proficiently with men will also enhance their sense of safety. Finding outlets to express their emotional threats and obtaining sources for their children will give them a sense of control and feel more confident dealing with this unpredictable horizontal stressor. The following subtheme of safety will be discussed.

**Safety**

Worrying over the safety of their children and themselves in an unfortunate reality these men report experiencing. These fathers’ fear of threats to their child and themselves’ wellbeing is also reflected in the literature of other parents of transgender children. This theme of safety included three subthemes: physical safety concerns for their children, threats to safety within the community, and fathers’ emotional safety. Implications for strategies to decrease this threat are discussed.

**Physical Safety Concerns for their Children**
Several of the fathers reported being worried about their child’s physical safety and some reflected on the helpless feeling of not being able to always protect their children. John even specifically talks about agreeing to have his child homeschooled in order to help protect his daughter during the initial stages of her transition.

Bryn: When Cayden first came out, I remember thinking like, "Oh boy, here we go." I didn't know what to expect. Is he gonna be beaten to death? And I still have those fears a little bit.

Bob: My whole thing up front was when Elliot came out was for me it was a safety thing. I just saw how in pain he was. "Dad I hate who I am. This is who I want to be and who I am and I feel. I think about hurting myself. I think about not wanting to live." So, for me, it just clicked. I was like I need to do everything I can to keep my child safe...A safe space was certainly something we looked into for colleges. There were schools that Elliot was interested in, but some were communities that we knew would not be as understanding or safe as we had wanted. We chose a school where we knew that there was a strong community of support for LGBTQ+ people.

Jack: Experiencing life now as the father of a trans(gender child), I'm worried, constantly. Worried for her safety and worried because she's across the country; because I can't get my hands on her when I need to; I can't protect her like I want to. Fear. Fear. Worried about my kid. Worried about their health. Worried about their wellbeing. Worried if they're gonna kill themselves or not. Worried for their future. I'm still worried for their future... Worry that she's going to go into a public bathroom and somebody think that she's in there doing something other than trying to pee. It's heartbreaking.

Clyde: I walk around every day wanting to punch everyone because of the bathroom bills and things like that. She read online about how transgenders are destroying the world or how it's a choice they've made because they want to use a different bathroom. And so you're in a constant state of anxiousness because you're continually having someone insult your child. In the academy they describe different levels of being aware. And red is the most alert and then yellow and down from there. Most people are a step below yellow, which is not really alert at all, I think it's green. And they counsel police officers to always be yellow, to always be looking for a threat, always be looking for a problem, always be looking for some sort of danger right around the corner. Whether it's stepping into a puddle or a guy with a gun. Whether I want to be in it or not, I'm just waiting for the next threat. Kids kind of look at us funny from time to time when you say we moved to because we moved to where we did specifically because of her...It's an instinctive thing. I think moms have a very nurturing aspect to them that turns on when they reach motherhood. And I think the fathers' perspective is instinct. I guess is to be protective…. All these jokes about fathers and danger are really kinda funny things because I know that most of the fathers that I know are really, really overprotective guys. And I was protective before, when I had two boys. And now that I have a boy and a girl, it's even
worse because I see her as both my child and trans daughter. And everything that comes along with that. So she's not just a girl out there. She's a girl whose trans so there's different groups of people who could be predators on her as there would be for just a normal girl.

John: Of course, my initial thought was fear. While my family's embraced it, I thought, "Coley’s going to go through hell." Teenagers are awful to begin with and she’s going through middle school. She had gone to sixth grade and she broke here story in May of sixth grade. During the summer, she got hair extensions put in and started dressing like a girl. Then, we talked about homeschooling. We homeschooled her through an online program for the first semester of seventh grade because her mom and I agreed and she with us, that that would have been a tall order to leave school as Coley in May of sixth grade and come back as a girl in fall of seventh grade.

The very unfortunate reality is that these men’s concerns for their transgender children’s safety are not unfounded. Research over the past decade has consistently found that the transgender population experiences high rates of physical violence compared to the non-transgender population (Clements-Nolle, Marz, & Katz, 2006; Lombardi, Wilchins, Priesing, & Malouf, 2002; Witten, 2003; Wyss, 2004; Xavier, Honnold, & Bradford, 2007). Estimates for rates of reported physical violence within this community range from 43%-60% (Hendricks & Testa, 2012). Xavier, Honnold, & Bradford (2007) reported that 40% of the 143 participants experienced physical assaults since age 13. Within this overarching 40% of those who have experienced physical violence, 18% reported one incident, 23% reported two incidents, 30% reported three to five incidents, 17% reported six to 19 incidents, and 12% reported 20 or more incidents of physical violence (Xavier, Honnold, & Bradford, 2007).

Worry over transgender children’s safety is something that parents in other studies also focused on. Hill and Menvielle (2009) had 60% of their parents express fears that their child’s physical safety might be in jeopardy because of their gender identity. Additionally, Boenke (1999) and Riley et al. (2011) also had parents discuss their concern for the safety of their children. Riley et al. (2013) found safety is also a major concern for the transgender child and the
need to feel safe is pivotal for transgender children. Malpas (2011) found fathers within a counseling group for parents of transgender children focused more on their concern about their children’s safety and wishing to protect them than the mothers. This is perhaps due to the manner in which men are socialized with the socio-cultural context highlighted by the *Family Life Cycle* theory. Manhood has been associated with consistently proving masculine qualities such as competitiveness, protectors, and constantly being on the defense for threats (Bosson & Vadello, 2011). Several of the fathers reflected this socialization by going into protective mode.

Clyde: It's weird from the prospective of you're not just trying to protect them as a child anymore; you're trying to protect them as a child who is a member of a very different class now.

Bob: I wanted to protect my child… So I went into protective mode.

Jack: This guy tried to stare her down in a Holiday Inn breakfast bar. That'll go damn near the hospital 'cause I just about got up and went and beat his ass. He saw me starting to get up looking at him like I was gonna get him and he got up and left. She knew I had her back. Nothing was going to happen when dad's around. She's gonna be safe. This role as safe keeper is not only socially ingrained into some of these men, relinquishing the role can be a difficult task. Both Jack and Bob reported struggling with the idea that they cannot be constant protectors of their children as they have become adults. Within the *Family Life Cycle* theory, the predictable horizontal stressor of children growing up and becoming more independent can be challenging as these fathers and their children renegotiate their relationship. Just as some of these fathers met becoming a father with feelings of stress and fear, redefining their parent-child roles as the child grows up can also result in these similar feelings. This can be especially true if they believe their child still needs protecting due to their gender identity.

In addition to physical safety worries, Clyde also discovered new areas of potential safety risks that he needed to address with his MTF daughter. He reflects on the differences of
socialization for his daughter when it comes to her safety post transition. Clyde’s wife became upset after having to be alone in a dark building trying to locate her room key and Bonnie became quizzical about why she was so upset. Clyde explained:

Well, Bonnie, you didn't grow up as a female so this is probably not on your radar, but it's something that you should be very cognizant about. See, her life, is very different from you and I. You and I grew up as boys. From the time we were little to our teen years, we never had to worry about being raped by anybody. I mean, sure, it happens but it doesn't happen anywhere close to what it does to women and I just kinda lied to him, and I said, "I've never walked down the street and worried I was going to get raped."…I said, "So you need to please be aware that as you make this transition, this is something that you seriously need to be aware of. Be aware of your surroundings; be aware of who's around you." That's something that she's coped with in her life and something that you've gotta start coping with now. And it was a very staunch realization for her that she's made a very unique choice in her life about who she's supposed to be because there's a lot of things that go along with it that she just didn't expect.

Like physical violence, transgender individuals are also subjected to high rates of sexual violence compared to non-transgender people. Research findings using surveys and needs assessment found most commonly that 50% of transgender persons report experiencing sexual violence within their lifetime (Stotzer, 2008). This is double to rate of natal females (1 in 5) experiencing sexual violence in their lifetime (CDC, 2010). To further investigate the research, Clements-Nolle, Marz, & Katz (2006) surveyed 392 MTF and 123 FTM transgender individuals from the San Francisco area and discovered that 59% reported a history of sexual violence, including rape. Kenage & Bostwick (2005) found a higher rate of reported sexual violence at 69% within their sample of 113 MTF transgender individuals from the Chicago. A sample of 112 MTF from the Richmond, Virginia area reported a lower percentage, 23%, of MTF participants reported enduring sexual violence (Xavier, Honnold, & Bradford, 2007). This lower percentage may have been due to the location of Xavier, Honnold, & Bradford’s (2007) participant pool being from a more rural area than the other two previously mentioned studies. These authors further reports that 71% of the MTF participants who experienced sexual violence in their
lifetime attributed it to their transgender status, gender identity, or their gender expression. Therefore, furthering the notion that assaults are often times committed against these individuals because of their gender identity.

Although sexual assault is an unfortunate realistic threat to transgender individuals, it is interesting that Clyde felt the need to discuss the potential of sexual assault now that she transitioned. The emphasis on sexual assault now that she identities as a girl mirrors Donnelly & Kenyon’s (1996) notion that, “…it is easy to assume that sexual victimization does not happen in men” (p. 441). Clyde’s discussion with his daughter mirrors other the idea that women are taught to be the gatekeepers of uncontrollable male sexuality (Murnen, Wright, & Kaluzny, 2002). The socio-cultural context that socially obligates fathers to protect also obligates them to protect their children in a different, perhaps sexist, way. As Clyde adapts to his child’s gender identity, vertical stressors, such as sexism, can influence the way in which he teaches her about societal expectations and, unwittingly, reinforce sexist archetypes. This can also be seen in the way he views his cisgender son’s safety versus Bonnie’s:

And there are a lot of worries that I don’t have for my son for example. He tells me he's gonna be out late at the movies, he tells me he's going to be hanging out with friends. As far as safety, of course it's always in the back of my mind as a parent but its not something that springs to the forefront whenever I'm gonna go and do "X". With her, anytime she says I'm gonna be out with friends, it's more of a "really, what friends? Where are you going? When are you going to be back?"

In addition to worries about physical and sexual threats, some fathers also expressed concerns about the lack of safety with their own community.

**Threats to Safety within the Community**

The cultural climate in which people live can impact the sense of security they possess. Bob and Clyde report having safety concerns with the environment they are/were living. Both report the hardships of having a transgender child while living in the southern region of the
United States. Clyde and his family even decided to move to a more trans-friendly environment after their daughter disclosed her gender identity in order to improve their family’s welfare.

Bob: The South is where religion is still very important. I mean, very important. We are in a very the Baptist Belt area. The town that we live in there's not LGBTQ+ center. So, it's kind of slow as far as in this area, as far as support goes. But, fortunately, in this area we have a lot of influx of a lot of different people who have moved from a variety of different places around the country in this area. There's kind of a little more open mindedness where we live. Whereas, if Elliot was living with his mom, who lives about 40 miles from here, Elliot would be looked at as an alien. And would be looked at as kind of being immoral. So, that is a struggle. Elliot’s made it clear he wants out of (this state). He's been accepted to college. That college in particular is a very strong school for LGBTQ+ people. They have a lot of support. It's a perfect spot for him, but someone asked him why he didn't apply for a scholarship to become a teacher in (this state) after graduating. He said, "I don't want to live in here." I think Elliot sees the south as backsliding. Elliot’s made it clear that this is not a safe state for him and it's not a good spot for him to be. Now, there are certain areas in the state that would be better than others, but the south is definitely more hostile than other areas as far as he's concerned and I'm concerned. With the legislations that just passed in Texas and Alabama, there's just a lot of people and political entities saying that we're wrong. I hate that for him. I've lived in (in this state) the majority of my life and I love the state. I'm not very happy with my state. I'm not happy. I used to love being southern. I don't like being a southern anymore. I don't like being from (this state) anymore. I love the geography. I love the place, but there's some mindsets and some structures in the south that had gotten better.

Clyde: But moving down here, we specifically selected a county because the day that President Obama issued his directive through the DOE (Department of Education) saying that any school that receives federal money the kids should be able to use whatever bathroom they want to go into, this county Schools down here, immediately said, "We already do that. That's standard procedure for us. We will always protect our LGBT students." And so we knew coming down here was where we wanted to be because we knew the school system would protect our daughter and so we made that move and that's one of the things that has somewhat alleviated some of the pressure that you feel but as a parent you want to protect your kids.

These fathers living within the southern region of United States know all too well the cultural implications for their family. Their feelings of the potential danger for their children and themselves within the south are not unfounded. LGBT youths are more likely to report being victimized based on the sexual orientation and gender expression in southern states than those in northeastern states (Kosciw, Greytak, & Diaz, 2009). Also, homophobic language and slurs were
more likely to be heard within schools in the southern region compared to northern areas (Kosciw & Diaz, 2006). A number of studies have indicated that areas of the southern region are more likely to support a more traditional concept of gender roles for men and women (Bolzendahl & Myers, 2004; Carter & Borch, 2005; Eldridge, Mack, & Swank, 2006; Konrad & Harris, 2002; Rice & Coates, 1995; Twenge, 1997). Transgender individuals are often thought to be in violation of gender norms and, therefore, not adhering to these culturally derived expectations. This likely produces more prejudice for transgender people in comparison to other parts of the United States (Gerhardstein & Anderson 2010). As mentioned earlier, the numerous “Bathroom Bills” within the southern region does not render a trans-friendly environment either. These bills instead lead to anti-trans propaganda promoting a cultural that disvalues transgender people and those associated with them, such as their family. McGoldrick, Carter, & Garcia-Preto, (2011) discuss how there is stress of living somewhere at a given time and, “…is to an extent marked by its members’ experience” (p. 9). Therefore, the larger society and culture send messages that the south is not “Home Place” and these fathers and their families do not have a sense of belonging (McGoldrick, Carter, & Garcia-Preto, 2011, p. 8). It is both not surprising and unfortunate that Clyde and his family decided they needed to move to a more accepting environment and that Bob’s son searched for schools that would be a safe place for him to further his education.

Even when the immediate area these fathers and their children are occupying is not a source of threat, fathers reported worrying when their children traveled to different communities. Harvey and John reported feelings of worry when it comes to the thought of their child traveling to potential hustle and unaccepting environments that might be unsafe for their child if outed.

Harvey: (Son’s safety) does cross my mind, but it seems to me, I haven't seen or felt or heard of anything that has gone in that direction. Anyway, he's in southern California
now, which is a lot more accepting for that stuff. A lot more than in the south. There was last summer, he went on a church charity trip for and they go down to North Carolina to help fix poor people's houses. He dresses and identifies as a male. There was some worry that one of the other kids would out my son. That did kind of concern me, although his mother went with him on that trip so that to me added a layer of security. I'm not sure if it would have in the long run, if there would have been any problem, but still it gave me some security, some level of security. That was pretty much the worst that I've ever felt. I was worried with him being in a less favorable toward LGBT community. I worried about that.

John: That was kind of a big step forward (getting a passport) because even now Coley’s been to more countries than I've been to. But god forbid if her passport says male and god forbid she was trying to get back into the United States or leave another country and they would say, "Wait a minute. Your passport says you're male. You're not male." You can only imagine how that situation could play out and probably not well.

John’s worry about his daughter having potential compromises to her safety in other communities is also not unfounded. The Open Society Foundation notes the dangerous predicament transgender individuals can find themselves in when the culture they are traveling in has discriminatory practices:

In many regions across the globe, trans people cannot obtain official documents that acknowledge their appropriate name and sex or gender marker. Trans people risk discrimination when they use a document that does not match their gender identity. In addition, they may be suspected of identity fraud and trigger security alerts because of this discrepancy. This is particularly dangerous in situations where a trans person is crossing a border and being unable to prove one’s identity can result in being detained (p. 3).

Due to all the potential hazards that come within certain socio-cultural contexts, fathers consistently have to survey their child’s surroundings and the environment they are in. Even, like in Clyde’s case, choosing to move the family to a safer community to lessen conceivable threats. Just as these fathers report having to be on guard for their child’s safety, they are not immune to safety concerns for them in association with their transgender child.

**Fathers’ Emotional Safety**
“Basically, men live under the pressure of one unrelenting message: Do not be perceived as weak” (Brown, 2012, p. 92). Perceptions of weakness can lead men to feelings of vulnerability. Brown (2012) defines vulnerability, “…as uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure” (p. 34). Within the scope of the Family Life Cycle theory, this message is reinforced and perpetuated in society and cultural. Men, and in extension these fathers, have been socialized that weakness, especially emotional weakness, is not tolerated. Therefore, when these fathers experience this unpredictable horizontal stressor, the vertical stressor of being genderized to be strong and avoid vulnerability is emphasized as well.

This sense of vulnerability and having to navigate who and when they disclosed their child’s gender identity proved to be a difficult situation. This exposure solidified some threats to their emotional safety. All of the fathers reported being concerned about disclosing their child’s gender identity to other people. Harvey and Clyde talked about their hesitation to let people know about their child’s transition.

Harvey: I would ask him something like, “Well what happens if I'm with some friends and I introduce you as my son and then later on my friends come up to me and say, ‘That's not a boy, that's a girl?’” He looked at me and said, "Well just tell them I'm transgender." The way he said it was like, so what, that's no big deal. That's when I picked up steam in this whole process and I said, “Well, I'm just going to have to be open about it. There's no reason to be embarrassed about it.” And so it felt like a big weight was lifted from my chest… It's like you've got a secret. It’s like that Edgar Allan Poe, The Raven. You've got this secret and then you're spending so much energy trying to hide it. But then when you don't have to spend that energy to hide it, when you're open about it, it's very freeing.

Clyde: It's weird (telling others about his child is transgender). I think you're going out on a limb any time you're telling someone that your child is different than theirs. And it took a while before we talked to Mom about it…when I talk to people I don't want them to feel like I'm pressing some sort of agenda on them. Even though I feel that I am, I just feel like I'm telling them, this is who my daughter is, and a lot of people I don't tell because there's no real need to. I want her perceived as female from the get go and not this female transgender person, just a female. So other than medical personnel, we don't give a whole lot of disclosure to people.
John reported, “The year that Coley told us that she was transgender, I had bought the Christmas card. I held up a Christmas card and I said, "I send out about a hundred of these every year and up until this point, I've sent out a picture of two sons and a daughter. This year, I'm sending out a picture of two daughters and a son." While he reports obtaining a lot of support from family and friends. He did experience some social stigma at work.

John: The people that I did not tell kind of showed their stripes a little bit, which was a little bit disappointing. I think what happened was I had changed companies at the time and someone I had worked with at my prior company when Coley came to us and said, "I'm Coley." This woman's daughter and my youngest daughter were best buds, so I told my co-worker because our kids were hanging out together. I told her and she said, "It's absolutely wonderful and you guys are a great family." Then I left and I went to work for a different company. The kids really didn't hang out together anymore and I really didn't see that woman anymore. But then I know that my next company, there was some rumor percolating. “John’s got a transgender kid." I thought, "How the hell did that get into this workplace?" Because I had just started at that company when Coley became Coley, so I hadn't even put up family photos in the office. I was able to trace it back to this woman at my prior company who was friendly with this woman in the current company. I was like, "Oh, the soap opera here." I just thought to myself, "I don't have a problem with that former co-worker saying, 'Yes, John has a transgender daughter.' I think the more appropriate thing would be, 'That's John’s story. John will tell you that. Why don't you ask him if you're concerned.'" What was distasteful to me was that the woman who was working with me at this company, who was walking around and telling people, "He's got a transgender kid." Who cares? How did he influence your ability to do your job? …why are you talking about it like it's a scandal?

Unfortunately, John’s experience is a worry that many parents of transgender children have. The 12 participants within Hegedus’ (2009) study expressed concern about being gossiped about by others because of their child’s gender identity. Riley et al. (2011) participants also experienced this worry of what others might think about their family’s situation. Researchers found that their participants wanted support, but also were concerned about how others were react.

Falk (2001) and Remafedi (1987) both note the unfortunate reality that transgender children are often subjected to considerable stigma. It is important to convey that social stigma
affects not only transgender people, but their families as well. The process by which a person is stigmatized by virtue of association with another stigmatized individual has been referred to as “secondary stigma” (Halter, 2008) or “courtesy stigma” (Goffman, 1963) or “associative stigma” (Mehta & Farina, 1988). Once a member of the family has disclosed their gender identity, “There is a sense of isolation as family members struggle with who to trust, coupled with an equally frightening fear of exposure that others will find out. In addition to their own shock of discovery, they soon realize that their loved one will be stigmatized…” (Lev, 2004, p. 284). Fathers of transgender children, therefore, will not only need to process their own potential stigma of their child, but also the secondary stigma attached to having a child who identifies as transgender.

Fathers were asked what are the most challenging aspects of being a man as a father of a transgender child? Three fathers (Jack, Bryn, and Bob) each reported that telling others and dealing with those people’s potential reactions was the most challenging aspect of being a father of a transgender child.

Jack: The most challenging is family acceptance. Friends can go bum. They'll be my friend if they want. I've lost friends over this. I've lost family over this, but not much. Not enough to worry about. For instance, my sister's husband and oldest son will not call Jill by her name. They won't call her by her old name. They just won't join in the conversation about her. They won't ask about her. If she does something great and I brag on her, they won't say, "Good job." They just politely stay out of the conversation. I can live with that. If you're going to start talking trash, then somebody's going out to the woodshed and I'm gonna whoop their ass.

I sat everybody down and I told them the same way. And I told every one of them, "I love you. I've enjoyed knowing you. I've got to tell you something that might affect the way you might feel about me and my family. Before I tell you, you've got to know that I support my kid 100%. And if you can't be accepting, then you need to just shake my hand and walk away cause you won't like it any other way.” I told that to everybody, to my mom and dad, to my wife's mother, to all the aunts and uncles and cousins and all that.

Bryn: It's dealing with everybody else; that's the challenge. That's where the effort comes in. Because people you've known all your life long or all your kids life long, they ask you how your daughter is doing? And those that we knew really well, luckily, have been really tolerant and accepting. Nobody has stopped speaking to us. Really, really
accepting. And probably going through their own steps of questions and feelings about how does that work and how does this work. We get the same questions over and over. I try to make it tearing off a Band-Aid (telling people his son’s gender identity). I don't hide it. To the extent that my son is comfortable with me disclosing, essentially "outing" him. I won't do it, if there is no reason to do it. But, when somebody who knows my kid, asks me about my kid or whatnot, I will say I have a transgender son. I'll just put that out there. Early on. Part of the process. But, by and large, people are pretty good.

Bob: That was challenging (telling other people about son’s gender identity). I found that we kind of isolated ourselves as a family and initially. I just wanted to deal with it as a family unit. So, initially, it was just kind of circle the wagons. Me and step-mom and stepsister said, “We're here and we're going to take care of you.” Then, there came a point where okay, it's time to reach out. That was challenging because I just was fearful on what people were thinking. Were they going to understand? I reached out to my mom and to my brother and my sister and they were all fantastic. It probably took a couple months after Elliot came out, for me to come out to my family. Friends I did the same. It took a couple months. Just like, "Hey, this is what's going on." And then, when we had the court hearing for custody, my friends were there and they came to court. They had seen what my role had been. I know people in my life that I'm just not going to bring it up to because I just don't feel like going down that street because I know it's not going to get anywhere for them. I pick and choose.

This emphasized difficulty might be contributed to the fact that this might be one of the first times these men have noticeably dealt with secondary stigma. All the participants have a lot of privilege. Therefore, having to evaluate situations and people when disclosing something that some find socially undesirable, might be a very new feeling to them that they are still trying to figure out how to navigate. Exposing themselves, rendering them vulnerable, can be not only an uncomfortable, foreign experience, but also one that they have been socialized to avoid.

Bob’s experience reflects the parents within Coulter’s (2010) and Riley et al.’s (2011) study that also discussed feelings of social isolation. To cope with this social isolation and stressful situation, he reports, “I slipped back into a little pattern of drinking a little bit too much, primarily at night when everybody was asleep. I slipped back into a pattern of sneaking cigarettes every now and then, which is something I used to do when I was stressed. I think I
went for about four or five months where I just delved into some unhappy patterns of coping. Then, at one point, I was like, ‘Okay, I'm over this. I need to move on.’”

As seen in Bob’s experience, experiencing secondary stigma can have negative effects. Parents unable move from the stigma associated with their transgender child end up continuing to struggle with who and how to obtain support from and even, “bolster their view that trannsexuality is wrong for their child” (Wren, 2002, p. 389). In addition, parents of transgender children may have their secondary stigmatization manifest into isolation and feelings of shame and isolation, as seen in some of the fathers within this study (Menvielle, Tuerk, & Jellinek, 2002). With the severity of social stigma attached to their child and then, consequently, imposed on them as fathers, it will be important to explore how these fathers respond to the secondary stigma they incur. Believing that the burden of establishing their child’s gender identity can be a source of stress for fathers.

Conversely, those parents that were able to discuss their children’s transition saw positive effects. Pleak (1999) discussed the need for peer contact for parents of transgender children during this unpredictable horizontal stressor. This author also reported that when parents did speak openly about their children’s gender identity, their level of acceptance increased. Talking to others about this situation was also a much needed cathartic relief for parents as well (Rosenberg, 2002). Half of the fathers reported disclosing their child’s identity as the most challenging part of this situation. This emphasizes the need to help these men with this issue of disclosure and their thoughts around secondary stigma. Strategies for helping these men are discussed within the implications below.

Implications for Adapting to Child’s Gender Identity by Engaging in Advocacy
The fathers’ experiences with the healthcare system was met with several challenges. Negotiating the healthcare system is often a necessary process for transgender people and their families to do. Not have insurance companies willing to reimburse for interventions, limited amount of competent healthcare professionals, and educational programs not readily training professionals how to work with transgender people and their families has contributed to some of the challenges these men faced within the healthcare system. These issues are not independent of each other and can influence the other. For example, if insurance companies reimbursed healthcare professionals more readily for their services, more clinicians would see the monetary value in that and want to be trained in their specialty, and, consequently, educational programs would want to meet this demand and start providing more training opportunities.

To unpack this notion, let’s first focus on the insurance aspect, mainly because money can be a huge motivator for change. As reported earlier insurance companies have viewed transgender people as risky enrollees and their medical needs to be either pre-existing, cosmetic, or elective (Walsham, 2012). Much of the risk is believed to be due to the comprehensive needs transgender people (e.g., surgery, therapy, HRT) and the cost that associated with these services. Padula, Heru, & Campbell (2016) did a cost-effective analysis and found, “Health insurance coverage for the U.S. transgender population is affordable and cost-effective, and has a low budget impact on U.S. society…The budget impact of this coverage is approximately $0.016 per member per month” (p. 1). Much of the cost-effectiveness of insurance companies providing coverage is because it also cuts down on other health issues that might be attributed to not providing help to transgender people and their families, such as depression, suicide, addiction, and mortality. As mentioned earlier, not providing coverage can be extremely dangerous. Studies have found that suicide amongst MTF transgender people dropped from 20% to 1% after
receiving treatment (Kuiper & Cohen-Kettenis, 1988; Lundström, Pauly, & Wålinder, 1984). Not only is providing coverage a cost-effective initiative that enhances overall healthcare of transgender people and their families, it can act as a monetary incentive for more professionals to specialize in their treatment. This will help fill the gap of not having enough local healthcare professionals. Advocating for changes within the insurance field of healthcare, therefore, is pivotal for making improvements for competent availability.

Professionals, specifically counselors, must be trained in order to fill in this gap appropriately and competently. The increased emphasis in multicultural counseling training and competency development spearheaded by the American Counseling Association (ACA) and the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) standards has increased counselor’s attention of diverse populations. Despite this multicultural movement, however, the transgender population often goes unaddressed and has been characterized as the “stepchild” of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community (Forman, 2004, August; Lev, 2007). This is increasingly problematic because counselors are likely to encounter at least one transgender client during their careers (Feldman & Bockting, 2003). O’Hara, Dispenza, Brack, & Blood (2013) make several recommendations for counselors and counselor educators that include learning ways to engage in advocacy, expanding knowledge base through research and online forums, learn to work from a person-centered, narrative, constructivist, and solution-focused approach that has been seen to work well with this population, and collaborating with other professionals, such as physicians, attorneys, and government personnel. These authors surmise their findings by stating, “By providing opportunities for exploration, exposure, discussion, skill building, and advocacy, the profession can hopefully increase professional counselor understanding, preparedness, and competence
when working with transgender individuals” (p. 253). By promoting these recommendations within classroom programs and making room for electives focusing on this population and their families will help increase counselor competency and perhaps increase interest in specializing in this arena.

As the above has focused on the transgender person and their families, several of the things these fathers said allow for implications on how to best work with men in therapy. Cochran’s (2005) review of literature of men in therapy reports, “men’s underutilization of psychological services and psychotherapy is well documented” (p. 649). It has also been well documented that men have an active, task-focused orientation (Flippin & Crais, 2011; McKelley & Rochlen, 2010; McKelley & Rochlen, 2007). Therefore, men, and by extension fathers, might have a mentality within therapy that they need to do something. Traditional talk therapy, consequently, might be seen as unproductive or even uncomfortable for men. Overall there is a public stigma (i.e., what society views as negative) associated with men seeking help, especially psychological help, and, therefore, men are more likely to internalize this public stigma than woman and convert it to their own self-stigma (Corrigan, 2004; Vogel, Wade, & Hackler, 2007). Not only do men get these images that seeking help is weak or inferior, they actually start to believe it themselves and avoid behaviors or activities connected with obtaining help outside themselves.

Traditional counseling is one such activity men avoid due to the perceived threat it has on a man’s sense of masculinity (Schaub & Williams, 2007). Allocating control, being vulnerable, and talking about feelings in order to solve a problem that one cannot resolve on their own can result in feelings of emasculation. Encouraging men to obtain mental health counseling can be a “hard sell,” (Brooks, 1998, p. 73). Therefore, while changes to culture take time, the literature
has developed several suggestions to help get men through the therapy door and asking for help that can be addressed more immediately. According to Vogel, Heimerdinger-Edwards, Hammer, & Hubbard (2011), having space on a therapist’s website acknowledging the stigma and providing additional information combatting the negative messages accompanying men seeking counseling. The use of cognitive therapy (Mahalik, 2001), bibliotherapy (Heesacker & Prichard, 1992), male-focused brochures about therapy (Hammer & Vogel, 2010), and incorporating storytelling, journals, and metaphors (Johnson, 2001) have been identified as ways to better engage men in psychological treatment. The fathers that utilized therapy saw some of these interventions to be useful. Harvey and John both reported benefits of bibliotherapy by reading The transgender child: A handbook for families and professionals (Brill & Pepper, 2008). Additionally, Harvey, Jack, and John all went into therapy wanting answers and to cognitively understand the problem and then what actions could be done to solve it or process it. They looked towards the counselor or healthcare provider as the expert. This makes it especially important that counselors be competent and knowledgeable. These men were not necessarily coming to counseling to express and process their feelings, they wanted answers and focus on the cognitive element of this process. They were looking for action-based intervention and coaching from their therapist. McKelly and Rochlen (2010; 2007) reflect this notion in their findings that men appeared to be more receptive to 1:1 help when this help was shaped more as coaching than counseling. This concept appeared to be easier for men to relate to and they were more responsive as they saw it as action oriented and not just processing their feelings. Also, several researchers also saw the value in men’s group counseling as it offers a space for men to reciprocate help and normalize the overall therapeutic process and group members’ issues (Andronico, 1996; Rabinowitz, 2001; Robertson, 2001; Vogel, Heimerdinger-Edwards, Hammer, & Hubbard, 2011).
Through these psychological interventions, fathers can explore their thoughts and underlining feelings with a healthcare professional about the vulnerability and secondary stigma they might be experiencing due to their child’s gender identity. Opportunities for men to express and learn about these discourses can help to lessen their threats to their emotional safety as they obtain tools and resources on how to process these thoughts and feelings. Therapist can help to normalize these fathers’ experiences as they can share information with them as additional research is done showing the universal themes other fathers go through. Good et al. (1995) report that it is imperative for counselors working with men to understand gender-related issues and how these ideas might influence their thoughts of emotional safety and expression.

With the known pattern of men and their lack of help seeking behaviors, it is important for professionals to seek out these men. Good and Wood (1995) reports outreach programs might be helpful for getting men into therapy. Other people initiated many of these fathers’ experience with healthcare professionals. The notion that men will come to the healthcare professional is not a common notion. Therefore, it is up to us to find the men. Outreach programs and programs specializing in treating them and their unique needs is a must to get these men threw the door and participating in psychological help. Lehr and MacMilliam (2001) asked men who are noncustodial, divorced or separated fathers about their experience with a psychological program aimed at their needs. The authors report, “Most of the men in the groups commented that they were invited to join the group ‘over coffee’ with the outreach worker. The informal approach of the outreach worker seemed to work quite well with these men” (p. 379). Having a less formal recruitment and interaction with men may increase their willingness to engage in treatment. Lehr and MacMilliam (2001) also suggest that programs focus less on curbing unhealthy behaviors and, instead, have a strength-based orientation where men concentrate more on their positive
skills. This might change men’s attitudes about obtaining help as they might think programs are punishment that only discuss things they are doing wrong. Lastly, there is, “…evidence supporting the view that how men are socialized to be men may be harmful to them and to society in general (Fragoso, & Kashubeck, 2000, p. 93). Therefore, helping to socialize boys that feelings can be expressed in a healthy way and help seeking behaviors are not a sign of weakness.

Just as these fathers focused on their safety, their children’s safety was also a concern. As discussed, transgender people face several threats to their safety. These fathers took ownership in needing and wanting to protect their child. However, as presented in the Family Life Cycle, larger society and cultural also has ownership in stopping this problem. Grant et al.’s (2010) task force stresses this need for societal involvement by stating, “Ending violence against transgender people should be a public health priority, because of the direct and indirect negative effect it has on both victims and on the health care system that must treat them” (p. 87). The authors make several recommendations for policy priorities took help keep transgender people safer. These include, but not limited to: enacting anti-harassment and non-discrimination policies within schools and places of employment, developing transgender affirming curriculum in schools, educational trainings in the workplace, places of worship, and medical agencies, increasing healthcare coverage, and eliminating anti-transgender legislation, such as the Bathroom Bill laws.

Conclusion

Some of the struggles these fathers report experiencing within the context of this unpredictable horizontal stressor are attributed to the socio-cultural context around them. The physical, sexual, and community safety of their children is a worry these fathers had for their
children. The safety concerns also extended to their sense of emotional safety as they worried about secondary stigma and vulnerability. In the following section, theme centered on the meaning these fathers make about their experience as a father of a child who identities as transgender will be presented. The implications for these themes will also be discussed.

**Navigating the Developmental Process of Self-Evaluation Theme**

This final interview asked participants to reflect on the meaning and understanding of their experience and the intellectual and emotion connections they developed between their work and life (Seidman, 2006). Making meaning of the experience is at the heart of phenomenology (Seidman, 2012). The ways in which these participants make meaning of their experiences influence their behaviors that can, consequently, draw significant implications for qualitative researchers (Creswell, 2012). This process elicited two subthemes: assessment of personal identity and assessment of social identity.

**Self-Evaluation**

For these men, this experience meant looking inward and outward to figure out how to process this situation in order to connect and continue to unconditionally love their child. The purpose, or meaning, they derived through this process is that they needed to complete their own self-evaluation in order to change and adapt. They each called into question what they thought, felt, had been taught, and the resources attainable and not. And ultimately what was most important to them. This unimaginative situation forced these men to assess their personal and social identity. This experience allowed them to challenge their ideas and take inventory of their lives and the influences these stressors have on it. Each underwent their own self-evaluation to adapt to this experience.
Conducting a self-evaluation in order to develop one’s self-concept has two aspects for assessment. These include personal identity, which includes one’s individual values, goals, beliefs, prejudices, and abilities, and social identity described as, “that part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership in a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (Tajfel, 1981, p. 255). Simply put, “…personal identity refers to how people view themselves as individuals, social identity refers to how they view social groups to which they belong” (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992, p. 302). The two aspects are not independent of each other. They are very much connect and the interaction between these identities help people construct meaning (Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 2002). This is seen within these fathers’ experiences in the context of the Family Life Cycle theory. This unpredictable horizontal stressor forced the fathers to evaluate both their vertical stressors and the influences the socio-cultural context had within their different group memberships. Their self-evaluation that assisted in developing meaning is discussed below with particular attention paid to their personal identity, social identity, and these identities interactions.

Assessment of Personal Identity

The notion of transgender was a foreign concept for some of the fathers. Therefore, when their children disclosed their gender identity, this was a time in each of the fathers’ lives in which they had to assess their own thoughts and feeling and seek outside support and resources. This unpredictable horizontal stressor allowed these men to develop a new sense of meaning as they evaluated this disclosure and what it meant to their personal identity and how their different stressors (vertical and socio-cultural) impacted them. This situation appeared to be a rather big
learning curve for each of the fathers. All of the fathers reported the idea of having a transgender child was very much out of the realm of possibility.

Harvey: It's kind of hard to put it in words because the whole notion has opened my mind. I'm awakened into a whole new world that I just didn't think I knew until this happened until I accepted it. To me, it means happiness.

Bryn: Towards the end of break, right when he was getting ready to go back, during one of the nights when there was a pack of friends over, one of the friends came out and said, "Cayden wants a binder. You gotta get Cayden a binder." And I thought, "He's got tons of binders. What kind does he need? Three ring? Spiral? What are we talking here?" They were like, "No, no, no! A chest binder. He wants to have a chest binder." And that was the first little flicker in my mind that went, "Okay." I said, "Chest binder. Huh? Let me talk to your mom about that. I'm not sure about the physiological implications of such a thing."

Bob: Again, for me, it was a learning curve because I had no clue. I had a few gay friends in high school or in college in particular, but I had never been associated with anybody who was a transgender person.

Clyde: I felt like if I ever had children and they came to me and said that they were gay I didn't consider trans at the time. But if they said they were gay, I was like, so what? They're gay. Never thought about trans.

Jack: But, understanding when she first told us about her gender dysphoria, and she was about 15, I didn't react quite as understanding to it... I was very closed-minded to the whole transgender thing because I really didn't know anything about it.

John: We would not have been surprised in the least if Coley had come to us some day and said, "I'm gay." Anyway, her mom called me and said, "Here's what's going on." The first thought that went through my head is, "How am I going to put this into words because this is life-changing? How do I explain this? How do I describe this to people when I didn't even know what it was?" Thank God for Google. I consider myself generally a smart guy, but I didn't know what transgender was. I thought there were three categories: gay, straight, and bi. That was my shallow perspective on the world and I was happy to embrace anyone who was gay, straight, or bi.

This growth area does not appear uncommon as the initial stage within The Family Emergence Stages suggests as it often alludes to confusion. The Family Emergence Stages are: discovery and disclosure, turmoil, negotiation, and, lastly, finding balance (Lev, 2004). This model outlines the stages in which these fathers assessed their personal identity throughout this
process. Due to the complexity of this process and reactions connected to it, this developmental model acts as a blueprint and not linear or representative for everyone. Nevertheless, looking at it from a guidance point of view, during the first stage of discover and disclosure, shock, betrayal, and, as seen above, confusion can be experienced.

Bob: Initially, you're in shock. You're just like okay, I don't know what this is.

Jack: We went up the elevators and she said, "Dad, I want to talk to them by myself." I said, "Okay. No problem. I'll wait in the waiting room." So I waited in the waiting room, and 20 minutes later she comes out and I went up and paid for the appointment. I paid it in cash I had in my pocket. So we got in the elevator, and I said, "So do you feel better? Are you cured?" And she goes, "Yeah, I'm better." I said, "Oh cool," and I didn't think anything else about it.

This confusion experienced by all of the dads is perhaps due to the vertical stressor of cisgenderism. “Cisgenderism refers to the cultural and systemic ideology that denies, denigrates, or pathologizes self-identified gender identities that do not align with assigned gender at birth as well as resulting behavior, expression, and community” (Lennon & Mister, 2014, p. 63). This stressor essentially endorses the belief that cisgender identities are more valued and often ignores the existence of transgender identities. Some of these fathers, therefore, reported not having the possibility that they child was transgender on their radar. These men had to educate themselves on the identity and, as discussed later, took on the role of educating others.

Within the second stage of turmoil, the most difficult stage, family members may become withdrawn, emotionally and even physically volatile, hopeless, and stressed, and mimic posttraumatic stress disorder responses (Lev, 2004). Some of the negative reactions to the disclosure of a family member’s gender identity might be delayed and the initial reaction might be that of supportive or actually inviting until the reality of the life changes that are to become (Lev, 2004). Both Jack and Harvey reported having negative responses.
Jack: …that's when she said, "I think I have gender dysphoria, this is what it is, and I'm doing research about it trying to find out about it." When she said I have gender dysphoria, I said, "Well, you're a little faggot that want's your dick cut off." … And of course there I go again saying something awful hurtful, "Are you fixed? Are you better? Are you cured?" I didn't know what to say.

Harvey: My dad is Mexican and is very traditional Hispanic, and for me, I just took it as something was wrong with my child. He had been going to therapy, so on several occasions I was like, okay, I'm going in there to talk. I want to be in this therapy session too. I would basically tell his therapist, “Hey, something's wrong with this kid, fix him,” or her at the time. I thought, and I even told him, I said, "This is messed up, this is not right." We drifted apart.

It is no surprising to hear that some of these men had a negative reaction to this process. Lev (2004) notes that this process is, “one that family members are often unwilling participants in, and in which they may feel somewhat like hostages on another person's journey” (p. 280). The vertical stressor of transphobia might influence these negative responses. Hill and Willoughby (2015) defines this stressor as, “…an emotional disgust toward individuals who do not conform to society’s gender expectations” (p. 533). Having children who do not obey societal norms of gender can produce negative reactions and these fathers’ desire for their children to be cured. This belief that transgender children can be cured is not an uncommon thought as well. Mallon and DeCrenzo (2006) report that parents will find ways to cure their treatment by psychological help via conversion therapy. During this stage of turmoil, Harvey reports that his indoctrinated religious ideas and beliefs about gender and sex that impact his reaction to his child’s gender identity.

I guess you could probably say it was probably religious thing at first when I had difficulty accepting it. The reason I hesitate to say it is because I'm not a very religious person. I was brought up a Catholic, and I don't believe it, but when you're indoctrinated to all that stuff, then in the back of your mind, you believe it. My first notion was, “Hey, this isn't right. Men are with women, and women are with men, and that's it. You're born with what God gave you.” But that's the way I felt. I think that just understanding this whole situation has made me open my mind a lot better.
McGoldrick, Carter, and Garcia-Preto (2011) reports religious beliefs and practices can also be a vertical stressor. This embedded idea had to be challenged within Harvey’s personal identity evaluation. Both Jack and Harvey had rather outwardly negative reactions to their child’s gender identity. Some of the other fathers also experienced some turmoil as well in the way of grief and ambiguous loss of their child. While John and Harvey report not grieving, Bob, Jack, Bryn, and Clyde report some experiences with grief during this stage.

Bob: But me personally grieving, and my wife even talks about that, but everyone's like, "You handled everything so well." I'm a private person when it comes to emotions. I dealt with it at that a time the best way I could.

Jack: But there was definitely grief. I grieve the loss. I miss my son every day. I grieve for my son every day. Every day. As well as most parents that lose a child. Now I hate to say that this is like losing a child. I hate to compare it to that because it knows that pain. I do not know that pain. Because I can pick up the phone and call my kid. I can call up and have a conversation, but my son is gone. My son's gone. So, there is absolutely a grieving process.

Bryn: Grief actually went away fairly quickly when I had that moment of, “Ahhh geez.” We've always had a boy. We just didn't know it. However, he ended up in a female body. It doesn't matter. But, we always had a boy. And that, you can call it a paradigm shift or whatever. But that realization was one that started getting easier for me. I look at him now; it's second nature. I don't even think about it anymore.

Clyde: In some respects (Clyde’s had grief), but not the loss of a boy so much. More of the loss of her original name. And we thought that it was the perfect androgynous name cause it can go either way, right? The problem is what they’re called. But I miss the kid that was the boy. So I guess the difference is so very real because I have Bonnie the daughter, the same personality, the same person and she loves me and I love her and so it works out just fine. There's not as much grieving as I think with somebody who had a boy from a very young age and they were going into national league baseball or a kind of a power lifter and champion and manly perceived. I guess those guys are going to have a great deal of grieving. We just really didn't. We didn't really lose a boy. We just changed.

The experiences of grief and loss these fathers report are seen in several other studies of (e.g., Boenke, 1999; Gregor, 2013; Hill & Menvielle, 2009; Wren, 2002). Specifically, the loss of birth name and the identity a family attached to that name, as expressed by Clyde, has also been seen in the literature (Zamboni, 2006). This loss has been characterized more appropriately
as ambiguous loss. Ambiguous loss (Boss, 1999, 2006) is a stress to the family system in that it is a paradoxical phenomenon of a psychological and physically presence-absence paradigm. Boss (2007) defines the physical absence as leaving without goodbye and the psychological absence as goodbye without leaving. The latter, therefore, refers to the experience of a transgender family member. The person is still physically there, but whom the family has come to know and the idea and expectations of them as a whole are no longer present. Reacting to this ambiguous loss can elicit certain types of grief processing. A child disclosing a desire to transition from a given gender to their true one can produce social stigma. Parents will sometimes find themselves unable to process their grief openly due to the stigma attached to this loss. Doka (1989) describes this process, known as disenfranchised grief, as, “grief that is experienced when a loss cannot be openly acknowledged, socially sanctioned, or publicly mourned” (p. 1). Although a loss has occurred, a parent of a transgender child might think they do not have the right to openly mourn or seek out support or guidance from others during this time of transition. Societal norms determine the “grieving rules” as to what constitutes as legitimate grief and how that loss can be mourned (Doka, 2002, p. 161). As discussed previously, several of the fathers reported being hesitate about disclosing their child’s gender identity and with whom they chose to process their grief and loss.

Pearlman (2006) reports that with the disclosure of a child’s gender identity, some turmoil can begin due to the shattering of dreams parents had for their children. Fathers, consequently, had to assess their thoughts, expectations, and dreams for their children during this time of personal identity evaluation. This process, as will be discussed below, meant fathers had to recognize what was most important to their sense of self and realize that some of those hopes and dreams were still present with their now transgender child.
The third stage of negotiation refers to the family coming to the realization that the family member’s gender identity is permanent and will not simply go away (Lev, 2004). It is during this stage that family members begin a dialogue to discuss and define what the family member is comfortable with and what limits to set when it comes to the relative’s newly revealed gender identity (Lev, 2004). This negotiation was seen as some fathers would pick and choose who to tell. For instance, Bob established clear boundaries that he would not disclose his son’s identity in the workplace. Also, fathers were seen to negotiate the people who were not accepting, but could still stay in the family’s lives. For instance, some friends were thrown out, but older relatives who are more set in their ways were given more leeway. Bob reports negotiating with his son about getting a haircut in order to represent his preferred gender expression.

I took him to get a haircut. That was a huge issue with his mom and his grandparents because I did that without their support. It was really weird because after he got his haircut, I looked at him and I was like "Yeah, this is my child. This is perfect for him." When he had long hair and he was dressing the role of a girl, he just didn't look right.

For some parents, negotiating gender identity and moving towards finding balance is a seeing is a believing type of mentality. Pearlman (2006) found that parents seeing their children expressing their true gender was the tipping point for moving towards acceptance. Other fathers reported having to negotiate their thoughts and ideas during this time in order to move towards acceptance.

Bryn: It's the acceptance, coming to terms with my daughter now being my son; and, realizing he was your son all along.

Jack: I've also been forced to find out how big of an asshole I was…My beliefs and opinions are 180 degrees from where they were before. I would never try to disrespect anybody. I have a whole new respect for those, I don't want to say 'those people', for trans people. I mean, they're people. I don't even like calling them trans people. They're just people. I see that now. Believe me when you think you're doing a lot of things right because a lot of people appreciate what you do and then you figure out deep down inside
you're really a fucking ass and you're really an asshole. That's the kind of Jesus meeting you really don't want with yourself. I had it…

Harvey: I kind of feel like I've been given the key to open up a door that opened my eyes into a whole new world that's just amazing. I thank my son for doing this. I think it was something that I needed to grow. It was a challenge, but again, once I accepted it and figured it out, I just feel so much. I could use the word blessed…When I read that (The Transgender Child), that was kind of like the turning point. And I started to figure out maybe it's not him that's messed up. It's something that's wrong with me. I thought about it for a while and I came to the conclusion that the reason I had a problem with it was because I was embarrassed for myself. I felt very disappointed in myself that I would be superficial. At that point, that's when I said, “You know what? This has got to change and I have to change. I have to change the way I think about this whole thing.” Rather than keeping it secret, I started talking to him more and asking him things. You're going to be a guy, I'm going to call you a boy. I'm going to refer to you as a he or him. If that's what you want, I'll do that for you, that's no problem. It was kind of almost like an empty promise and so I was still kind of in the discovery phase.

Like with these fathers, acceptance and tolerance is on a spectrum when someone discloses their gender identity. The range of reactions family members exhibit can go from complete total rejection to complete acceptance (Mallon & DeCrenzo, 2006). Negotiating this process can be a difficult task for everyone involved. Each of these fathers have had to look inward and process their feelings, especially that of ambiguous loss. Boss (1999) suggests that not processing feelings ambiguous loss can make achieving closure and moving forward with this unpredictable stressor a difficult task.

The fourth and last stage, known as Finding Balance, marks the end to both turmoil and the need to negotiate differences within the family. At this stage, resolution of gender issues is not necessarily achieved and permanent. It instead infers that the transgender identity of the relative is no longer a secret and the family is ready to integrate the transgender person back into the family fold (Lev, 2004). The family is able at this point to refocus their lives around everyday events and occurrences and not surrounding their lives around gender issues. This is
seen as these fathers discuss next steps and advice that appears to go beyond focusing on their child’s gender identity and, instead, more universal hopes.

Clyde: I hope that I just continue to love her the way that she wants to be loved and I hope that I never get frustrated with her in a situation that is beyond her control. I don't think that my goals as a father have really changed because my daughter is transgender.

Jack: My hopes are my child will get back into lighting design, which she loved, and she's great at. Whatever she chooses to do, get back into something and make a run with it. She's got a really good boyfriend. I really like them a lot. My wish for them is they get married, adopt children, and move along. Really make a long run of it, and die old, slapping each other on the butt like me and my wife are going to do.

Harvey: I guess that they be happy.

Bob: I just want him to be happy and healthy, enjoy the college experience and have a great, great time in college. I want him to be loved and to have a great relationship some day, whether it's with whoever it is. I want him to be an advocate, too. I know he will be. I want him to advocate for kids, transgender kids, and I hope that he's able to do that some day.

Bryn: My hope is that he finds a way to live. Not to risk putting too fine a point on it. I want him to choose to live. And rather than just fail until he dies, I want the apathy to abate. I want that to abate and for him to cope with it to the point that he's willing to give life a good hard shot. It can be okay.

John: My advice would be treat your kid just like you treat your other kids. Love your kid unconditionally because that's the best thing you could do for them.

Assessing their personal identity allowed these participants to make sense of this situation and move forward to finding balance. As the situation around them changed, they all realized that they had to change as well. Each of these men evaluated their own thoughts and feelings in response to their child’s gender identity. As Clyde reports, “I guess the best description is adapt or die. I ended up adapting my life as many different ways as I could to make room for that child.” In the next section, participants’ evaluation of their social identity will be discussed.

Assessment of Social Identity
These men’s process of this experience was not isolated to their own self. As the *Family Life Cycle* postulates, there are several socio-cultural contexts that influence one’s framework for assessing problems. These men play several roles within society, not just as fathers. Therefore, they needed to evaluate how their role as a father of a child who identifies as transgender would potentially impact their role as employee, friend, spiritual person, southern citizen, and immediate and extended family member.

As discussed earlier, all of the fathers experienced some concerns about secondary stigma. Conducting a social inventory allowed the fathers to evaluate what was most important to them. Each one of the fathers, despite the stigma and hardships, chose their child and embraced their child’s gender identity. Like in Harvey’s experience, “…there was a choice you have to make. Do you want a transgender live child or do you want a dead child?”

The socio-cultural context appeared to be a both a sense of stress and comfort for these fathers. Discussed earlier, some fathers looked outward to their social identity and found issues with access to healthcare treatment and other resources, worries about cultural and geographic safety, and lose of friends and family. However, fathers also saw support and help within their socio-cultural context in response to this unpredictable horizontal stressor. For example, the three fathers that did receive therapy during this transition all believed it was a beneficial community resource for them. Also, many of the fathers looked to their romantic partner, immediate and extended family, supervisor, and friends for support and help processing this situation.

Bob: My wife has been a great support. She was just very equipped to be very understanding, have a lot of empathy, and be very supportive for me and for Elliot. So that relationship was key for me. My family being very supportive and very understanding, that was really important. Mainly, the core of my wife and my step-daughter, who both were just accepting and have been there every step of the way. From there, it was my extended family, my brother, my sister, my mom and uncle and some other family members. Fortunately, got a good group of friends that have been wonderful and I’ve leaned on them when needed.
Bryn: For me personally, I feel fairly fortunate that my family is supportive, even if they might not get it. They're all supportive.

John: At that point, I said, "I'm fortunate. We are fortunate that we chose our friends wisely. We associate with people who are accepting and unconditional."

Jack: When I got the email at work about Jill, I went in to tell my boss. I didn't even go home. She asked me what the problem was, and I, for some reason, laid it all out to her. And she confided in me that her husband was exactly the same way. We were already friends as well as we worked together. My wife and I, went to dinner with them, and I saw how well adjusted she was. We sat and talked for about four hours at a restaurant and I figured out there is hope out of this.

Surprisingly, school was a source of support and help for these men and their children. Grossman & D'augelli (2006) suggests this is not the norm as the experiences transgender students and their families have within the school system can be very difficult and a source of stress. Nevertheless, some of these fathers report their positive experiences with their child’s education:

John: Then there's those little issues of using the girls' bathroom. We got through that one. Back in middle school, she used a staff bathroom. The following year, she went back for eighth grade and we had a meeting with the chief operating officer of the County Public Schools. He said, "My brother's gay. I grew up and I watched people ridicule my brother." He said, "I want you to understand that this is a decision that I need to make professionally and for what's best for this County Public Schools. This would be precedent setting. Personally, I have nothing but respect for your daughter." I just didn't like the combination of words and where we live. We left there and I was feeling like this isn't going to work out. I got an email from him. He said, "I gave it thought. Again, this is precedent setting for the school. I want to let you know that I've reached the conclusion that Coley can use the girls' room." I almost just went through the ceiling with excitement. Just a wonderful day.

Bob: The school's been wonderful. It was in December of that Junior year he came to me and said, "Dad, I really want to meet with the principal because going into my second semester and I want my teachers to respect my pronouns and utilize my pronouns." So, I arranged a meeting with the principal and Elliot and I met with him. He was just like, "Okay." He goes, "What can we do for you? How can we help you? You can use the guys' bathroom. If you're not comfortable with that, you can use the girls' bathroom. If you're not comfortable with that, you can use the nurse's bathroom." It was really amazing, his response.
Bryn: And five-six weeks after he had gone back to school after holiday break, he called a meeting to have a talk to his instructors at school and said officially, I'd like for you to call me by male pronouns. And I want you to all me "Cayden." And they were amazingly accommodating.

Clyde: But moving down here, we specifically selected a county because the day that President Obama issued his directive through the DOE (Department of Education) saying that any school that receives federal money the kids should be able to use whatever bathroom they want to go into, this county Schools down here, immediately said, "We already do that. That's standard procedure for us. We will always protect our LGBT students." And so we knew coming down here was where we wanted to be because we knew the school system would protect our daughter and so we made that move and that's one of the things that has somewhat alleviated some of the pressure that you feel but as a parent you want to protect your kids.

Lastly, many of these fathers saw the value in the help they received and how this aided them in their process. John reports being on several panels of transgender parents discussing his story in order to help others understand. Bryn and Bob also state who they wish to help educate and help others be informed about this situation.

Bryn: That's a funny thing, every now and then you get this reaction from people when I say, “well our kid came out as trans,” and they don't mean to but they say, "Oh, I'm so sorry." Well no, no, no. He's not dead or he died. He's just transgender. And it's also, like you have to help them. You can then help them with stuff that you personally had to go through with your own kid. And you help other people broaden their minds. Maybe that's how change and acceptance is going to happen.

Bob: Being the parent of a transgender child, I see that I have the ability to help other people just simply by talking about Coley. If they want to know my story, it's not my story. It's Coley’s story. But if they want to know how I, as her parent, processed it and dealt with it, I'm happy to tell them that story… I've been involved in the support group and facilitator the parent support group. I guess because of my background in working with groups and working with children, but also the fact that I was in a pretty good place with Elliot. Maybe it was to show an example of a positive father figure in the process.

In response to this unpredictable horizontal stressor, these men not only looked inward in order to process this situation, they also sought their larger society as well. Through this process, they were able to determine the arenas that helped and hinder their growth and ultimately finding balance. Implications for these fathers making meaning of their situation are discussed below.
Implications for Navigating the Developmental Process of Self-Evaluation

This unpredictable horizontal stressor has been shown to cause some strain for fathers. Hill, Menvielle, Sica, & Johnson (2010) notes this stressful position parents have during this experience by stating, “Parents may, however, be caught in a bind: on the one hand, they may recognize the importance of supporting their child’s wishes; on the other hand, they may be distressed by a gender nonconforming child because such a child might be exposed to social ostracism, be a target of violence, and generally have a difficult life” (p. 9). Fathers can have both an internal conflict (e.g., love for their child versus thoughts of cisgenderism) and external conflict (e.g., immediate family systems versus societal norms). Wahlig (2015) notes that, “Despite these challenges, parents must nevertheless find a way to understand and find meaning in their transgender child’s identity (p. 312). Processing their experience by making meaning of it can help to defuse negative reactions and promote growth and connection between fathers and their children.

Developing meaning can be a difficult task as it is multi-faceted. As seen with these participants’ experiences, making meaning was a self-evaluation that included their own personal and social identity assessment. Is it not only beneficial for these men to develop a sense of meaning to find balance for this situation, but it is beneficial for their children’s wellbeing as well. Research has shown that the parental response to a child’s transgender identity has a major impact life satisfaction and acceptance (Ettner and White, 2000; Rachlin, 2002). Conversely, parental rejection can decrease transgender children’s self-esteem (Rachlin, 2002). It is, therefore, imperative for both the father and the transgender child to increase the father’s ability to make meaning and process this situation.
Researchers have discussed interventions in which counselors can implement in order to enhance meaning-making for the family members of transgender individuals. Norwood (2013) stresses the important of intentionality. Counselors need to openly disclose the importance of making meaning during this experience and help support fathers as they evaluate, deconstruct, and reframe their beliefs, cultural norms, and familial thoughts about gender. Counselor’s role in helping fathers to make meaning needs to not only focus on the father’s psychological wellbeing, but also educate these men on transgender identity. Therefore, psychoeducation can also be implemented to help these fathers gain understanding that can then assist with developing meaning. Pekkala and Merinder (2002) define psychoeducation as, “…the education of a person with psychiatric disorder (or family member with one) in subject areas that serve the goals of treatment” (p. 2). Some of these fathers reported finding comfort in gaining more information about their child being transgender and having an elevator speech to share with others. Hill and Menvielle (2009) endorse the importance of counselors helping family members of transgender individuals to act as advocates. Lastly, counselors can reframe fathers’ struggles as they work to make meaning as a growth and connecting opportunity as they take inventory of their sources of support and resources around them.

Conclusion

These fathers worked to make meaning of this situation by doing a self-evaluation. As reported, all of the fathers had very limited, if not complete lack of, knowledge about what transgender is. Let alone what it means to have a transgender child. This situation forced these men to assess their personal and social identity in order to find meaning. This experience allowed them to challenge their ideas and take inventory of their lives and the influences these stressors have on it. This next section will discuss to strengths, limitations, and future research.
Chapter 11: STRENGTHS, LIMITATIONS, & FUTURE RESEARCH

This study’s methodology had some strengths and limitations. Adding to the sparse body of knowledge was a significant factor within this study. Although efforts to establish trustworthiness were attempted, some areas, such as transferability, are lacking. It is my hope that the results of this study will act as a springboard for future research. A discussion of strengths, limitations, and ideas for future research pertaining to this field are outlined in further detail below. It is important to note that not every limitation or strength is solely just that, a limitation or strength. There is value and shortcomings to various elements of a study. The characterization of the study is based on the author’s interpretation of the study’s strengths and limitations with the caveat that some elements could be both. Lastly, I added my own experience of conducting this research within the epilogue. It is my hope that sharing my tale of the amazement and appreciation for this community and these fathers will help to promote other researchers to study and advocate for this community and their families as well.

Strengths

The major strength of this study was the exploration of this population that is both unrepresented and often hidden. Limiting the study to strictly the voice of the fathers gave the opportunity and space to speak their truths and give them a forum that has yet to be provided. The implication can help to influence the therapeutic interventions of mental health professionals for both fathers and family systems, which will be discussed below. This research has broken new ground and can act as a springboard for additional research on fathers who have children who identify as transgender to develop. Focusing on this one specific geographic region allowed the study to concentrate on the unique experience these fathers had due to being in the southern part of the United States. Also, choosing to interview fathers three times provided rich, in-depth
data that could be thoroughly analyzed. Asking about not only their experience as a father of a transgender child, but also their experience as a father and the meaning they attribute to it enabled for a more comprehensive examination of their experience.

Limitations

Despite all of my best efforts to compile a thoroughly comprehensive study, there were some limitations. While I am attempted to recruit a broad stroke of participants, this study had a homogeneous sample. All the men identified as White, with only one participant reported identifying as Hispanic/White; they were of similar age range and children discussed their gender identity within a similar age range as well. Like limiting the geographic region, findings might limit its transferability due to the sample’s demographics. Although I was willing to meet with participants face-to-face, due to scheduling conflicts and distance, I was not able to meet with any of the fathers in person. I was, therefore, not able to add physical observations (e.g., appearance, mannerisms) to the evaluation of their data. All participants were within the finding balance stage of the Model of Family Adjustment. Although fathers discussed the disclosure, turmoil, and negotiation stages, none were currently in these stages. As stated above, I chose to do one type of qualitative research methodology, narrative interviews, and not able to reap the benefits of other methodology, such as grounded theory, ethnography, or focus groups.

Future Research

Building upon this research study is imperative to continue to fill the gap in body of research by adding more information and insight into the experiences of these fathers. Future qualitative research could include narratives exploring more diverse samples of fathers. These samples could include, but not limited to, more racially diverse fathers, additional geographic areas, fathers in different stages of the Model of Family Adjustment, single fathers, fathers with
diverse religious affiliations, and younger fathers. Narratives could also be obtained from both fathers and their children simultaneously. This would not only get the father’s lived experience, but also see what the child’s experience with their father was.

Additional types of qualitative methodology could be used in future studies. Ground theory utilizes data based on participants’ lived experience and social context in order to develop theory (Martin & Turner, 1986). Conducting a ground theory study to develop a theoretical framework could help mental health professionals working with fathers who have transgender children. Focus groups could also be used. Asking fathers to discuss their experience together could help generate new thinking and allow participants to relate their experiences with others and develop additional themes and comparisons (Creswell, 2012). I did not ask for artifacts from the fathers within this study. Many of the participants, however, did provide some in the form of photos, emails, letters, and articles. Goetz & LeCompte (1984) defines artifacts as items participants make and do that are of interest to the research topic. I did not include the artifacts in my analysis, but having a future study that incorporate artifacts might illuminate research questions more and give additional insight into these men’s lived experiences.

Quantitative research could also be conducted to help add to the body of research. Correlation studies could measure the relationship between the strength of a father’s religious affiliation and a father’s rating of help seeking behaviors during their child’s transition. Regression studies could also help to predict how the disclosure of their child’s gender identity may impact a father’s acceptance level. Lastly, quasi-experimental designs could be conducted in order to see if there are any differences in counseling theories/interventions (e.g., cognitive behavioral therapy versus psychodynamic) when working with a father who has a child who identifies as transgender.
Conclusion

This study helped to provide a groundbreaking scope of these fathers and their experiences. It was immensely important to obtain the voices of these men first hand as they are unrepresented in the literature and are often a hidden population. Future research utilizing various methodologies within this research field will need to continue to be conducted in order to help these men and their families. Additional research could also help to combat some of the limitations mentioned above within this study. The following epilogue will reflect some of my experience researching this topic and my hopes and encouragement for future research for this population and their families.

Epilogue

I touched on this in my acknowledgements, but it was an interesting feeling discussing this project with people and the first question being, ““How will you get anyone?” This reaction came from people who are involved in research and counseling and those who are not. There was this general consensus that finding anyone would be difficult. The doubt of finding anyone started to come into play when I was about to start recruiting. I knew it wasn’t going to be easy, but all this questionable doubt around me made me question whether I was being naive. On the day I got IRB approval, I started emailing and posting to social media immediately. I spent the whole day emailing to people that might have leads. Several people shared my post, to my surprise. Organizations and colleges/universities were contacted. By the next morning, I had at least 15 emails from people saying they might know someone or had advice for other organizations or people to get in contact with because they might be able to help me. The outpouring of help to connect with these men was amazing. I still sit here in slight shock that so
many people reached out just in that first day. Numerous people, even weeks later, also reached out to see if I still needed any help.

What was perhaps most surprising, was the number of people who did not fit my study that came forward. I received several emails from people stating they either were not completely sure if they met eligibility or outright knew they did not meet it, but they still wanted to see if I would be interested in interviewing them. It was amazing to talk with so many people who saw they were not being represented in the literature but wanted to be. I had emails from families who had the parent and child both transitioning, fathers with children who are intersexed and transitioning, fathers from outside of the southern region, transgender people from Indian reservations contacting me. These are only some of the few responses I received. In each of their emails, there was this underlining desire to be studied and have their voice present in the literature. The participants in this study really wanted their story told as well. I did not ask any father for artifacts, but several fathers sent emails their child sent them about being transgender, emails they sent to family and friends about their child transitioning, pictures of their families, and articles their children were quoted in.

It is my hope that people reading this will see that people in the transgender community and their families want their voices heard in the literature. Not only that, but obtaining participants is possible. This community is very well connected and was so amazing at helping to get the information about the study sent out to other people. Often when I looked at the bottom of the email a father sent me to see who forwarded him the information, I would have no idea who the person who sent it on was. Having the opportunity to speak with these men was an absolute privilege and the most joyous part of this study. If anyone is thinking about conducting research about transgender people and their families, my wish is that you more forward with it
and reach out to this community in order to get their much deserved and needed voices included in the literature.

This experience was not only one that I hope benefits fathers of transgender children and their families, but also it benefited me personally a great deal. I am actually an outsider in this area of research based on my own demographic makeup. I do not identify as transgender, am not a father, do not have a child, let alone a transgender child. I’m not a parent yet, nor have any relatives at this present time that identify as transgender. This line of research interest developed out of the events discussed in the prologue. This outsider status influenced my lens as a researcher because I very well may have analyzed the data differently than someone with a more personalized experience with the subject matter.

Nevertheless, I was surprised by some elements of this research study. For starters, I was not expecting these men to be as talkative and forthcoming as they were, although that was certainly a pleasant surprise. It was also surprising the reaction I received from others when I discussed my line of research. I have been interested in conducting research about transgender individuals and their families for about seven years. The interest developed while I was in my Master’s program. During class we were asked about populations we wanted to work with in a counseling setting. We went down the line of students discussing interests in working with veterans, children with autism, and addiction. Often when these students’ potential specialties were disclosed, several questions would arise from the professor and other students. The exception was often with me when I would discuss wanting to work with transgender individuals and their families. This declaration was often followed by silence and a quick notion to move on to the next student. Fortunately, a lot has changed within society regarding transgender individuals and their interest in this population. Now when I discussed this dissertation topic, I
received many questions and levels of interests. We as a society have a long way to go as far as supporting and accepting people within this population and their family, it is my hope that the increased attention and support I have seen over the years continues to grow.
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Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson.


Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson.


## Appendix A

### Demographic Data

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<th>Name</th>
<th>Child’s Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Child’s Gender Identity</th>
<th>Age child disclosed transgender identity (self reported)</th>
<th>Current Age of Child</th>
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</tbody>
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Appendix B

Themes

The impact paternal involvement has on fathers’ patterns of behavior.

Adapting to child’s gender identity by engaging in advocacy.

Navigating the developmental process of self-evaluation.

Interaction with their Fathers

Paternal Influence on Manhood

Interaction with their Children

Access to Competent Healthcare Professionals

Addressing other Mental Health Concerns

Fathers Experience with Therapy

Threats to Safety within the Community

Physical Safety Concerns for their Children

Fathers’ Emotional Safety

Assessment of Personal Identity

Assessment of Social Identity
Appendix C

Recruitment Email

Greetings:

I hope this message finds you doing well. My name is Jillian Blum and I am contacting you because of your unique status and experience of being a father who lives in the southern region of the United States and has a child who identifies as transgender.

I’m writing to gauge your interest in participating in a research study for my dissertation. I am finishing my doctoral studies in counselor education and supervision at The Pennsylvania State University and my primary interest is researching and better understanding the experiences of fathers of children who identify as transgender while living within the southern region of the United States of America. My dissertation will specifically sample fathers because their voices rarely being added to the research literature. In fact, I believe this study is the first of its kind: one that documents and communicates the experiences of fathers of children who are transgender within the southern region in order to help counselors and counselor educators develop interventions and programs.

In order to participate, you must be the father of (biological father, step-father, or in a fathering relationship with) a child who identifies as transgender (please note: I use transgender as an umbrella term and if your child identifies as transgender or another identity under this umbrella, for example: transsexual, gender variant, genderqueer, gender nonconforming, etc., you are still more than welcome to participate) and you live within the southern region of the United States (Defined as Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia), you are over 18 years old, and speak and understand English.

My study will require me to interview you 3 times between 60-90 minutes for each interview. If you are interested in participating, please read through the informed consent form I have attached to this email. I’m encouraging you to please feel free to send me an email or call me indicating that you are interested in participating in the study and/or if you have any questions. Also, please let me know if you know of any other men who may be willing to participate in this project who fit the criteria. I would appreciate if you forwarded this message on to them.

Best wishes!

Warmly,

Jillian Blum, Ed.S., LPC
Doctoral Candidate – Counselor Education & Supervision
The Pennsylvania State University
jbb251@psu.edu
770.361.4627
Appendix D

Consent for Exempt Research
The Pennsylvania State University

Title of Project: An analysis of narratives of men who are fathers of children who identify as transgender

Principal Investigator: Jillian Blum, Ed.S., LPC
Department of Educational Psychology, Counseling, & Special Education
The Pennsylvania State University
jbb251@psu.edu
770.361.4627

Faculty Advisor: JoLynn V. Carney, Ph.D., LPCC
Department of Educational Psychology, Counseling, & Special Education
303 CEDAR Building
The Pennsylvania State University
University Park, PA 16802
jcarney@psu.edu
(814) 863-2404

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this study is to gain a more in-depth understanding of how men who are fathers living in the southern region of the United States of America (e.g., Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia) describe their lived experience.

Procedures to be followed: You will be asked to participate in three audio-recorded interviews each with the researcher. Interviews will either be done via telephone or face-to-face at a location of the participants choosing, if applicable. The interviews will ask questions about your past and present as it relates to learning about fatherhood, being a father, being a father of a child who identifies as transgender, and the meaning you make of these experiences. Each of the three interviews will be between approximately 60-90 minutes. Interviews will be spaced three to seven days apart.

Statement of Confidentiality: Your participation in this research is confidential. All hardcopies with participant information will be in a locked file cabinet in the PI’s office. Electronic materials will be saved to a password-protected computer. Emails from PI to participant will be
encrypted and sent from a private, password-protected server. In the event of a publication or presentation resulting from the research, no personally identifiable information will be shared. Fake names, or pseudonyms, will be assigned to anyone participating in the study and general location of participant will be reported as the southern region of The United States of America. No identifying information will be associated with you responses.

When interviews are being placed over the phone, PI will be alone, behind a closed door to minimize anyone overhearing. Interview questions might elicit responses that you do not want others to hear. PI, therefore, stresses to you to pick a time and a location you feel comfortable talking on the phone and preferably when you are alone. For face-to-face interviews, you can pick location you are comfortable to meet and answer questions. PI has a private office that interviews can take place in. Like for the phone call interviews, I stress that interviews will ask personal questions and will ask you to keep this in mind when choosing a place to meet face-to-face.

If you have questions or concerns, you should contact Jillian Blum at 770-361-4627. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject or concerns regarding your privacy, you may contact the Office for Research Protections at 814-865-1775.

Your participation is voluntary and you may decide to stop at any time. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to answer.

Your participation implies your voluntary consent to participate in the research.
Appendix E

Interview Guide

Title of Project: An analysis of narratives of men who are fathers of children who identify as transgender

Principal Investigator: Jillian Blum, Ed.S., LPC
Department of Educational Psychology, Counseling, & Special Education
The Pennsylvania State University
jbb251@psu.edu
770.361.4627

Faculty Advisor: JoLynn V. Carney, Ph.D., LPCC
Department of Educational Psychology, Counseling, & Special Education
303 CEDAR Building
The Pennsylvania State University
University Park, PA 16802
jcarney@psu.edu
(814) 863-2404

Interview 1 (Focus: Demographics and Life History)

Demographic Questions:
- Your age?
- Your race?
- Your highest level of education completed?
- Your sexual orientation?
- Your relationship status?
- Are you currently in a romantic relationship with the child’s other parent?
- Your religious/spiritual orientation: (please indicate if none)?
- What is your child’s gender identification?
- Child’s preferred pronouns?
- What is your relationship to your child (e.g., stepfather, biological father, adopted father, etc.)?
- How many children do you have?
- What age did your child tell you they identified as transgender?
- How old is your child who identifies as transgender now?
• What pseudonym name do you wish to be used for confidentiality purposes within this study?
• What pseudonym name do you wish to be used for confidentiality purposes within this study for your child?

Proposed In-Depth Interview Questions:

• How has your life up to now influenced the father you are now?
• Describe experiences from your past that helped to shape your ideas about fatherhood.
• What memories do you have as a child of you and a father or father figure?
• What was the transition from being a man to a man who is also a father like for you?
• How would you describe your experience as a father?
• Describe how living in the southern region influenced your life experiences as a father.
• How did you prepare to be a father?
• What makes a man a good father?

Interview 2 (Focus: Influence of Phenomenon on Personal Life)
Proposed In-Depth Interview Questions:

• How as a man are you experiencing life now as a father of a transgender child?
• What are the most rewarding and challenging aspects of being a man as a father of a transgender child?
• What ways do you cope with these challenges?
• Have you experienced a sense of grief during this process?
• How have your ideas and beliefs about transgender people before you had a transgender child compare to your ideas and beliefs now?
• In what ways do you describe your experience of being a father of a child who identifies as transgender to people inside and outside your family (e.g., friends, jobs, church, southern culture, etc.)?
• What sources of support have you found helpful?

Interview 3 (Focus: Meaning Making)
Proposed In-Depth Interview Questions:

• Today, what does it mean to you to be a man who is a father of a transgender child?
• How has your family and outside influences such as friends, job, faith, south culture, influenced your meaning?
• How has this process impacted your meaning of gender and privilege?
• What pieces of advice would you give a father who is looking for guidance from you after his child has come out as transgender?
• Did you consider obtaining or did you obtain counseling to help you through this experience? If you did not consider nor obtain counseling, what stopped you from pursuing it? If you did get counseling to help with this experience, how was that experience and what or who influenced you to get counseling?
• How should counselors be helping a father make meaning in his own life?
• What are your thoughts and hopes about your child’s future?
• What does this all mean to you moving forward as a father?
Appendix F

Journal Sample

3.9.17-Interview #1 with Jack:

Jack appears cautious about participating in this study. In our email exchange, he references being VERY protective of his daughter and her friends. He wants to help the transgender community with his story and is happy to participate, but only if he thinks this is a genuine study. I’m not truly sure what he means by a genuine study. Do I have IRB approval? A general interest in the subject matter? I don’t really answer his question (really because I don’t know how) nor do I ask for clarification. I just send him the recruitment email and informed consent and send a blurb about my study’s purpose. Jack agrees to participant in the study and we setup a time for me to call him.

He has a rather distinct southern accent. I officially introduce myself and give him a verbal overview of the study and some background information about myself. He doesn’t really acknowledge what I’ve said like the other fathers. He just simply says something about just wanting to help his kid. At first, he does not say much and answers the first couple of questions with fairly minimal responses. Honestly, I started thinking, “Oh no. This is starting to feel like it’s not going anywhere.” I start to debate in my head: Should I start pulling teeth? Just let him answer as is because I don’t want to skew the data? I decide to let the interview continue as is and see if he opens up more.

Jack from time to time will bring up this terrible thing he said to his daughter one night. He doesn’t say what the terrible thing he said is because he reports knowing that this first interview is about him developing into a father and not about being a father of a transgender child. That’s for interview two. Yet he keeps bring it up. I once again begin to debate with myself. Should I just ask him what this terrible thing he said is or just let it go? I don't
necessarily want to bring up information that will be discussed at the next interview. Like before, I let things play out and don’t intervene.

He’s sharing more and more after each question. I guess he reaches his breaking point and finally decides to share what the terrible thing he said is. Jack discloses that he told his daughter when she said she was transgender that she was just a faggot wanting to get his dick cut off. Shocking statement, yes. Completely surprising, not so much. I find that he pauses for my response. I offer a neutral response of acknowledgment that I heard him, but try to skew my response to approval or disapproval. He starts to answer the original question at hand. I get this mix vibe from him of perhaps being uncomfortable having disclosed that and relief. We end the first interview and I ask what time would work well for him for the next interview. He tells me a time and begins to discuss how he talking about his past and things he said are difficult for him sometimes. I feel the need to emphasize with this statement. I get it. At least I think I do. On some level I guess. This isn’t the rosiest time for some men I imagine. I’m now hoping my empathy was appropriate and not over stepping into counselor mode. I remind him that he can stop at any time without any negative consequences and I can provide resources for him. He laughs it off and says that 6pm for next time works for him and that he wants to continue.
Vita of Jillian Blum

EDUCATION

Ph.D., Counselor Education & Supervision, The Pennsylvania State University, anticipated date, August 2017
Ed.S., Professional Counseling, Georgia State University, May 2011
M.S., Professional Counseling, Georgia State University, May 2010
B.S., Psychology, University of Georgia, May 2008

WORK EXPERIENCE

Owner and Counselor at Transitional Counseling of Georgia, LCC, Decatur, GA, 07/2016-present.
Providing individual, couples, family counseling for those experiencing depression, anxiety, and exploring LGBTQQIA identity in an outpatient setting.

Senior Behavioral Health Counselor, DeKalb Medical Center, Decatur, GA, 12/2013-present.
Managing the quality improvement of the Behavioral Health Services department within a private, not-for-profit hospital system. Conduct intake assessments and provide individual and group counseling for patients with mental health, substance abuse, or dual diagnoses in an acute inpatient behavioral health hospital.

PUBLICATIONS & PRESENTATIONS

Blum, J. B. (2017, March). Considerations for Providers when Working with the Transgender Population. Presented at DeKalb Medical Center, Decatur, GA.