

The Lives of Transgender People



Objectives

- Setting the context
- Current project review
- Implications for Student Affairs Professionals

Limited Research Outside of Pathologizing Transgender as "Gender Identity Disorder"

- Lewins (1995) - Includes a stage of "purging and delay" in his six-stage model of MTF identity development
- Devor (1997 & 2004) includes two stages of delay and two stages of identity confusion in his fourteen-stage model of transsexual identity formation.
- Mallon (1999) suggested that research to date has yet to propose the creation of healthy, nonstigmatizing models of transgender identity development.
- Hershberger and D'Augelli (2000) – trans youth
- Bilodeau & Renn (2005) *Analysis of LGBT Identity Development Models and Implications for Practice*
- Hiestand & Levitt (2006) model of Butch Identity Development

Limitations of Current Research

- Lack of examination of the different and more varied gender experiences of transgender youth
 - Many younger trans people today do not face as great a difficulty recognizing and accepting themselves as transgender. They can see transgender images in popular culture, read about transgender issues in the mainstream media, and connect with other transgender youth through websites, chat rooms, and other online venues. As a result, few younger transgender people seem to experience prolonged confusion or feel that they are “the only one,” as did transgender people who grew up in previous decades.
- The expectation that gender reassignment/confirmation surgery is the final outcome of the process and that transitioning is not complete without it
- Individual who transitions will no longer identify as transgender –not always the case
- Lack of examining multiple and intersecting identities related to race and ethnicity, nationality, ability status, class, and sexual orientation.

Current Project

- Approach in undertaking this research was that crossdressing, transsexuality, and other transgender identities are no less “natural” or “legitimate” than the dominant gender categories of women and men.
- Detractors may contend that we lack adequate critical distance or are biased by virtue of being members of transgender/queer communities, we feel that our positions give us insights that have been absent from much of the literature on transgender lives.

Current Project

Did not exclude respondents who did not fit the definitions commonly used for transgender people in the psychological literature, (e.g., transsexuals who do not transition completely or at all, male-bodied crossdressers who have never been sexually stimulated by their crossdressing or who are attracted to men, gender diverse individuals who challenge traditional transgender categories).

Current Project

- Our connections to the communities that we are studying also enabled us to involve many transgender people in the research who otherwise would have been reluctant to participate, fearing further mistreatment by academics.
- To a large extent, our “insider” status enabled us to conduct what is, to date, the largest study of transgender people in the United States.

Methods – Survey

- “Snowball Sampling” - “Invitation to Participate” letter was emailed to transgender organizations/ individuals identified by the researchers
- November 9, 2005 thru February 28, 2006

Sample n= 3474

Methods - Interviews

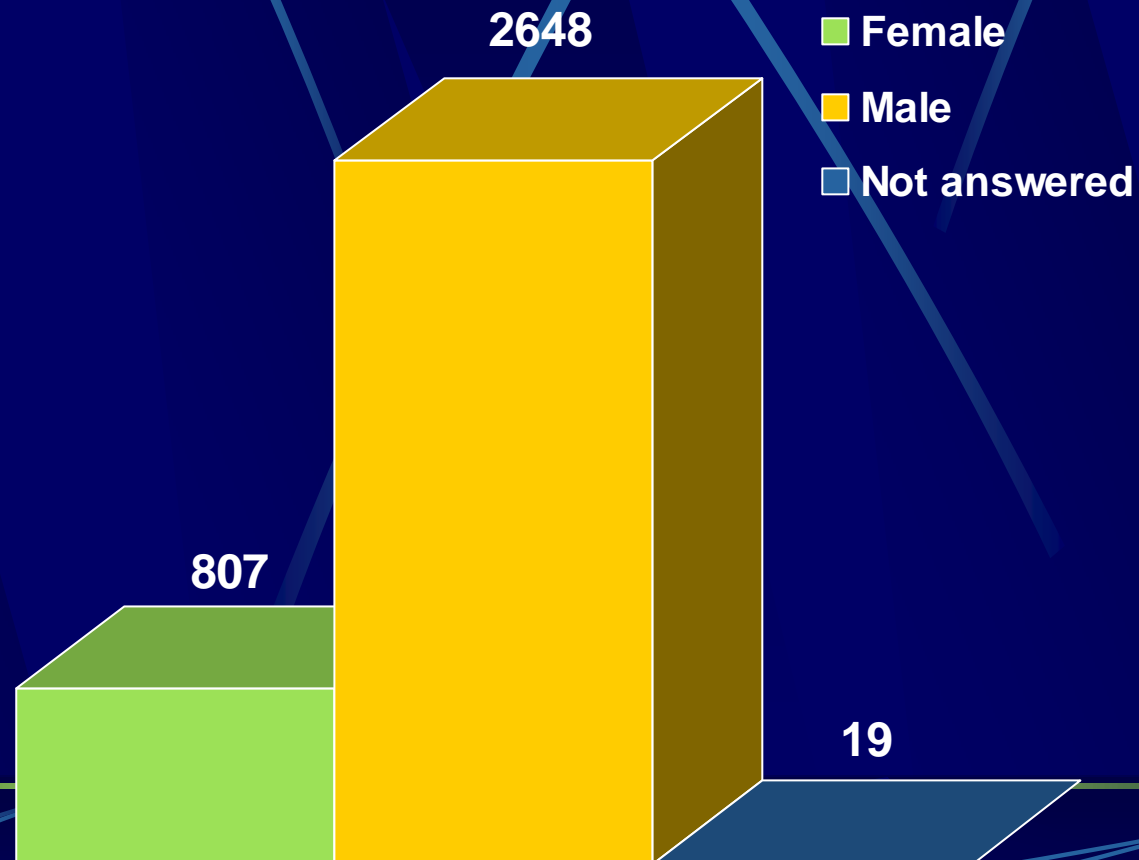
Participants who wanted to be interviewed were directed to researchers

- Sample n= 118 phone
- Sample n= 301 e-mail

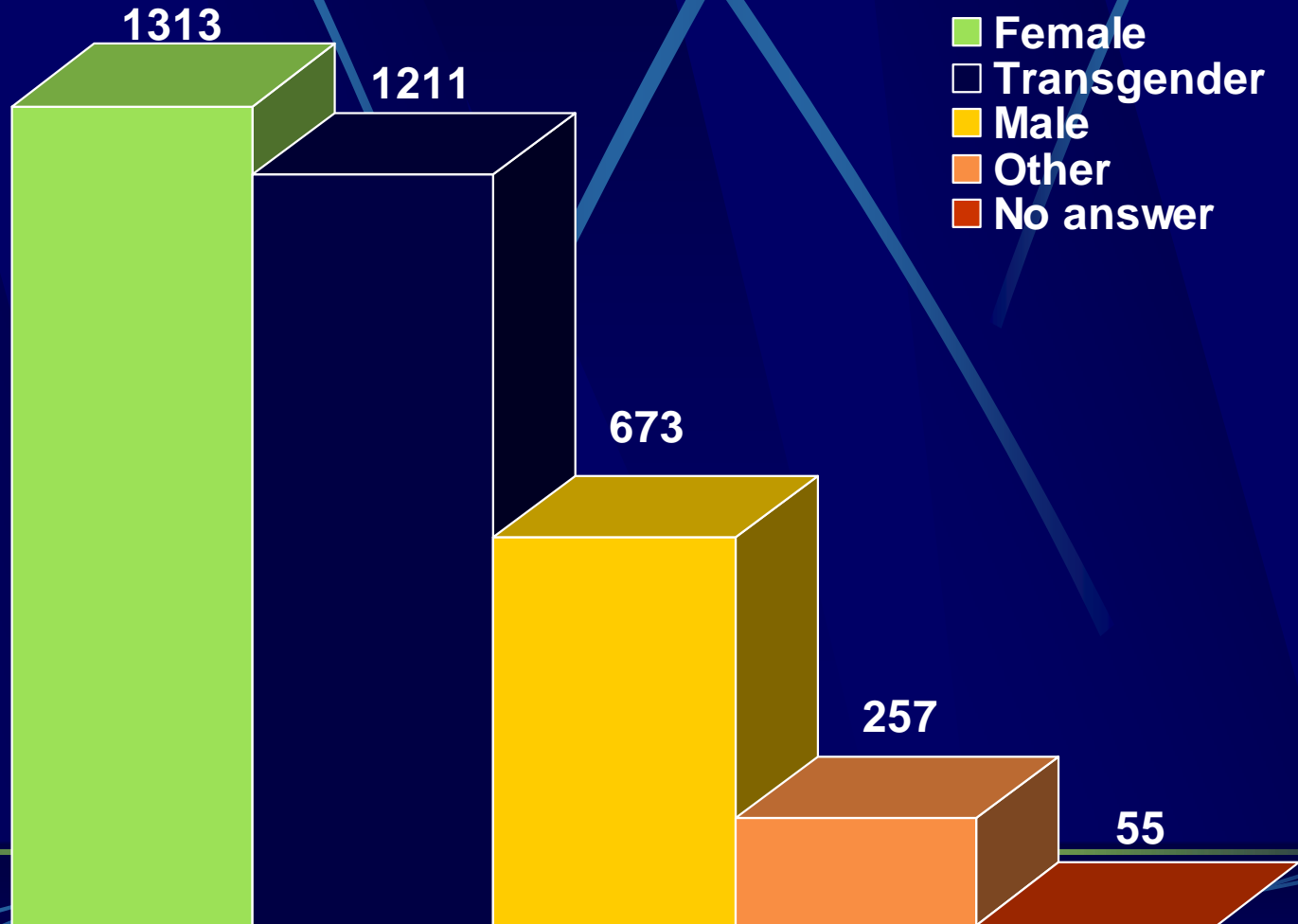


*Demographics of the
Sample*

What was the gender assigned to you at birth?



What is your gender identity?



□ Transsexuals

□ T-girl

□ Crossdressers

The Power of Language

□ Drag kings

□ Drag queens

□ FTM

Transgender is used as an umbrella term for anyone who transgresses or blurs traditional gender categories, inclusive of female-to-male and male-to-female transsexuals, crossdressers, drag queens and kings, genderqueers, gender blenders, two-spirit people, androgyny, and other self-identified gender non-conforming people.

□ MTF

□ Genderqueers

□ Androgynes

□ Bigender

Transgender "please specify" (n=1211)

Transgender Specific Identity by Age	18 and under (n)	19-22 (n)	23-32 (n)	33-42 (n)	53 and over (n)	Total (n)
Male to Female	7	17	39	62	73	198
Crossdresser	1	10	23	59	81	174
Female to Male	21	36	27	11	3	98
Genderqueer	22	31	6			59
Transvestite		3	8	12	11	34
Post-op	2	3	2	8	18	33
Bi-gender					6	6
Intersex		1	2	2		5

Other "please specify" (n=257)

"Other" specific responses	Total (n)
Genderqueer	41
Crossdresser	29
Androgynous/Androgyne	18
Not Sure/Unsure/Don't Know	11
Bi-gender	9
Both Female and Male	8
Queer	6
Questioning	5
Transsexual	5

Listen to the Voices

▽ “I had an epiphany, realizing I had not transitioned from female-to-male, but from female-to-not-female . . . What ‘not-female’ means to me is that I would have ended up happily male if I’d been born and raised male, but since I was raised female, that has affected my world view and brain development such that I cannot be the man I would have been otherwise.” (Reid)

▽ “I used to identify as a dyke very strongly and still do, just in a different way. I was occupying a more female space, but now a more masculine space, but not really as male. I did and still do identify with the idea of genderqueer. I like it better than saying I am a man, which I don’t really feel like I am, but I don’t feel like a woman really either.” (Eric, genderqueer)

Listen to the Voices

▽ “Throughout my life I have felt myself not quite identifying as a young boy, a cross dresser and as a transsexual. The changes came for me as a result of increased self-awareness and life experience. I never really fully felt like I fully “fit” into any of my prior identifications until now. I guess that’s why I kept searching. I transitioned about 2 years ago and I am sooooo much happier now.”
(Sherri, female)

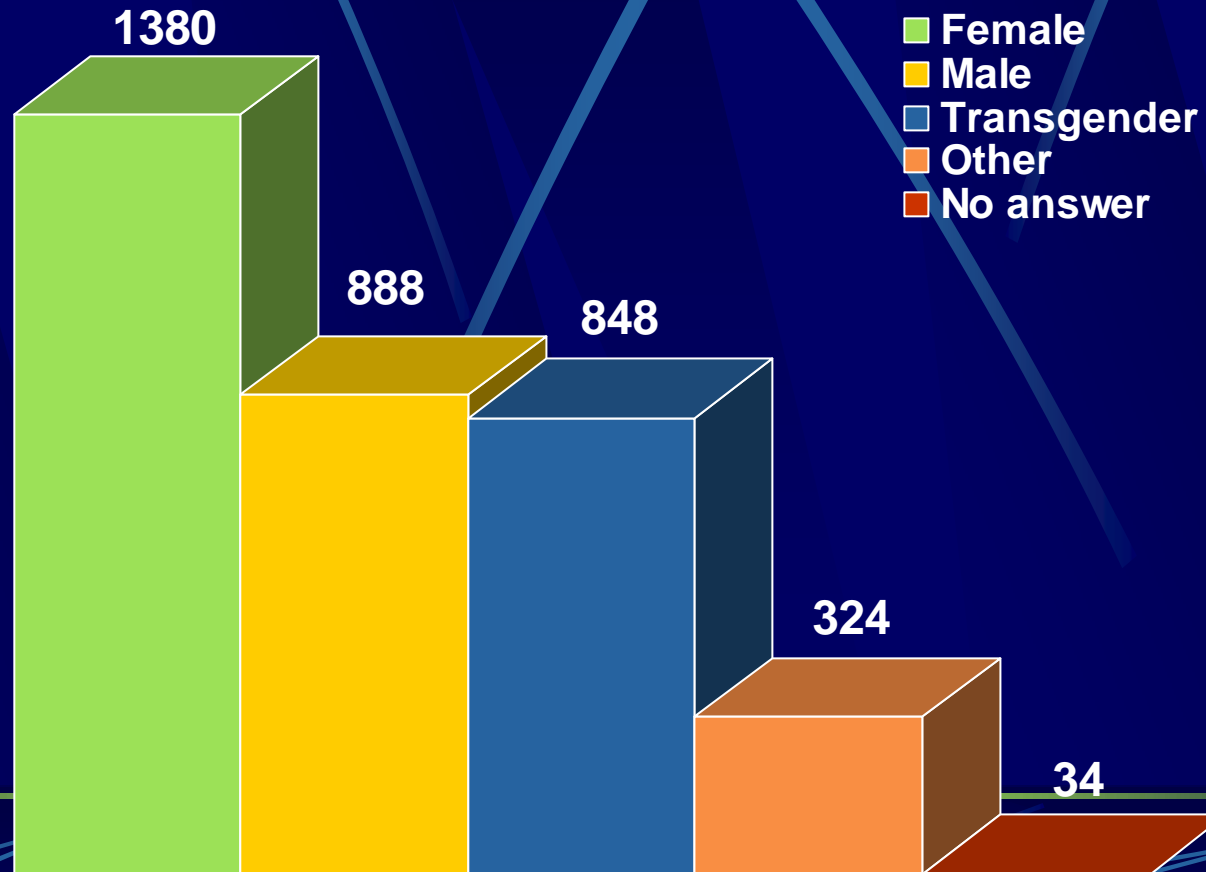
▽ Stephe describes herself as an androgyne or third gender. Ze identifies as both/neither man/woman, or as “in between a transsexual and a crossdresser.”

Variables for Subsequent Analysis

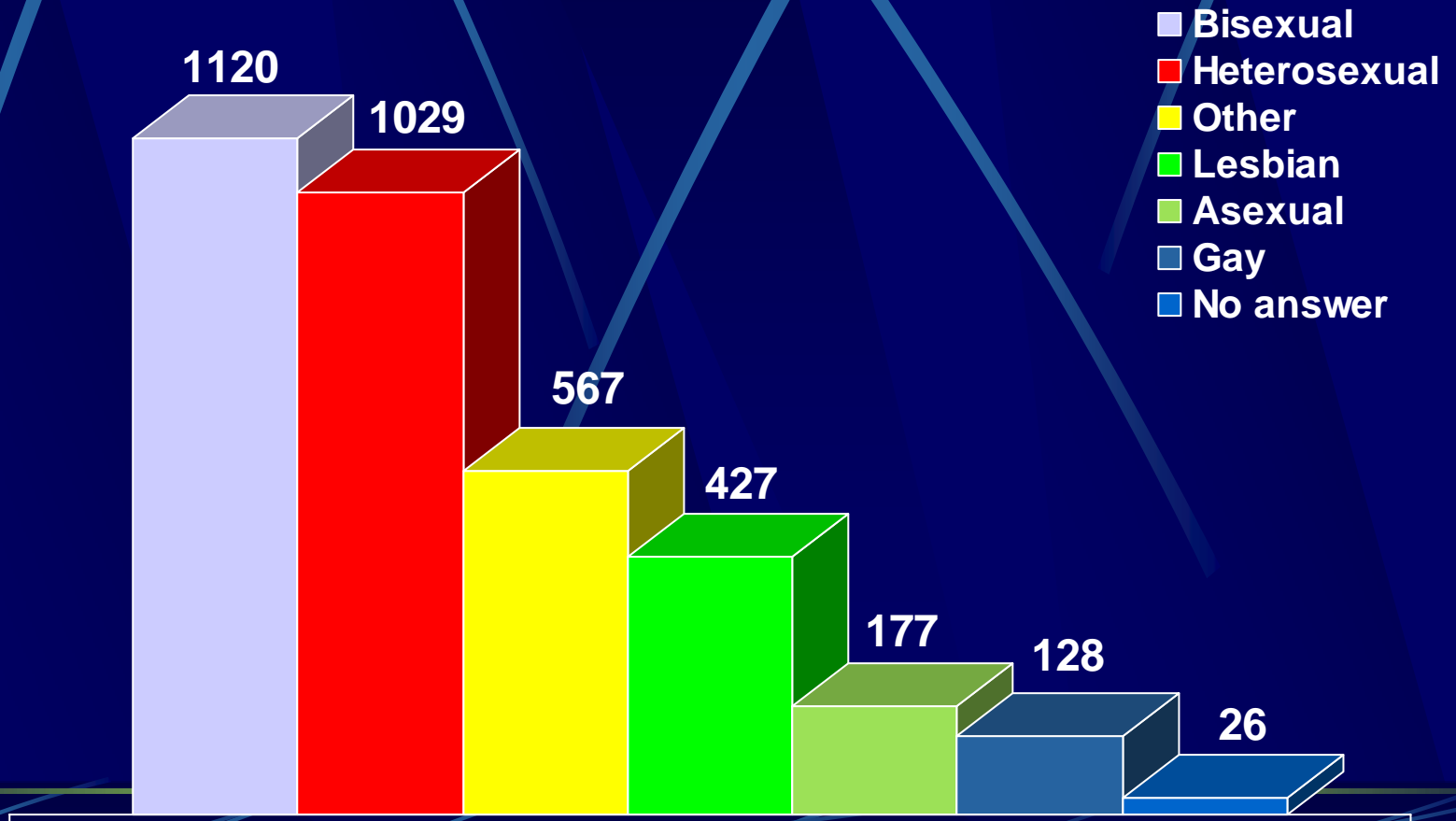
In order to explore the differences among transgender identities based on gender assigned at birth and gender identity, four new variables were created.

- Female-to-Male/Transgender identity (FTMT)
- Female-to-Different Gender identity (FTDG)
- Male-to-Female/Transgender identity (MTFT)
- Male-to-Different Gender identity (MTDG)

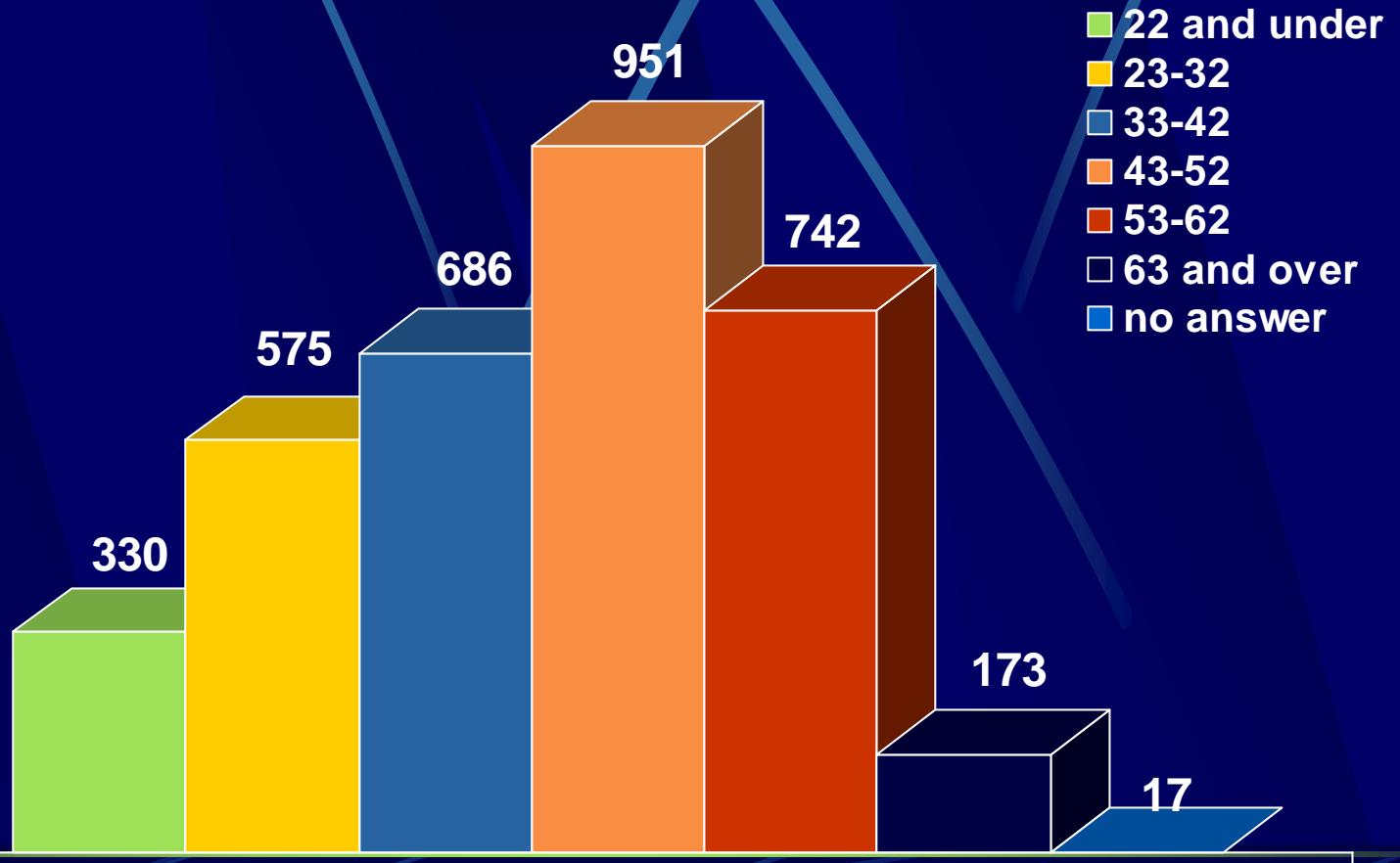
What is your gender expression (n)?



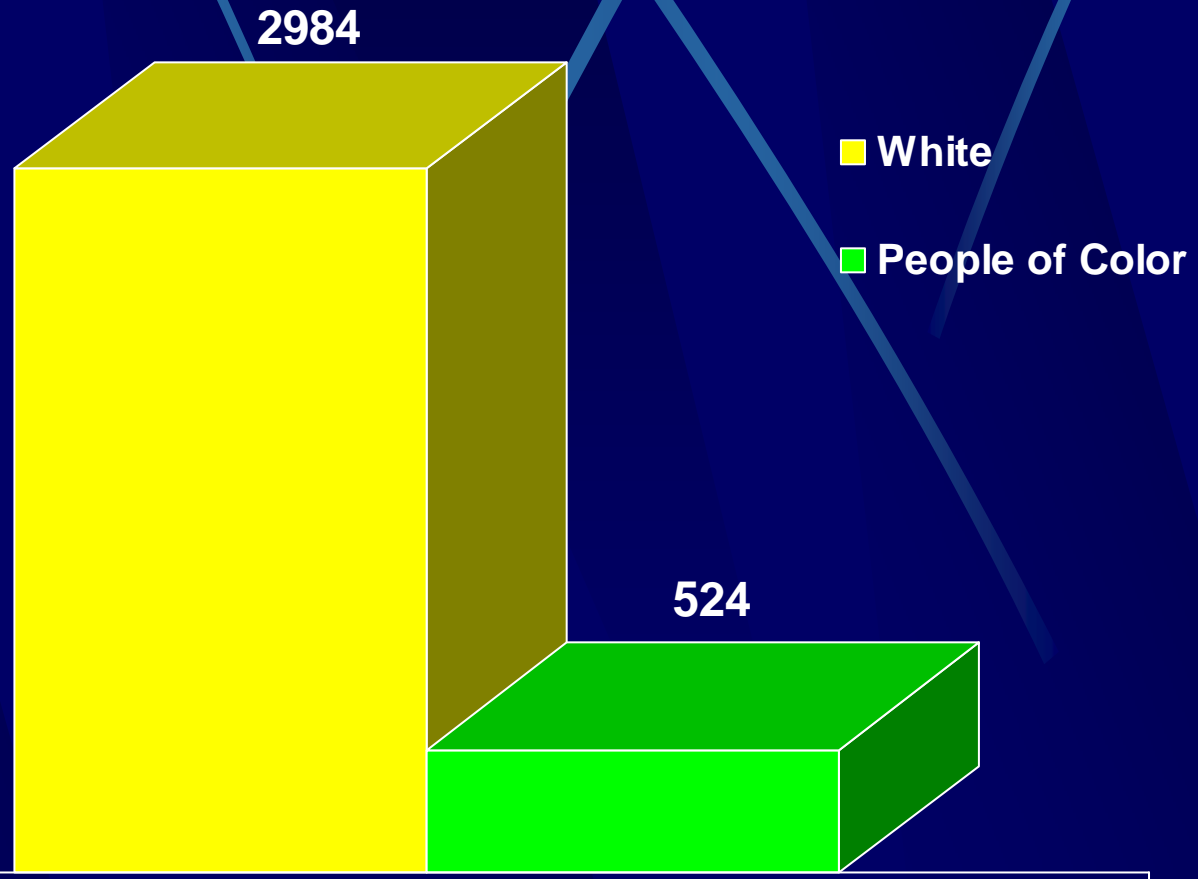
What is your sexual orientation (n)?



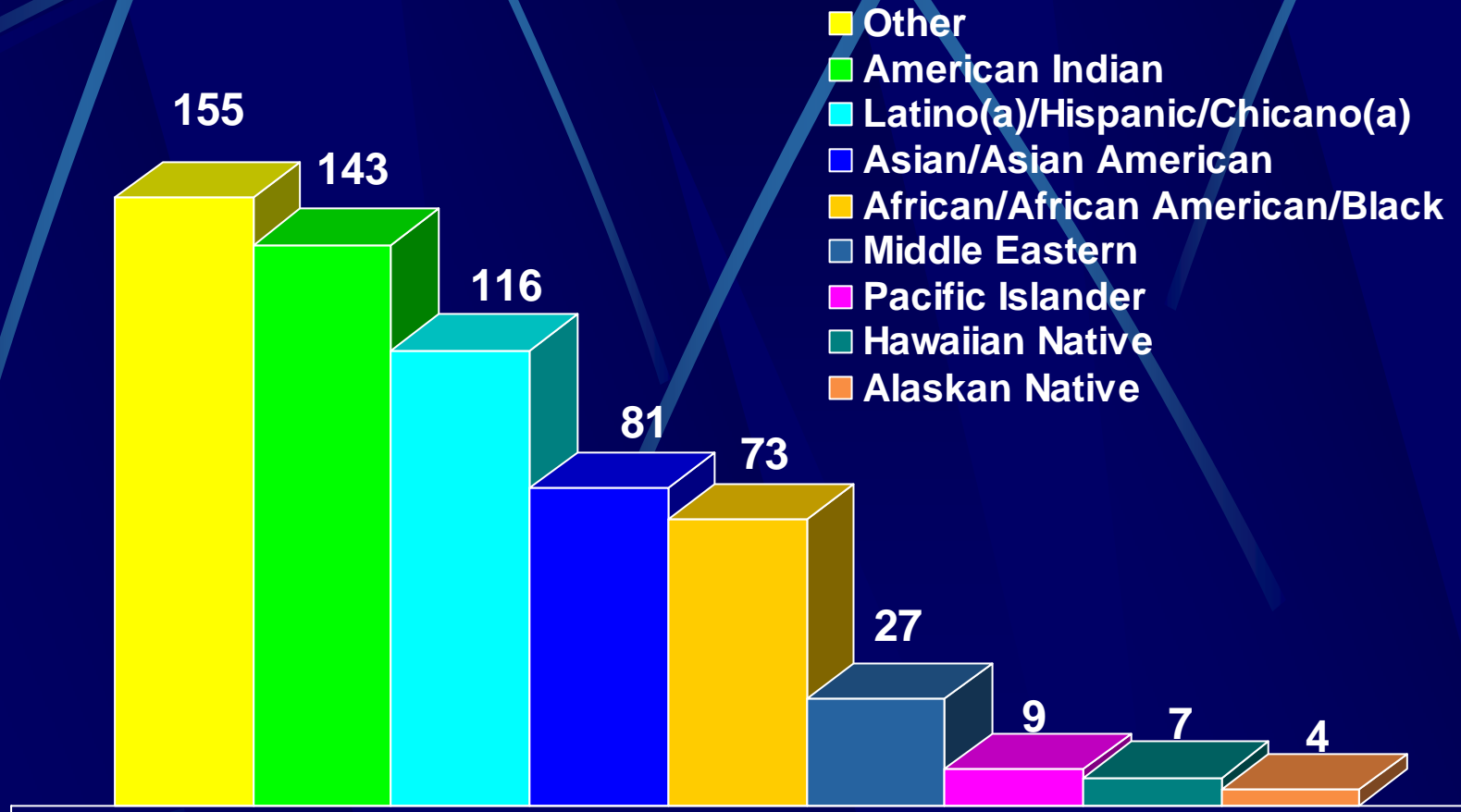
What is your age (n)?



What is your race (n)?

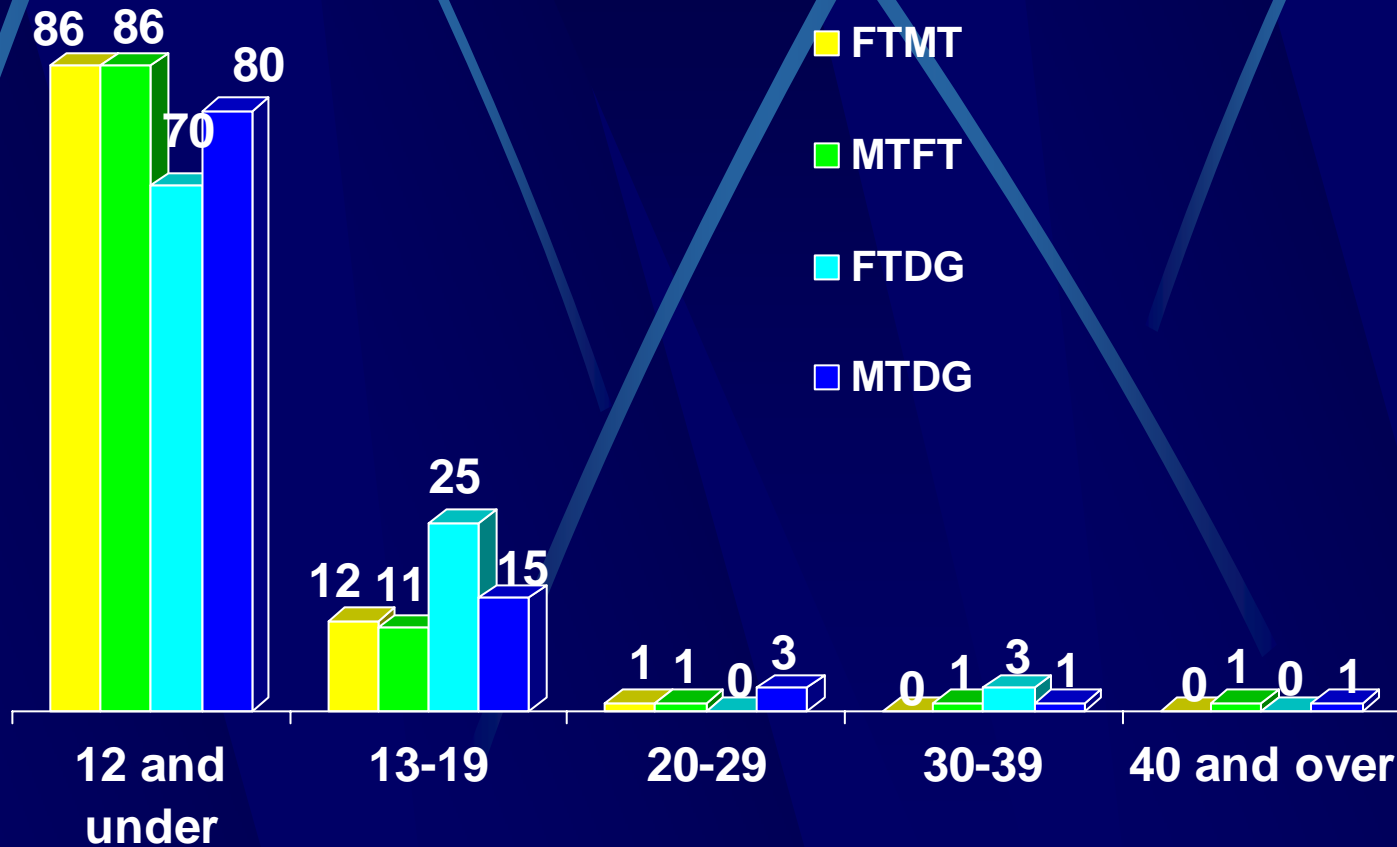


People of Color (n)



*EXPERIENCES WITH
TRANSGENDER
DEVELOPMENT*

When Participants Began To Feel "Different" (%)





A boy, 5, left, who identifies as a girl, plays with a friend in Northern California. He began emulating girls shortly after turning 3.

Listen to the Voices

▽ “From as far back as I can remember, I always believed I was a boy. I became confused when I realized that my body parts were not consistent with the identity I had.” Turner remembers that when he was 3 or 4 years old, he was part of an after-pre-school tap dance recital with a Mickey and Minnie Mouse theme. He thought he would be a Mickey rather than a Minnie. There is a picture of him crestfallen in the Minnie uniform. Turner couldn’t understand why he was put into this costume. It “was not who I was.” (TG)

▽ “My mother had to spank me to stop me from going into the women’s bathroom.” (Tanya, MTF)

Listen to the Voices

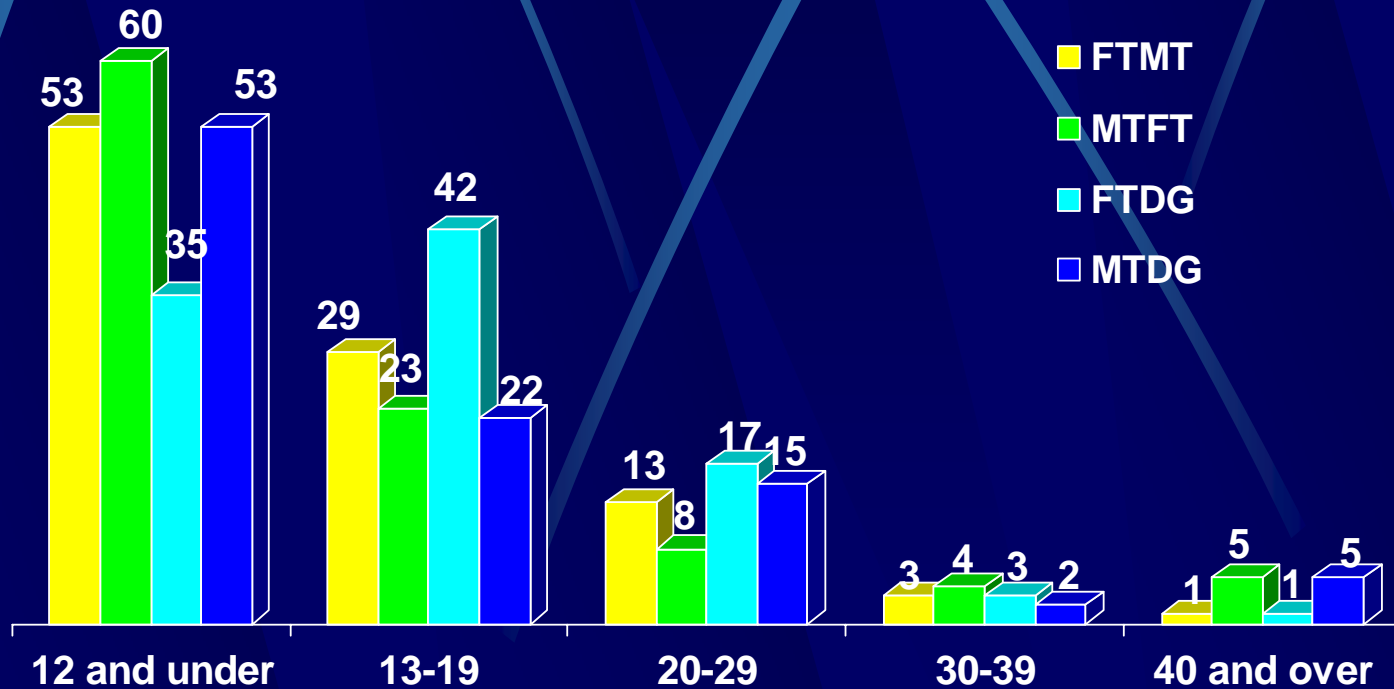
▽ “At about the age of 5, someone told me that there were only two genders and that I was a boy. I was crushed. I could not understand. How could I be a boy? I knew I was a girl or some other variation. I knew that there had to be more.” (Shelby, MTF)

▽ Adrien was masculine as a child, so much so that his mother went to a psychiatrist when he was about two years old to ask if he could be a lesbian. Adrien’s family called him “Patty Hearst” when he was a child because he wanted to play with guns and to dress as a boy. His mother “did her best to counteract it, but she knew it was a hopeless battle” and gave up fighting him. (FTM)

How Respondents Experienced This "Feeling of Difference"

Reactions	Female		Male		Transgender		Other	
	%	(n)	%	(n)	%	(n)	%	(n)
Fearful	43.0	(735)	16.1	(275)	33.4	(570)	7.4	(127)
Marginalized	40.9	(469)	18.6	(213)	31.9	(366)	8.6	(99)
Angry	37.3	(288)	25.1	(194)	29.4	(227)	8.2	(63)
Suicidal	41.4	(275)	22.9	(152)	27.3	(181)	8.4	(56)
Comfortable	34.1	(193)	19.4	(110)	38.7	(219)	7.8	(44)
Curious	31.9	(585)	19.5	(358)	39.9	(732)	8.5	(156)

When Participants Began to Feel "Uncertain" About Their Gender Identity (%)



Listen to the Voices

▽ Kody didn't have genderqueer role models, so didn't realize at first that he could identify outside of a gender binary. He began to use the traditional transsexual rhetoric of having been in the “wrong body,” and saw himself as boyish.

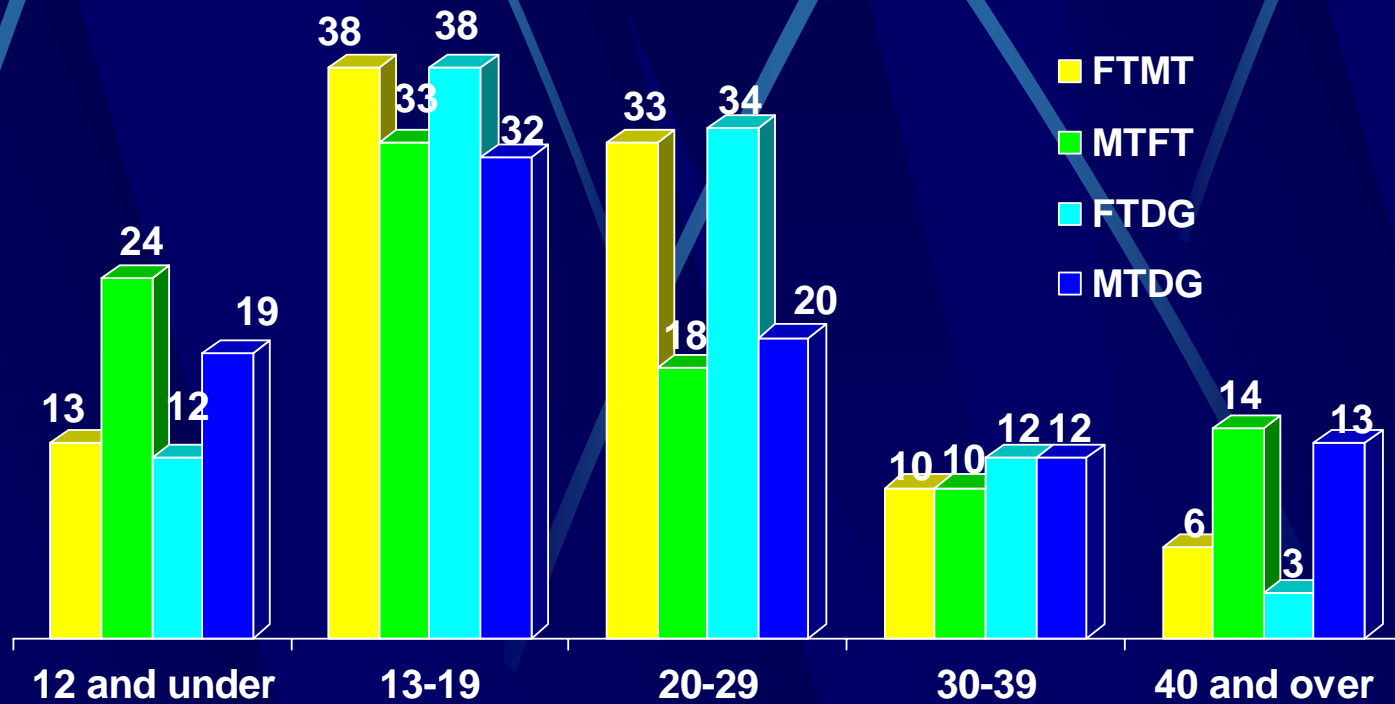
▽ Leslie believed that being a “transvestite” meant that you were gay, so at first thought that deep down she must be gay. But realizing that she was attracted to women, she began to think that she wasn't an “authentic” trans person. She asked herself, “So what am I?”

Listen to the Voices

▽ Pat first came out as a butch lesbian, as it was the “identity available” to him. It wasn’t until several decades later, when he was in his 60s, that he learned about FTMs and transitioned.

▽ Nathan did not know that it was possible for him to become outwardly male. He knew about MTFs, but not FTMs.

When Participants Began to Think They Might Be "Transgender" (%)



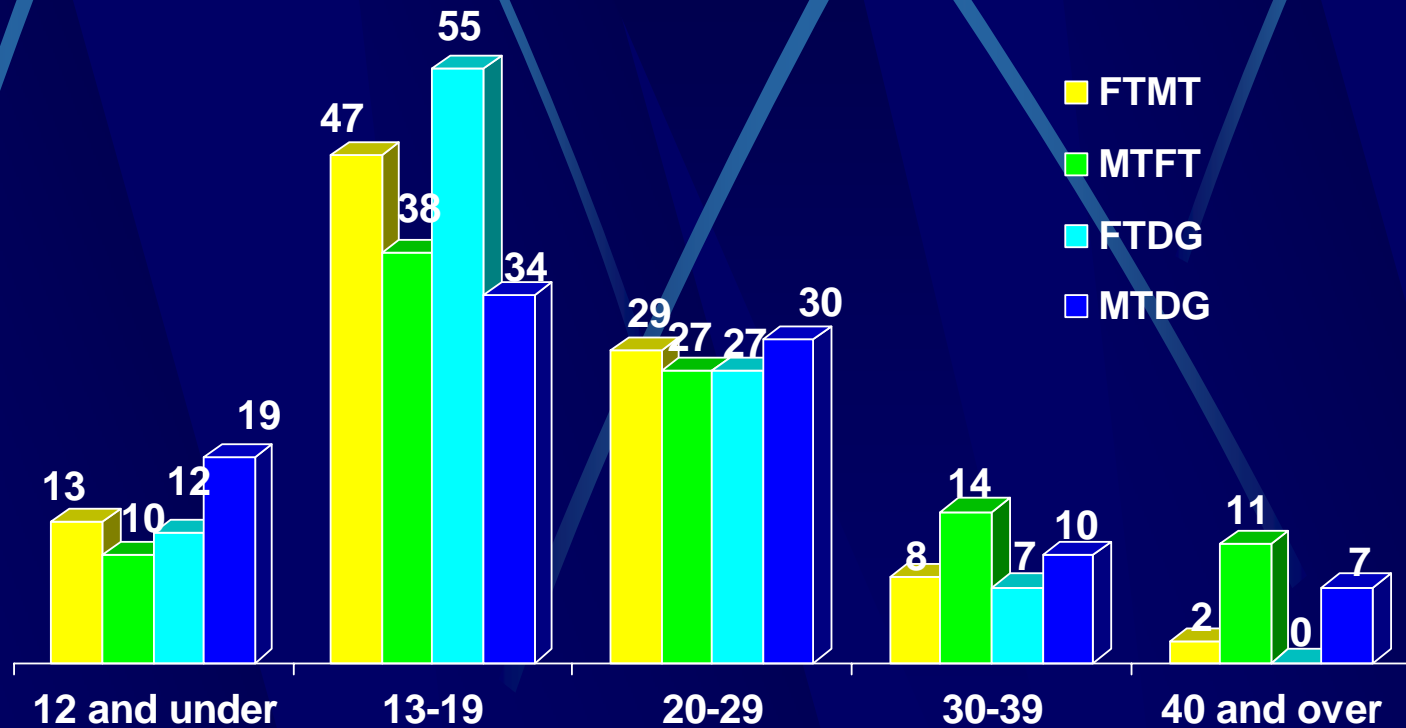
Reactions When Respondents Thought They Might be Transgender

Reactions	Female		Male		Transgender		Other	
	%	(n)	%	(n)	%	(n)	%	(n)
Fearful	41.8	(742)	18.2	(324)	32.8	(582)	7.0	(125)
Marginalized	41.2	(316)	15.6	(120)	34.8	(267)	8.3	(64)
Angry	45.4	(279)	19.7	(121)	26.8	(165)	7.8	(48)
Suicidal	50.1	(268)	17.9	(96)	25.6	(137)	6.2	(33)
Comfortable	34.3	(316)	20.0	(184)	38.8	(358)	6.7	(62)
Curious	32.6	(586)	19.7	(354)	39.2	(703)	8.4	(150)

"Other" Reactions (n=660)

relief	184
confused	122
excited	47
happy	44
depressed	37
ashamed	32
denial	27
hopeful	25
scared	22
sad	22
anxious	20
frustrated	18
hopeless	16
uncertain	15
guilty	15
uncomfortable	14

When Participants Began to Know that They Were Not Alone (%)

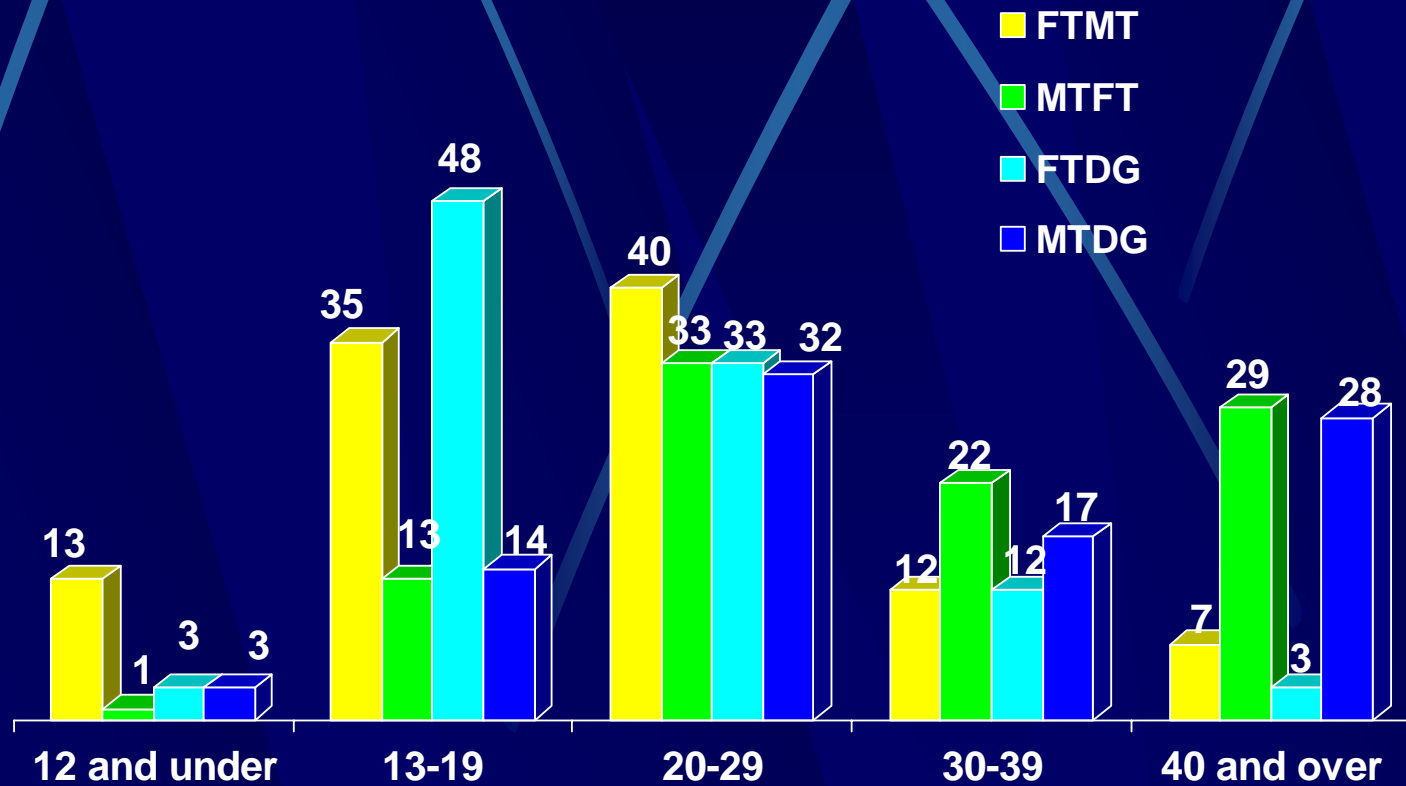


Listen to the Voices

▽ As an early teenager, Amy did research in the stacks of the library, making sure that no one saw her. She “felt very alone.” It was “a hopeless situation back then” [in the 1950s], with little material available on transsexuality and it being highly stigmatized. When the Internet developed, Amy started to talk to people online and realized that others were transitioning in their 50s. It was “the first time that [she] didn’t feel alone.” (MTF)

▽ Jennifer had a better understanding of herself after seeing a *Donahue* show on transsexuality when she was about 12 years old. Until she saw the program, Jennifer “felt like [she] was the only one.”

When Participants Met Another Transgender Person (%)



Listen to the Voices

- ▽ In 1999, Burton met an FTM, who was the friend of a friend, for the first time, and his “whole world was blown apart.” Burton “didn’t know you could be trans and be happy.”
- ▽ “Without the Internet, I have no idea where I’d be in this process. Undoubtedly, still in hiding.” (Leigh, CD)
- ▽ Aaron had no idea what transgender was before he met Leslie Feinberg. Seeing hir, Aaron realized “Oh, this is what it is about,” but also thought, “Oh, my God, I am in trouble.” He saw a “reflection of [him]self for the first time.”

Listen to the Voices

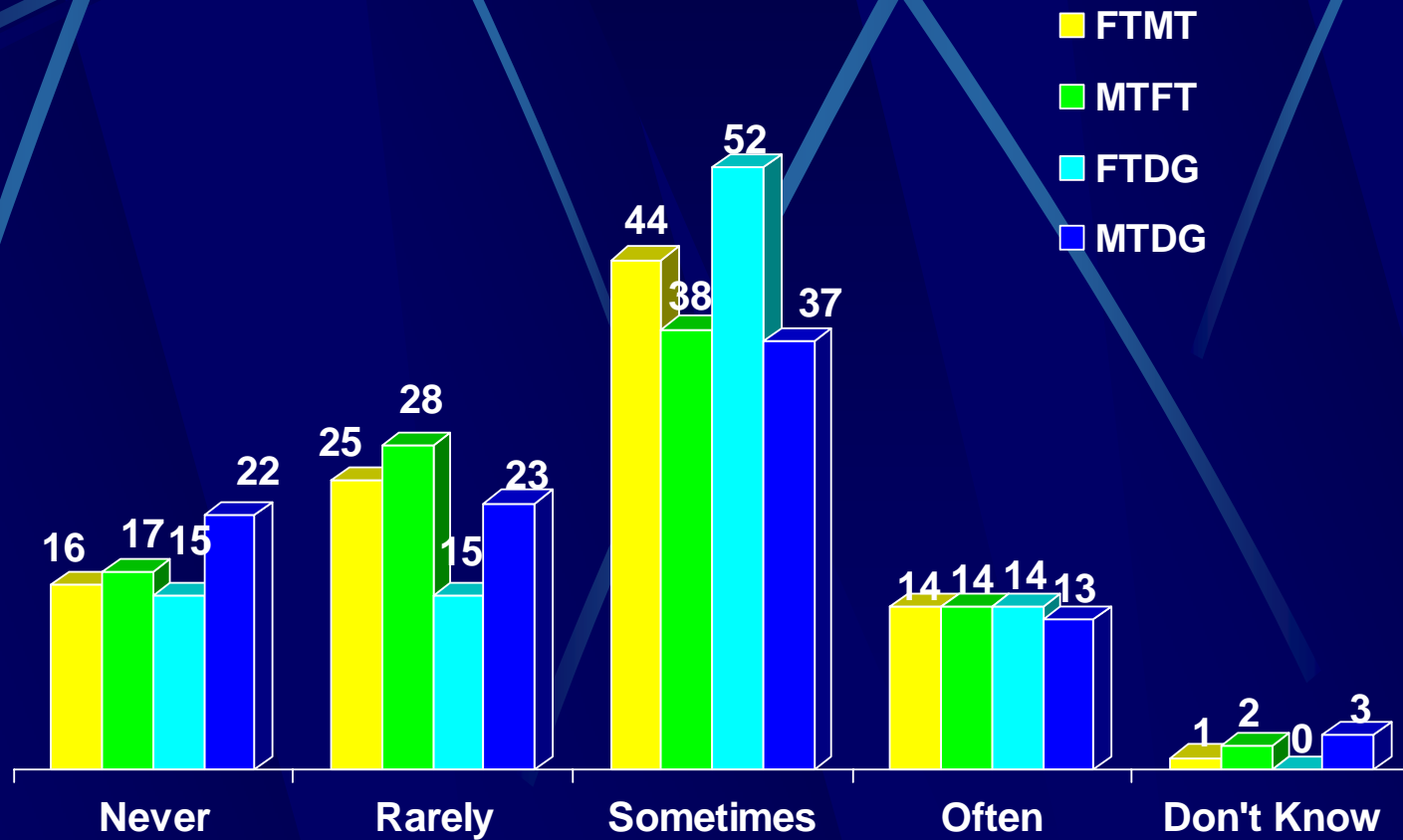
▽ “I grew up at a time before there was a name for how I felt. Transgender, genderqueer ... these terms didn’t exist – at least not as we know them now. There were no resources – like the Internet – which I could consult to help me cope with how I felt. I was very much alone with my ‘dark secrets’ and it was not until I went online in 1997 that I realized how un-alone I was.” (Donna L, CD)

▽ At about 12 or 13 years old, Liz came across Christine Jorgensen’s autobiography in the library. She recalls thinking, “wow, that’s my story.” She finally had a name for what she was feeling and “knew [she] wasn’t the only person in the world who felt this way.”

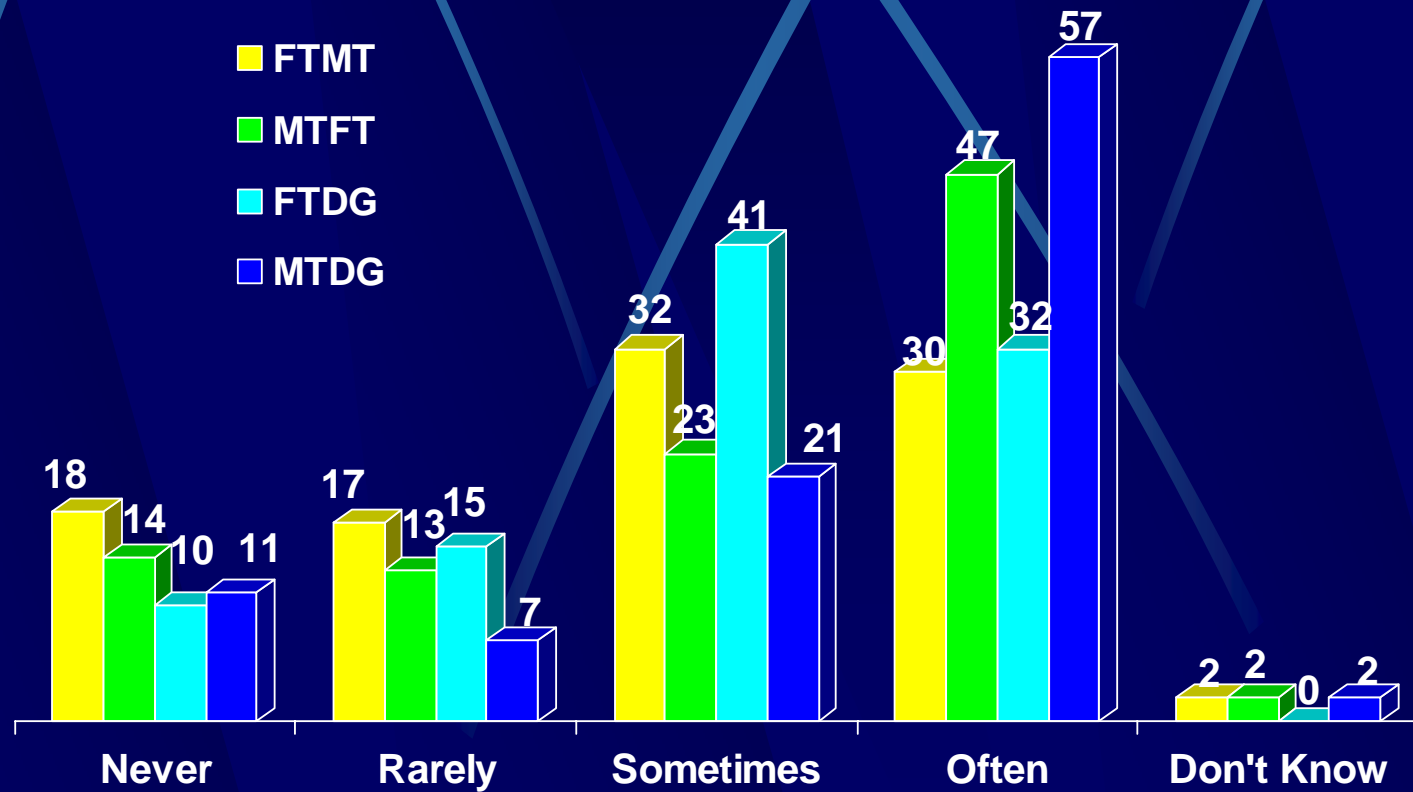
CLIMATE FOR TRANSGENDER PEOPLE

PERSONAL
EXPERIENCES AND
PERCEPTIONS

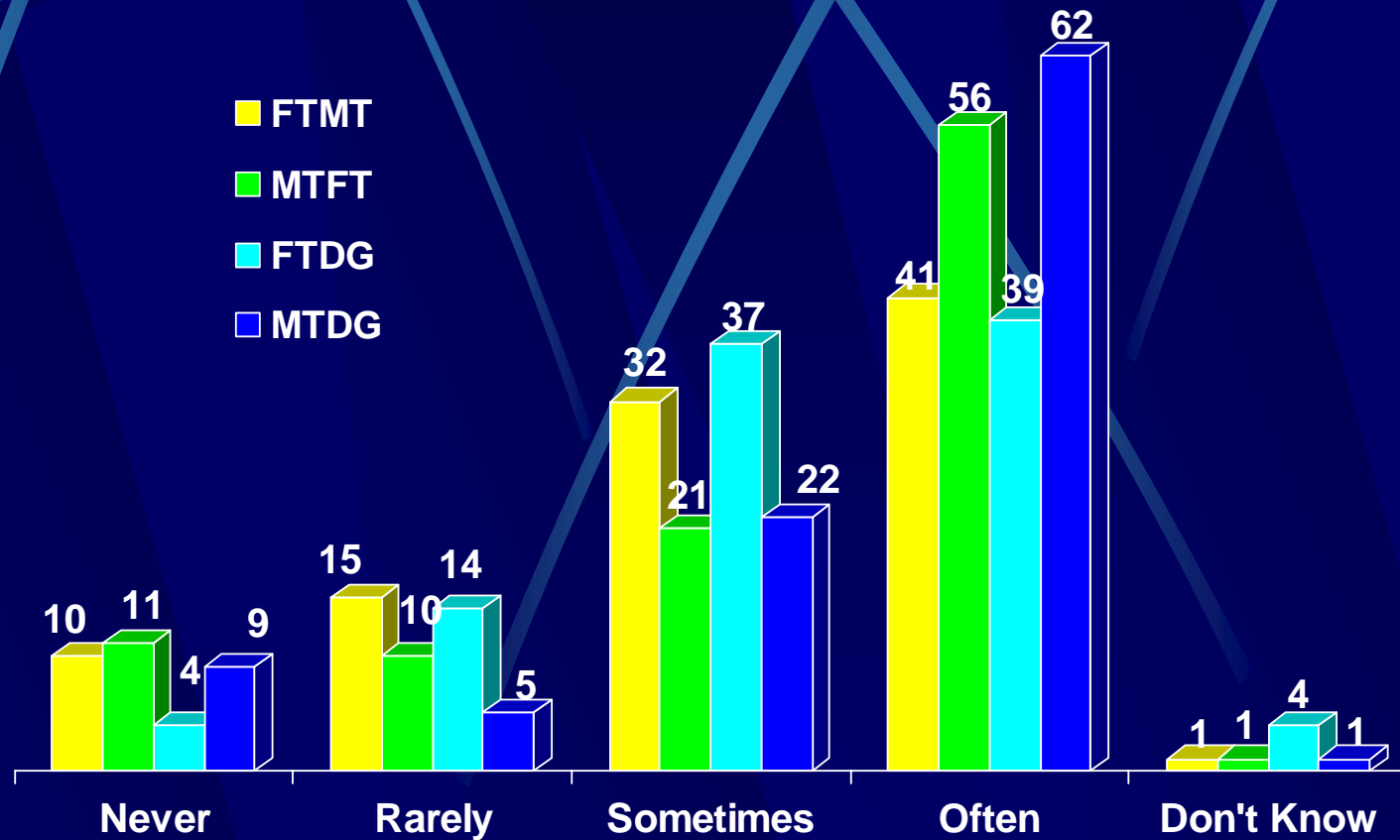
Feared for Physical Safety (%)



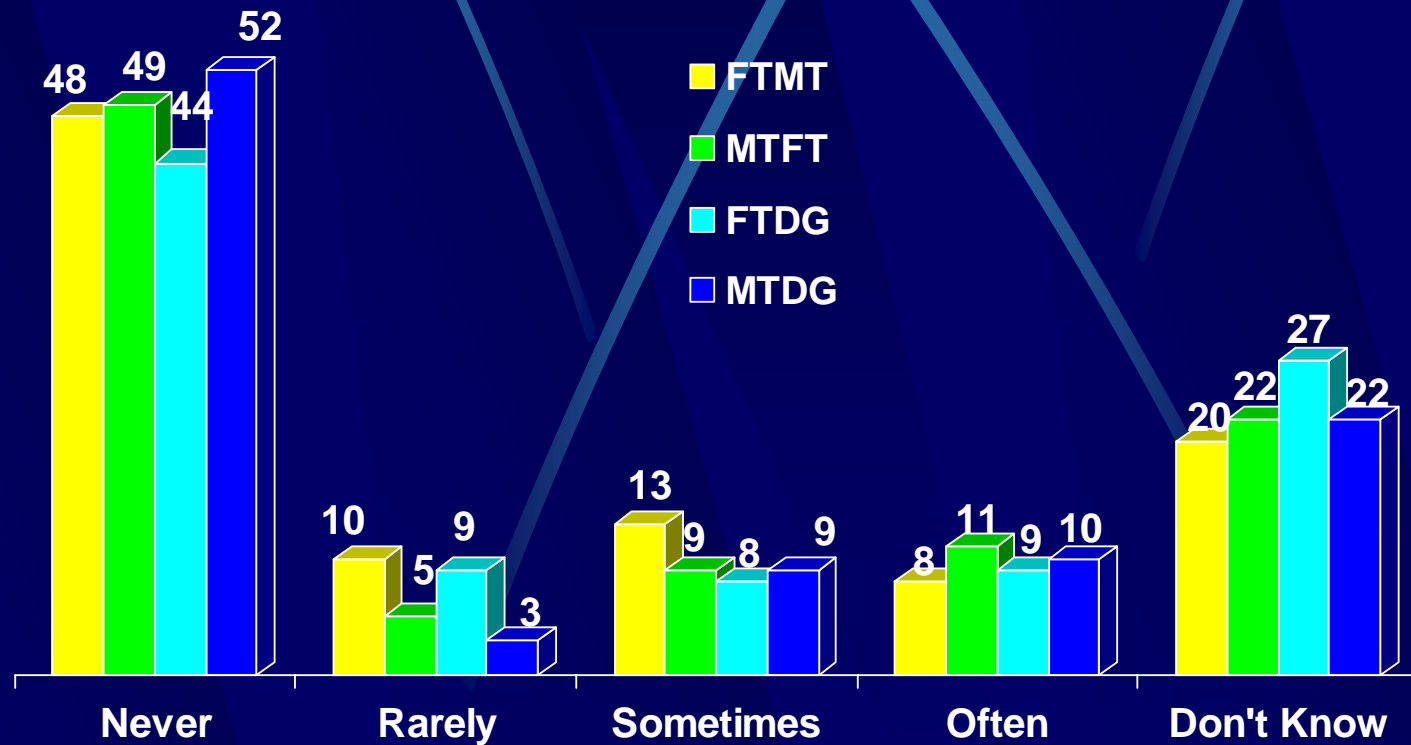
Concealed Gender Identity/Expression (%)



Avoided Disclosing Gender Identity/Expression (%)



Denied Employment/Advancement/Raise by Gender Identity (%)



Listen to the Voices

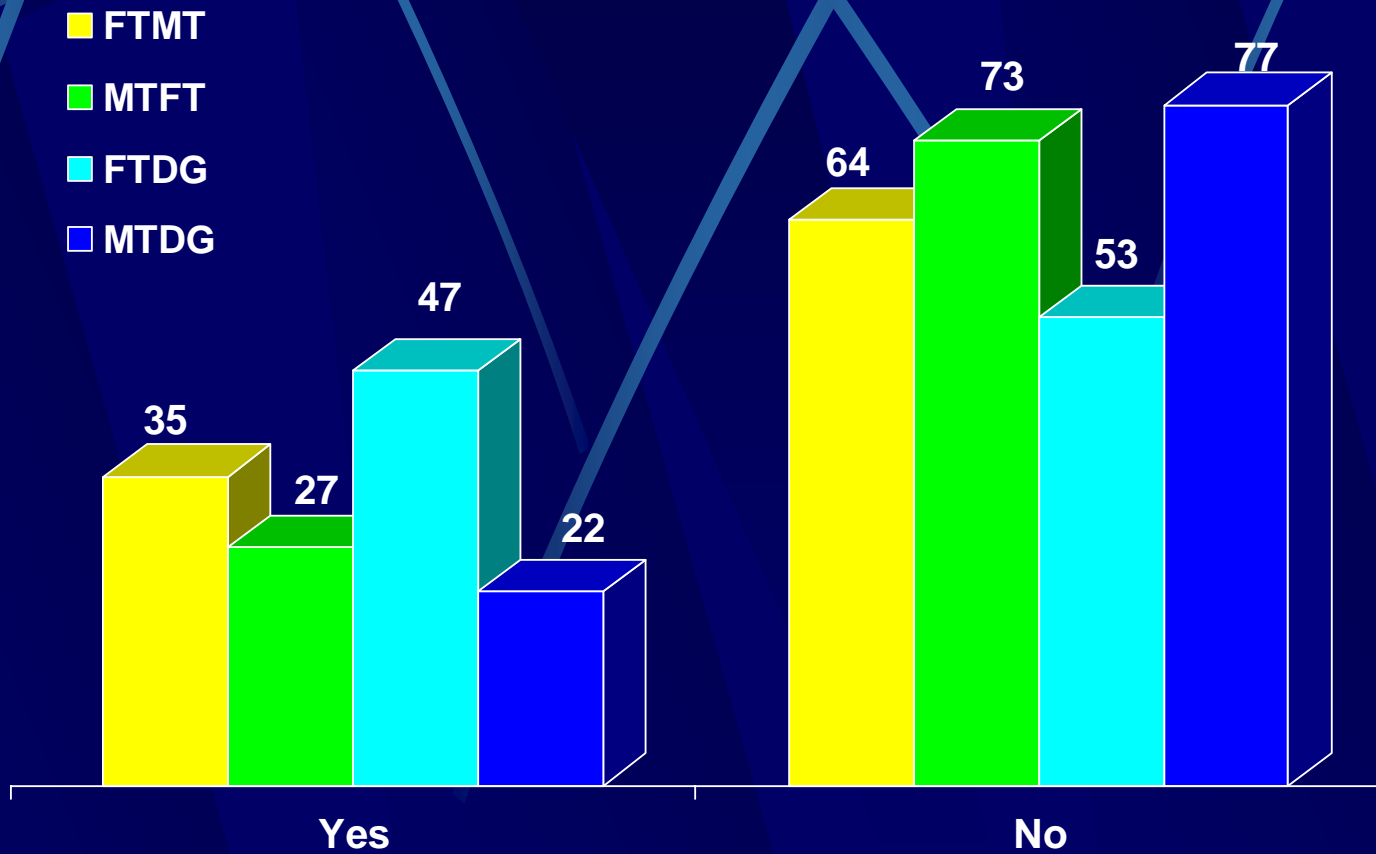
- ▽ Rhiannon has an entry-level customer service job and has been passed over for promotion, she believes, because of transphobia. (MTF)
- ▽ Lynn was fired from two jobs when she told them that she was transitioning and hasn't been able to find work since. (MTF)
- ▽ Most people these days, including most people at Alicyn's workplace, don't know about her past transsexual life. (MTF)
- ▽ Donna is “out at work by action, not word,” in that ze dresses wearing women's casual clothing, but has only explained hir gender expression to a few friends. Ze hasn't received any negative reactions, but has experienced a few second looks (CD).

Listen to the Voices

▽ Co-workers say that Carol is even easier to work with now, as she seems much happier. People have responded that she “makes a much better woman than a man” because she seems “more normal” as a woman. Her female co-workers have been especially supportive. (MTF)

▽ Lincoln and his wife were homeless for about a year. He transitioned on the job and had to quit because he was given such a rough time and his union offered no support. Lincoln’s wife then lost her job. Today, Lincoln works through a temp agency, who knows he is trans and has been very supportive. (FTM)

Been the Victim of Harassment (%)



Forms of Harassment

Forms	Total % (n)
Derogatory Remarks	24.0 (838)
Verbal Harassment	16.4 (574)
Pressure to be Silent	9.5 (333)
Threats of Physical Violence	7.2 (252)
Denial of Services	7.0 (245)
Threats to Expose Gender ID	6.0 (210)
Other	5.4 (189)
Written Comments	3.8 (132)
Physical Property Damaged	2.9 (103)
Anti-LGBT Graffiti	2.3 (81)
Physical Assault	2.3 (80)

Location of Harassment

Location	Total % (n)
In a Public Space	19.7 (692)
In the Workplace	9.1 (319)
Other	7.8 (273)
At an LGBT Event	2.8 (97)

Source of Harassment

Source	Total % (n)
Other	13.4 (470)
Don't Know	8.1 (285)
Colleague/Co-Worker	7.4 (258)
Family Member	5.8 (203)
Supervisor/Manager/Boss	4.5 (158)
Health-Care Professional	3.8 (135)
Police	2.7 (95)

Reaction to Harassment

Reactions	Total
	% (n)
I Felt Embarrassed	13.1 (460)
I Told a Friend	11.7 (412)
I Avoided the Person	11.2 (393)
I Left the Situation Immediately	10.5 (368)
I Ignored It	9.7 (339)
I Confronted the Harasser at the Time	6.6 (231)
Not Described Above	6.5 (228)
I Didn't Know to Whom to Go	6.1 (215)
I Made a Complaint	5.9 (208)
I Didn't Report It	5.4 (188)
I Confronted the Harasser Later	3.0 (105)

Listen to the Voices

▽ Sandy had been in combat, but felt more afraid to walk out her door crossdressed for the first time. When Sandy did start going out, it “was almost a disappointment that [she] didn’t get anybody’s attention.”

▽ “My wife has seen me en femme on a few occasions. I don’t force the issue because she needs to accept my femininity on her own terms and at her own pace. . . Just a few weeks ago we had a sort of a ‘girls’ day.’ . . . So there was no earth-shattering revelation, and I didn’t wear a dress, a bra, or anything else, but I was made up and in my wig, and I was Tina for the night. It was not erotic or sensual, but it was warm and affectionate.” (Tina)

Listen to the Voices

▽ “[D]ating post-transition has been very problematic for me. I prefer dating women who already know my gender history, but there is a bit of a dirth of trans-savvy femmes in [my city]. I’m pretty outgoing in general, but when it comes to dating, I am very shy, and really struggle with the whole disclosure issue. More often than not, I pass up potential dates with straight women just so I don’t have to deal with it.” (Michael, FTM)

▽ Robbi was the first licensed Grateful Dead photographer. Deadheads are very accepting of “alternative lifestyles,” but are “ambivalent about gender roles.” She is now out to the Dead organization, but wasn’t out to anyone before her 50s. (MTF)

Student Affairs Responses

Beyond policy,
bathrooms, and forms

Understand Salient Issues

- Lack of adequate support systems
- Family issues or impact of trans identity on families
- Social and emotional stressors via pervasive pattern of discrimination and prejudice; society that is generally not accepting of gender variant behavior
- Medical concerns (e.g., hormone administration, aesthetic surgery, and SRS)
- Career issues (e.g, “coming out”)

Health Issues

- Mood disorders, especially depression
 - 71% (n = 544) of participants from the current trans project indicated that they have experienced mild, moderate or severe depression that substantially affected a major life activity.
- Suicide
 - 50-88% of trans youth have considered or attempted suicide
- Anxiety disorders
 - 60% of transgender individuals within the U.S. have experienced some sort of harassment or violence, 37% some form of economic discrimination

Health Issues

Eating disorders

- Estrangement from the body can cause trans individuals to experience heightened body dissatisfaction and excessive concern with appearance

Substance abuse disorders

- Risk factors: street lifestyle, lack of education and job opportunities, and low-self esteem

Questions to ask

- How do you respond to transgender people and the transgender community?
- When considering the design of LGBT student support initiatives, what is the nature of the university's political and sociohistorical contexts and how do these influence current levels of LGBT student "outness" and visibility?
- Given political and sociohistorical contexts, how supportive will institutional leadership be of implementing a range of LGBT student support initiatives?
- Do you advocate for political, social and economic rights for transgender people?
- If you teach, how much transgender material do you include in your coursework?

Questions to ask

- The student expression of sexual orientation and gender identity at a small, private, politically liberal institution may be very different from that at a large public land-grant institution with a conservative board of regents.
- What type of strategic advocacy for LGBT student support initiatives is the best match to secure institutional support?
- Are advocacy strategies selected in collaboration with LGBT students in a manner that empowers identity construction and expression?

Become "Trans-affirmative" or "Trans positive"

- Examine your own attitudes toward transgender people
- Learn the importance of language
- Learn about salient issues for working with transgender students
- Develop skills to work with transgender students

Develop Skills

- Adopt a student-centered approach to let the student tell hir story
 - listening, empathy, and safe environment
- Gain knowledge of referral resources and consultation at the local, state and national levels
 - hormonal treatment & surgical reassignment procedures
 - support systems for HIV prevention, sexual assault prevention (especially for M-T-F clients), and experiences with discrimination

Develop Skills

- Help students externalize transphobia
 - Help alleviate feelings of shame, isolation, and secrecy
- Assist students in hir adjustment to hir new gender, OR affirm a unique transgender identity
- Be aware that not all transgender people have the same experiences and consciousness about gender identity and the transgender movement

Seek out special training for working with transgender individuals (e.g., conference, workshops)

Curricular Recommendations

- Use innovative ways to educate students
- Videos that explore the experiences of transgender people and the transgender movement
- Invite transgender speakers and transgender panel
- Recommend books
 - ✓ *My Gender Workbook: How to Become a Real Man, a Real Woman, the Real You, or Something Else Entirely* (Kate Bornstein)
 - ✓ *Trans-Sister Radio* (Chris Bohjalian)
 - ✓ *Dear Sir or Madam* (Mark Rees)
- Facilitate discussions on transgender issues
- Assign cultural immersion activities where students interview transgender individuals or visit transgender organizations
- Others?

Our Role In Affirming Transgender Lives

- By valuing transgender identities as healthy and positive, albeit socially stigmatized, the place of student affairs professionals becomes to challenge socially discriminatory practices and to replace prejudicial attitudes with an understanding of different gender experiences
- Instead of pathologizing transgender experiences as “gender identity disorder,” student affairs professionals can offer positive models of non-traditional genders and support students in developing a gender expression that feels comfortable to them

Questions...?



Last Thoughts

“Resistance begins with people confronting pain, whether it’s theirs or somebody else’s, and wanting to do something to change it”

--- bell hooks, “Yearning”

Thank You!

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Power Point presentation available at
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