

January 01, 2011

## Gender identity: an examination of fears concerning reporting

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### Recommended Citation

Lepak, Jamie Lynn, "Gender identity: an examination of fears concerning reporting" (2011). *Criminal Justice Master's Theses*. Paper 1.  
<http://hdl.handle.net/2047/d20001150>

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GENDER IDENTITY: AN EXAMINATION OF FEARS  
CONCERNING REPORTING

A thesis presented by  
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to  
The Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master in Criminal Justice

In the field of  
Criminology and Criminal Justice

Northeastern University

Boston, Massachusetts

August, 2011

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## ABSTRACT

The study explores qualitatively the fears that transgender and gender non-conforming college students have about reporting victimization to the police. This study uses a reverse social distance ideology to account for the space between transgender individuals and their treatment in society. This distance (often felt through discrimination and victimization) may be a predictor in transgender and gender non-conforming students not reporting victimization to the police or other service agencies. Study participants were recruited from nine colleges in a Northeast city for interviews to discuss reporting and help seeking behaviors. The findings suggest that social distance factors into students' perceptions of the police as well as their reporting and help-seeking habits.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to begin by thanking my beautiful family. Without your continued support, I would not be inspired to live vibrantly and dream creatively. Your love has guided me through all of life's lessons. Thank you for being my first "teachers."

Beth and Becky, when I left my home six years ago, I never imagined I would find another place to call home. Your constant love, dedication, and encouragement have shaped who I am today. Thank you all for always standing by me and loving me as your own daughter.

Tracey, without your guidance at such a young age, I may not be where I am today. You taught me to believe in myself and most importantly, to face challenges bravely. Thank you for being a mentor and a friend. I want to thank all my other friends: Aly, Clayton, Danielle, Debbie, Kaylyn, Kristin, Laura, Michelle, Molly, and Rebecca. Your words, support, and laughter have helped me through this process. There are parts of each of you that fill my spirit with liveliness, hope, and true companionship. I love you all deeply.

Lastly, I would like to thank my committee, Amy, Jack, and Kevin. Your support and leadership made this project what it is. Thank you for standing by me, supporting my work, and teaching me how to be a better researcher.

You all have touched my life in different ways, and this work is a reflection of what I hope I can continue to contribute to the criminal justice field. Although this work is limited in findings, the underlying belief in justice and equality for all people is something I hope to see protected and accepted in my lifetime. With all of you by my side, I know we can make this world a better, safer, and more accepting place. Thank you for your continued support and love.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Over the last 20 years, there has been an increase in research on hate crimes, especially those focusing on lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) people. The transgender community has not been well represented in hate crime research until recently. Transgender and gender non-conforming individuals face discrimination and are subject to verbal victimization at a higher rate than lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) people (Rankin, 2003; Sousa, 2001; Stotzer, 2009). Hate motivated violence against the transgender community is often a reflection of the victim not complying with gender specific and/or accepted roles (Witten & Eyler, 1999). Violence can come from many different actors and usually starts in childhood for many transgender and gender non-conforming people; this often leaves transgender victims feeling as if they have nowhere to turn if they are victimized (Stotzer, 2009).

The present study explores qualitatively the fears that transgender and gender non-conforming college students have about reporting victimization to the police and investigates the ways in which transgender and gender non-conforming victims would seek help. This study will be using a “reverse” social distance ideology to account for the space between transgender individuals and their treatment in society. This distance (often felt through discrimination and violence) may be a predictor in transgender and gender nonconforming students not reporting victimization to the police or other service agencies. Studies participants were recruited from nine colleges for interviews to discuss reporting, hate crime victimization, and help seeking behaviors.

## CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### *An overview of what “Transgender” means*

Gender and sex are two terms that are often used interchangeably; however, they have very different meanings. Someone’s gender refers to a person’s social and cultural characteristics of being either feminine or masculine. Gender lies on a spectrum and can vary from person to person. An individual’s gender identity is a person’s internal feeling of being either male or female. How a person presents his or her gender is typically characterized as his or her gender expression. People can present themselves as feminine, masculine, androgynous, or somewhere in-between. A person’s sex, however, concerns the biological characteristics that make a person male, female, or intersex. Doctor’s traditionally disclose a child’s sex at birth; this is done through his or her observation of an individual’s genitals, reproductive capability, and/or chromosomal make-up (Brown & Rounsley, 1996; Sousa, 2001).

There are many different categories and types of people who identify with the transgender and gender non-conforming community. “Transgender” is an umbrella term that includes all individuals who alter, change, or question their gender identity and gender expression (Brown & Rounsley, 1996; Sousa, 2001). *Transgender and trans-* are terms used to categorize individuals who “transcend the conventional boundaries of gender, irrespective of physical status or sexual orientation” (Kidd & Witten, 2008: p. 35-36; Feldman & Bockting, 2003).

Transgender is an all-encompassing term that can be used to refer to the following: transsexuals, intersex persons, cross-dressers, gender non-conforming individuals, drag queens, drag kings, and gender queers (Brown & Rounsley, 1996; Kidd & Witten, 2008; Wyss, 2004). A review of each of these groups is described in Appendix A. These categories are not exclusive

and should not be looked at as such; each of these identities can differ among people, ages, and cultures. For example, someone may identify as transgender but also label himself or herself as a gender queer. One student in the present study self identified as transgender but later referred to himself as gender queer. This happened with other students as well. Although each of these groups has different definitions, some people (especially college students) see themselves in multiple categories. For the purposes of this study, “transgender” is understood as anyone who questions his or her gender identity, is gender non-conforming, or self identifies somewhere on the trans-spectrum.

### ***Risks Associated with Being Transgender:***

#### **Passing:**

One of the risks associated with being transgender is passing. Passing is the ability to be seen in the gender identity presented by the individual. Generally, this applies to transsexuals because they wish to permanently alter their gender identity. Sometimes transsexuals have characteristics that impede their passing (height, physical build, hair, etc.). This inability to pass can make it difficult for transsexuals to “fit” into a specific gender role or identity. Transgender or gender non-conforming people have fears about their safety because of the way they present their gender (Brown and Rounsley, 1996). Occasionally confusion about an individual’s gender identity can lead to discrimination, violence, and sometimes severe forms of victimization. Witten & Eyler (1997) discuss that perpetrators “often believe that a person who transgresses the norms of gendered sexuality, either by engaging in sexual relationships with members of the ‘non-opposite’ gender or by behaving ‘as’ the other gender, is deviant...and thus a deserving victim of violence (pg. 3).”

College is often a place where LGBT students can begin to present and dress in a way they feel most comfortable. Levin and McDevitt (2002) cite that many of the students who are attacked on college campuses are lesbians and gay men; however, some of students who are attacked may “look gay” but, in fact, are not. This suggests gender presentation is a factor in some victimization of LGB people. Rankin (2003) and D’Augelli (1992) have closely examined the victimization of LGBT students on college campuses and developed the models for investigating this issue. Both researchers used surveys at universities to see how much victimization was happening and what the “campus climate” was like at the various universities. In the following paragraphs, the methods and findings for these two studies will be explained in some detail because they are the most cited and noteworthy studies examining LGBT persons’ experiences with victimization in a college environment.

D’Augelli (1992) surveyed 121 undergraduate LGB identified students to better understand their experiences with victimization and learn more about their fears concerning victimization and safety. D’Augelli (1992) found that three-fourths of his survey respondents suffered from verbal abuse and over one fourth had been threatened with violence. This study along with a few previous studies (D’Augelli, 1989, 1990) set the precedent for looking at LGB victimization. While he did not directly study transgender students at this time, his work has been used and cited in much of the current literature examining transgender college students. Rankin in 2003, followed suit but included some new questions and examined the LGBT community at each hierarchical level on the college campus. Rankin (2003) surveyed 14 different college institutions and received 1,669 surveys back from LGBT students, faculty, and staff. Her survey was designed to examine student and staff’ members’ experiences and perceptions of being LGBT on campus. Rankin cited that 43% of the LGBT students felt that

their campus climate was “homophobic” and many of her survey questions inquired about student’s experiences with victimization. She discovers that respondents perceived transgender students to be the most likely to be harassed on campus (Rankin, 2003).

These studies also reveal that LGBT college students try and conceal their identity from others on campus to avoid discrimination and victimization. Students reported concealing their sexual identity, gender identity, or both from expected harassers, health care providers, administrators, admissions personnel, deans, department chairs, and workplace supervisors (D’Augelli, 1992; Rankin, 2003). Twenty percent of all the transgender respondents in Rankin’s (2003) survey feared for their physical safety because of their status; this may be why over half of the respondents (51%) reported that they conceal their identity from others to avoid being victimized. Although concealment may work for some LGBT students, it may not be an option for some transsexual people because they cannot “pass” as the opposite gender. The costs that is associated with not being open about their status as LGBT may lead students to have more emotional stress, difficulty socializing, and academic problems (D’Augelli, 1992).

Several students in D’Augelli (1992) survey indicated that they thought disclosure of their status as LGB was important but that they did not discuss their status with others on campus because of the risks associated with disclosure. Over half of the participants (57 percent) said that they changed their lives to avoid discrimination and harassment because of their status as LGB (D’Augelli, 1992). Changes that students made included the following: avoiding certain locations, avoiding other lesbian or gay identified people, avoiding gay events/meetings on campus, or altering their relationship status for others (i.e., saying that they are dating someone of the opposite sex) (D’Augelli, 1989, 1992, p. 391). LGBT students, therefore, might not be willing to reveal their status to others because they fear the homophobic and transphobic campus

climate at their universities. Unlike some LGB students, transgender or gender nonconforming individuals do not always have the luxury of hiding their status because it is a part of their outward gender expression. This may leave transgender and gender non-conforming students feeling vulnerable and increase their fears about being victimized (Brown & Rounsley, 1996).

### **Hate Crime Victimization:**

Victimization of transgender and gender non-conforming people often begins at a young age. Their experiences with violence and victimization can last throughout their lifetime, coming from many different people (Stotzer, 2009). Herek et al.'s (1997) study showed that 41% of lesbian and gay youth had experienced a bias victimization before the age of were sixteen. In Witten and Eyler's (1999) study, they found that of their 86 transgender respondents, 60 confirmed that they had suffered some sort of violence or abuse before they were eighteen years old. They explain that some transgender youth display non-normative gender behavior early on in childhood, meaning abuse and victimization can happen early on in life (Witten and Eyler, 1999). While this abuse and victimization may not be characterized as hate crime victimization, it is important to understand that many transgender individuals experience multiple victimizations throughout their lives. Further research is needed to examine the victimization of transgender youth because this group is at a greater risk of suicide, substance abuse, being homeless, and dropping out of school (Lombardi et al., 2001; Grant et al., 2011; Rodgers, 1995).

LGBT individuals on college campuses are more likely to encounter higher rates of hate motivated victimization than any other minority group (Downey & Stage, 1999; Herek & Berrill, 1992; Levin & McDevitt, 2002). The most cited form of victimization that transgender and LGB individuals encounter is verbal victimization and harassment (D'Augelli, 1992; Gender PAC,

1997; Herek et al., 1999; Rankin, 2003; Sousa, 2001). Some research has even revealed that transgender individuals face verbal victimization at a higher rate than do LGB people (Rankin, 2003; Sousa, 2001). College students often described overhearing derogatory comments or experiencing them on their college campus in both D'Augelli (1992) and Rankin's (2003) studies. They also emphasized that they overheard anti-gay and anti-transgender comments frequently on their campuses. The researchers used these (derogatory comments) as indicators to understand the "campus climate" at the universities where they did their surveys. D'Augelli (1992) found that fear among LGB students was related to the frequency of personal harassment and knowledge of others who were harassed.

When serious personal crimes occur within the LGBT community, the transgender community is often targeted disproportionately (Gorton, 2011; NCAVP, 2009; Stotzer, 2009). The National Coalition of Antiviolence Programs (NCAVP) attempts to track LGBT hate incidents/crimes annually by partnering with antiviolence organizations throughout the country. In their most recent report, they found that transgender women accounted for 11% of all the LGBT victims in 2009 and were the victims in 50% of all the LGBT murder cases that year (NCAVP, 2009). The report also presents that victims of anti-trans violence may be subject to murder at a higher rate than LGB people (NCVP, 2009). Of the 22 hate related LGBT murders in 2009, half of the victims self-identified as transgender females. NCAVP states that transgender women are among the most vulnerable within the LGBT population (2009). Of the other 11 non-trans-identified LGBT murder victims, many were dressed gender non-conformingly at the time they were murdered. This indicates gender expression and gender presentation are associated with violence against the LGBT community. Victimization in the transgender community ranges from minor hate incidents such as verbal harassment to serious

deadly victimizations such as homicide. Despite the level of victimization, fears of reporting hate crime victimization(s) still remain within the transgender community.

***Reporting Victimization:***

Hate crime victimization happens frequently within the LGBT community, but these crimes are generally reported less frequently to police than are other non-bias related crimes (Berrill, 1992; Herek et al., 1999; Herek et al., 1997). LGBT bias crime victims often feel as if they cannot report their victimizations to the police for various reasons. One of the main reasons is the fear of “secondary victimization.” Berrill and Herek (1990) classify secondary victimization as when others respond negatively to a crime victim because of the victim’s status (p. 289).

LGBT individuals often fear that they will encounter further victimization from the police if they have to report their victimization. Many LGBT people have heard of police neglect and misconduct toward the LGBT community, and sometimes these stories factor into victims’ willingness to report crimes to the police (Levin & McDevitt, 1993; Sousa, 2001; Stotzer, 2009). Police misconduct further victimizes the LGBT community and builds a barrier between the two groups. If members of the LGBT community do not trust the police, they will not report crimes or call them for services (Berrill, 1992; Herek & Berrill, 1992; Levin & McDevitt, 1993; Levin & McDevitt, 2002). As a result, many LGBT victims may not seek help from the police, victim services, or medical providers because they feel they may be victimized further (Berrill & Herek, 1992; Levin & McDevitt, 1993).

Transgender and gender non-conforming people also experience high levels of police harassment and abuse (Grant et al., 2011; Sousa, 2001; Stotzer, 2009). They describe the process of transgender people being stopped, arrested, or held simply because of their gender identity as

“Walking While Transgender” (Grant et al., 2011; Sousa, 2001). Grant et al. (2011) reported that half of the transgender and gender non-conforming respondents (n = 6,450) did not feel comfortable asking the police for help when they needed it. The fear of potential abuse and misconduct from police personnel factor into whether or not an individual reports victimization to law enforcement (Grant et al., 2011; Sousa, 2001).

In 2002, Herek et al. found that, of the LGB victims who did not report their victimization, 68% said that “concerns about the police played at least some role in their decision” to not report the crime (p. 334). Victims believed that their sexual orientation affected how law enforcement treated them; 52% believed they were treated differently because of their sexual orientation compared to 42% of non bias crime victims (Herek et al., 2002).

Another issue LGB individuals face when dealing with law enforcement is the fear having to “out” themselves, (as LGBT) when reporting victimization, especially if their crime involves bias due to their sexual orientation or gender identity. LGBT people may encounter discrimination if their status is revealed; hence, many victims are hesitant to report victimization(s) if they have to reveal their sexual orientation or gender identity (Gender PAC, 1997). Transgender and gender non-conforming people fear discrimination from employers, landlords, and medical professionals as well as others. Discrimination can be characterized as the “norm” among members of the transgender community because many states lack legislation to protect them from unequal treatment (Gender PAC, 1997; Lombardi et al., 2001).

There is a sense of hopelessness often associated with reporting victimization. Many of the respondents in Kidd and Witten’s (2007) study feared the police would not legitimize their experiences or that nothing would happen if they did report the crime. Victims in other studies mention that they did not report because they did not think their victimization was serious

enough to report to authorities, especially if it was unlikely that the police would catch the perpetrator (Herek et al., 2002; Witten, 2003). Other reasons victims gave for not reporting were as follows: (1) They considered the incident a personal matter, (2) They did not believe it was a reportable incident or seriousness enough to report (3) The victim blamed himself or herself or was embarrassed, (4) The victim took some other action to avoid future victimization, (5) The victim feared retaliation from the perpetrator, and (6) The victim feared abuse/misconduct from the medical or legal system (Herek et al., 2002: 335; Kidd & Witten, 2007; Lombardi et al., 2001; Witten, 2003). It is clear that LGBT bias crime victims only seem to report their victimization if there is a favorable outcome in sight. If the risks seem too unpleasant, the victims often decides to not report their victimization (Herek, et al., 2002; Kidd & Witten, 2007).

Not reporting hate crime victimization may negatively impact victims psychologically. Hate crime victims are unique in their emotional response(s) post victimization. Hate crimes against any minority population can have short and long-term psychological effects on victims (Herek et al., 1997; Herek et al., 2002; McDevitt et al., 2001). Research has shown that victims of bias crimes tend to suffer more severe and longer psychological effects than non-bias crime victims from similar crimes (Herek et al., 1999; McDevitt et al., 2001). Victims of hate crimes cope differently and may have more frequent fears regarding their safety (McDevitt et al., 2001). Hate crime victims are also more likely to lose employment, have problems with their spouses or children, suffer from medical problems, have more difficulty overcoming victimization, and generally feel less safe (Chahal & Julienne, 2000; Hall, 2005; McDevitt et al., 2001). Herek, Gillis, and Cogan (1999) found that lesbians and gay men who experienced an assault or other “person crime” (within the last five years) because of their sexual orientation were more likely to have symptoms of depression, traumatic stress, anxiety, and anger than non-bias crime victims

(Herek et al., 1999). They also concluded that gay and lesbian victims were more likely to regard the world as an “unsafe place” and they tended to view people as “malevolent” (Herek et al., 1999, p.949).

Victim help seeking may be different for victims of bias crime as well. Help seeking refers to the “process by which individuals resolve problems that compromise their level of functioning via utilization of legal, financial, community and institutional resources” (Dunbar, 2006, p.325). Victim help seeking (medical and mental) varies for different cultural groups after a victimization takes place. Liu (1995) found that help-seeking behaviors were different for victims of hate incidents (as cited in Dunbar, 2006). Liu (1995) also found that victims of hate violence are more likely to seek out help from friends and report their victimization to family members than to seek out counseling or legal advice (as cited in Dunbar, 2006). Hate crime victims coping and help seeking habits differ from non-bias crime victims. Researchers need to more closely examine fears associated with reporting among the transgender community. It is to be hoped that this will allow us to better understand how to aid victims’ needs and help seeking habits post-victimization as well.

Previous research has demonstrated that transgender people often experience multiple victimizations but are less likely to report these incidents (Herek, et al., 2002; Kidd & Witten, 2007). Researchers still do not fully understand why transgender and gender non-conforming people are more likely to be victimized and less likely to report victimization. Previous hate crime literature does not specifically explain transgender individuals’ experiences, fears, and concerns with victimization and reporting. This study hopes to gain some insight into a population that is understudied and underrepresented in hate crimes research. Using social

distance theory, I will examine transgender individuals' fears of reporting in hopes of understanding why their reporting and help-seeking habits are different from other groups.

### ***Social Distance as a Predictor for Underreporting***

The theory of social distance, by Emory S. Bogardus, (1925) has been used to measure distance between in and out minority groups. Social distance, in its most simple definition is the degree to which an individual will avoid a minority group or a member of a stigmatized group (Bogardus, 1925; Garofalo & Bryant, 2004). Social distance is not directly linked to prejudice, but instead, should be understood as a measure of how socially connected (or willing to be connected) a person is with members of different minority groups. Social distance is different from prejudice in that prejudice examines preconceived notions of groups, which are not always negative in nature. Social distance however, is more appropriate for this study because it highlights peoples degree of connection (or lack thereof) with minority groups. The idea is that we feel close to those who are socially close to us (Karakayali, 2009). Borgardus (1941) believed that the key element of social distance is as follows: "Where there is little sympathetic understanding, social farness exists. Where sympathetic understanding is great, nearness exists" (pg. 106). Bogardus created a scale to measure social distance between social groups.<sup>1</sup> Karakayali (2009) points out that the Bogardus scale is essentially treating social distance as a "subjective" category because it only examines people's attitudes towards groups. Generally, the scale is built around the assumption that respondents will have an understanding of people who do and do not belong in their own group (Karakayali, 2009: pg. 541). The majority of the

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<sup>1</sup> The participants in the Bogardus study were asked if they would be willing to interact with members from a select minority group in the following ways (1) marry/have as a kin; (2) be friends; (3) have as a neighbor; (4) work with; (5) accept as a co-citizen/acquaintance; (6) accept as a visitor in his /her country; or (7) not willing or will not accept at all within the borders of his/her country.

previous research on social distance examines relationships between immigrants, social rejection of minority students, and racial issues (Muir & Muir, 1988; Netting, 1991; Tuch, 1988).

More recently, Garofalo & Bryant (2004) looked at social distance and the vulnerability of gay and lesbian college students to hate crime victimization. They found that straight college students felt a “substantial social distance from gay and lesbians” but especially from gay men (Garofalo & Bryant, 2004). Their findings, particularly regarding gay men, align with what researchers know about previous anti-gay hate crime perpetrators; they are usually young males, acting in groups, who target gay men (Garofalo & Bryant, 2004; Levin & McDevitt, 2002). This is the only study linking social distance to gay and lesbian individuals, and no studies have been conducted on the transgender population specifically. For the purposes of this research study, the author used Lee, Sapp, and Ray’s (1996) ideology of a reverse social distance theory.

In Lee et al.’s (1996) study, they created a reverse social distance scale to measure minority groups’ perceptions of social distance from the majority. Instead of looking at how distant the majority group was from minorities, the authors reversed the scale and looked at minorities’ perceived distance from the majority. The authors assumed that minority students do not isolate themselves from the majority “by choice,” but would prefer to be accepted by the majority so that they could have equal access to resources (Lee et al., 1996). Lee et al. (1996) sent out 1000 surveys to minority college students (at one state university) and received only 108 completed surveys. Instead of using Borgardus’s (1925) scale that asks respondents about their willingness to accept others (as a citizen, neighbor, friend, etc.), Lee et al. asked minority students their perception of the willingness of others to accept them in those roles. Lee et al. (1996) found that African Americans perceived the distance from Caucasian Americans to be greater than the other two minority groups (“Hispanic” and “other minorities”). Generalizations

should be drawn cautiously, as this is the first time a reverse social distance scale was used to examine this population and because of the small number of respondents. Even though this study has limited findings, the reverse social distance ideology is applicable to other minority groups, especially the transgender population.

The current study will be using the idea of a “reverse social distance theory” as a framework to potentially understand why transgender college students may not seek help or report victimization. From much of the previous hate crimes literature on LGBT students it appears there are elements of distance already felt by transgender and other LGB individuals; their fears of secondary victimization, vulnerabilities of passing, and mistreatment from society all will factor into their perceptions of distance from their communities (Brown & Rounsley, 1996; Grant et al., 2011; Sousa, 2001). No scales were created or used in the current study, but rather detailed accounts of connectedness (or lack thereof) will display how students feel within their communities and on their college campuses.

Students will most likely attribute feeling connected or not connected to their communities based on their level of involvement and feelings of acceptance within their communities. Community connectedness and community participation will show both concrete involvement and the participant’s emotional and cognitive attachments to others and groups. Community connectedness reflects the participants’ cognitive and affective components of community acceptance (McMillian, 1996; McMillian & Chavis, 1986). These constructs are often more difficult to operationalize because they are cognitively based; therefore, qualitative research fares better for accessing this type of information. Community participation, on the other hand, is a much easier construct to operationalize because it involves specific behaviors or groups with which a person is affiliated (McMillian, 1996; McMillian & Chavis, 1986).

Because of the amount of discrimination, harassment, and violence that often plagues the transgender community, distance between transgender individuals and their community maybe a predictor for these individuals not reporting victimizations or seeking help after victimization. John Bruhn describes the process of social exclusion in his book *Sociology of Community Connections* (2005). He points out that social exclusion results in groups coming together “by choice or by force” and often results in cultural disadvantages (economic, social, and political) leaving disadvantaged groups with few resources to participate fully within society (Bruhn, 2005, p. 158). I believe transgender college students may not feel accepted within their community and, therefore, may see distance and fear as reasons for not reporting victimization. Understanding students’ social connections to their communities and college campuses may be important in understanding their help-seeking and reporting behaviors.

### CHAPTER 3: METHODS

This study uses qualitative interviews with transgender college students in a Northeast City to learn about their fears of reporting victimization as well as their help-seeking habits. I decided to conduct interviews because the previous literature on LGBT victims has used survey instruments to understand how individuals report victimization. Researchers have learned that transgender students are often victimized and do not report victimization(s), but I wanted to more closely examine how and if community connections and feelings of acceptance played into their reporting and help seeking habits. By interviewing participants, I was able to get in depth, descriptive accounts of their experiences. The exploratory aspects of this research allowed me to ask difficult questions, see responses, and ask follow up questions when appropriate. There has not been a great deal of research conducted that concentrates specifically on the transgender community; therefore, I felt it was best to utilize interviews with college students to learn more

about their connections to the community and fears about reporting. The interviewing instruments (Appendices C & D) were developed to try and gain insight into the three major questions that guided this research:

- A. Do transgender and gender non-conforming students feel socially connected to their community?
- B. What fears and vulnerabilities do transgender/gender non-conforming college students have when they think about reporting victimization?
- C. Does social distance affect reporting and help-seeking habits among transgender and gender non-conforming students?

A non-probably convenience sample was used in this study. I knew my research would not be generalizable; however, the thought of using theoretically informed stories to depict each student's perception (of social distance and victimization) would be revealing enough to better understand this understudied population. To obtain participants, I went to the universities' LGBT group meetings to explain my research and recruit participants. Numbers of individuals in attendance at the meetings varied from small groups of seven to larger groups of approximately thirty. Not all the students at these meetings were transgender. Most of the institutions allowed me five to ten minutes to speak at one of their weekly meetings to explain my research and potentially recruit participants. A script was read at meetings and is attached in Appendix B. A few of the schools (3), for privacy and confidentiality reasons, would not allow me to come to their meetings. They did, however, distribute flyers at meetings or through their weekly LGBT emailed newsletters to let their students know about my study. Eight of the nine schools had identifiable LGBT groups on campus. At the one school where no LGBT group existed, fliers were posted for recruitment purposes.

Universities were chosen by size (large, medium, and small) and by their funding source (public or private). The separation of schools by size and funding source was done to provide a more representative and diverse sample of students from the area. I selected one public and one

private institution from each of the different size schools, resulting in nine schools being included in the study. While many of the students found my research interesting and they told me they thought it was “much needed,” many felt uncomfortable actually sitting down for an interview to discuss these issues. Some of schools I chose had highly visible and largely active LGBT groups on their campuses while others had small groups. The total number of institutions from which students were recruited was nine, and the total number of interviews conducted was 5 (n= 5).

Not being satisfied with this low number of respondents, I decided to contact three community organizations that work directly with the transgender population (specifically transgender victims) to see if I could obtain more data about transgender victims’ experiences. I asked practitioners about their experiences working directly with this population and their perceptions about transgender students’ experiences. The total number of interviews conducted with practitioners was one (n=1). Here too, the response was low among the organizations asked to participate, but the practitioner who was interviewed provided valuable insight.

The student participants for this study varied in age and level of education. Four students were undergraduates and one student was in graduate school. Only one participant was not open or “out” about her status as being transgender; therefore, my sample was biased towards students who were out and open in regard to their transgender identity. To participate in the interview, students had to be enrolled at one of the nine study schools, be at least 18 years old, and self-identity as transgender or gender non-conforming. For the purposes of this research study, “transgender” embodies anyone who has questioned his or her gender identity, is gender non-conforming, or self-identifies somewhere on the transgender spectrum. Demographically, three of students interviewed were Caucasian and two participants were African American. The

sample was diverse varying in gender expression and transitional status. While I did not directly ask students about their transitional status, all of the students mentioned it to some degree during the interviews. Participants were asked to describe how they would characterize their gender identity today. Two students identified as transgender females, two as transgender males, and one as a gender non-conforming male. The demographics of the participants were fairly diverse given the small respondent size. The descriptive data obtained in this study is a starting point for understanding the fears that transgender and gender non-conforming students have toward reporting victimization.

All of the interviews with students were held in a safe, private place at Northeastern University. The interview with the practitioner was held at her office. All interviews were audio-recorded with the subjects' permission and transcribed for analysis. The majority of interviews lasted around 30 minutes, but they did not exceed one hour. Verbal informed consent was obtained before each interview and the Human Subjects Review Board at Northeastern University approved all study protocols.

Some of the interview questions were drawn from previous studies; for example Herek (1986), D'Augelli (1992), and Rankin's (2003) previous surveys helped determine student's sense of safety in their community and on campus. I selected some of the questions from these surveys because they have been used notably in other studies that examine homophobic and transphobic victimization on campus. My interviewing instruments contained structured questions, which were used consistently throughout each interview. Occasionally during an interview, I would have to use probing questions when an interviewee's response was unclear. For a few of the interview questions, I also had to paraphrase the original question to maintain

flow and conversation with the participant. Overall, however, the content and questions remained the same across each and every interview.

The purpose of the interview instrument was to examine students' connections to their community (social distance), their fears surrounding victimization, and how these fears influenced reporting and help-seeking behaviors. The purpose of the practitioner interview instrument was to obtain a professional perspective on the reporting habits of transgender students as well to inquire about the types of services offered to victims and some of the difficulties practitioners may have with aiding the transgender population.

Using a reverse social distance approach, I explored students' connections to the community and the communities' acceptance of them as being transgender or gender non-conforming. I was trying to establish how much distance or lack of acceptance students felt from their community; if a minority group, such as the transgender population, feels less connected to a majority group such as the LGB or straight population, perhaps this may make members of the minority group more hesitant to report victimization and seek out resources that are controlled (and often run) by the majority group. This may explain why there is underreporting within the transgender community. An examination of students' connectedness to the majority, risks they take, and fears they have concerning reporting victimization will be discussed.

## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

### *Social Connection*

The students in this study seem to differ in their feelings of connectedness to the metropolitan area. They equate positive experiences with living in (or near) the city their whole lives, going to school here, and being involved in community and/or campus activities. Most students felt connected to their community; however, when they were asked if they felt their

community was accepting of their gender identity or gender expression, most interviewees gave less accepting answers. This may indicate that students generally feel as if they have a comfortable place where they fit-in (e.g. on a college campus, or with an LGBT group, a transgender group, or a group of supportive friends), but this does not necessarily mean that the community at large is accepting of their status as being transgender or gender non-conforming. Transgender students equate negative connections and feelings of acceptance with being called derogatory names or being harassed. In addition, they may view the Metropolitan area as not being "the right environment" for them.

Students have both positive and negative connections to their community. One graduate student, Jane, described that she doesn't feel safe or connected to the metropolitan community in any way; she talked about negative comments people have made to her, how her school does not have policies to protect her, and how people do not want her around socially. Jane was the only student who articulated that she does not feel at all accepted by, or connected to, the metropolitan community. Jane was a unique interview because she was not "out" to others regarding her gender identity and did not present herself as female. Jane articulated that she feels a great disconnect from society because the few times she has presented as a female, she was victimized or mocked; therefore, she chooses to present as a male because she does not feel safe presenting as her authentic self. Jane's discussion of why she does not feel connected is attributed to a lack of acceptance from society; she stated,

[I don't feel connected because] the few times I've gone out and everywhere that I've been, comments people have made to me; the, the amount of friends that I've lost; the fact that [school and work] doesn't have a policy to help me... so there's nothing at work, there's not much socially... people don't really want you around. The few times I've gone out, I have had a hard time getting cabs to stop for [me], and people make a lot of comments.

Jane associates her negative experiences, (name calling, losing friends, and lack of legal

protections) with her community's lack of acceptance of her identity. These negative experiences may correlate back to social distance theory because the student views the majority as controlling policies that directly impact her life on a daily basis.

Jane cited the lack of formal policies (to protect her from discrimination) as a reason for her not feeling connected or accepted within society. The space enforced by others especially those who harass or make fun of her, leaves Jane disconnected and feeling unable to present as a woman. College students spend a majority of their time outside their home, at school or working; therefore, some students, such as Jane, live with a constant awareness that her disconnection from society and lack of acceptance from the community directly impacts her safety, income, education, and social network. Jane understands her social position within society and uses the distance she feels as a mechanism for understanding society's mistreatment of her.

While no reverse social distance scale was used to describe students' connection to their community, most of the students said they felt "somewhat" or "pretty" connected to their community. For example, Matt, a black, undergraduate, felt partially connected to his community. He felt that there are certain places where it was okay that he identifies as a transgender male but that there are other places where it is not okay for him to identify that way. He said, "I would say...I think it's fine that I'm male, um, and in certain places ... it's fine or not fine, that I'm trans." Matt said he felt he had to change his appearance at work and in the neighborhood where he worked because he felt the community there would not be accepting of his transgender identity; however, he felt comfortable as a transgender male on his campus and near his home. Rankin (2003) has found that transgender and gender non-conforming students change their gender presentation or behavior if their safety is of concern in a particular

environment. Students from this study articulated similar feelings and behaviors. Overall students felt fairly connected to their communities because they had places where they could express themselves and feel safe. Future research may want to examine if increased exposure potentially leads to an increase in risk of victimization.

While students' connections to the community did vary, all of the students that were recruited for this study were somehow connected to a LGBT group on their college campus. When asked if they felt connected to the transgender community, students said they felt "somewhat" or "very" connected. The college campus as a whole is a unique environment and plays an important role in this study. Students who felt connected tended to feel most accepted on campus. Students articulated that they felt pretty safe physically on campus, yet some still felt uneasy at certain times. For example, Casey said,

I felt physically safe; I'd say...I was definitely very anxious...Especially at first because I mean there were times when I would get...people calling me fag or something like that...So that was hard in terms of like harassment, or like, you know, any sort of verbal prejudice ... but I think physically I felt, I felt pretty safe for most, most of the time I think.

Once Casey began the transitioning process, she said her feelings about her safety changed because there were fewer comments around her appearance. This may be an area for researchers to continue to explore. Do transgender college students fears change as they transition, or is fear and victimization dependent on an individual passing?

The campus climate as a whole can at times be a transphobic place for transgender students. The majority of the college student respondents in Rankin's (2003) survey perceived transgender people to be the most likely to be harassed on campus (71%) followed by gay men (61%) and lesbians (53%). While the actual percentage of transgender students harassed was smaller than the perceived number (71% vs. 41%), it goes to show that all college students see

transgender people as being the most likely to be harassed on campus (Rankin, 2003). Most of the students from this study articulated that they felt physically safe, but a majority of them reported hearing derogatory comments or being verbally harassed. This was also the most cited form of victimization among the students in this study. Casey said, “There have been some situations ... where, um, you know the verbal harassment has made me feel really unsettled, and like anxious and like wanting to leave.” Verbal harassment can sometimes be viewed as a starting point for victimization. For example, one student David feels that when verbal insults or harassment happen they have the potential to spiral into something more severe.

I think yeah, definitely, [the comments] affected how I perceived my safety. Um, in the sense that, I felt that there was a potential for it to escalate. Um, I’ve never really felt particularly unsafe just because I’m a pretty big guy, so I’ve never felt like there inherently is something to fear, but definitely when there are those comments then it makes it harder to [feel safe].

Most of the students felt safe in the campus climate in regards to their physical safety; however, previous research comparing LGB students and transgender students shows that transgender students are just as likely, if not more likely, to face challenges on campus (Rankin, 2003; Taylor, 2009). Students from this study reported hearing derogatory comments, yet a majority regarded feeling physically safe on their campus.

There was only one student who had not experienced harassment or victimization on campus; Adam was a freshman and had only been enrolled in school for six months. Even though he had not encountered any harassment, he anticipated being harassed. He stated,

I feel pretty safe right now, [the university] is my community... On campus, I’ve never felt unsafe, and [because I am] at the point [in] my transition where I’m pre-op, pre-hormones; like for the most part, when I’m out and about, I’m like well [society] probably think[s] I’m a lesbian, but that’s okay... that’s chill with me. Um and so I haven’t gotten like harassed or anything, as of yet. I’m sure at some point in my future [I will be].

The anticipation of victimization was common among interviewees. Adam discussed that he probably had not had any previous victimizations because he was from another country, which happened to have a nonviolent and peaceful culture. He discussed that once he began changing his appearance and no longer looking like a “lesbian” in the United States he would inevitably receive some backlash from the community. I asked David, another undergraduate, if he felt that an expectation of victimization was a part of the transgender/gender non-conforming experience and he said,

I would agree that it's probably part of the experience. Just as far as, like, when you are perceived as gender non-conforming, then ... someone's gonna have a problem with that. There are going to be people who escalate that to violence. So yeah, I'd definitely agree with that.

Students articulated that they expect to experience some form of victimization, especially if they do not pass or if they dress gender non-conformingly. In D'Augelli's (1999) survey, one participant wrote, “Verbal insults tend not to bother me. I expect them” (p. 319). This seems to be a consistent pattern among LGBT college students. Historically, this type of expectation is anticipated among individuals who are diverse. Minority communities often experience backlash from society, often in the form of violence or intimidation, because they are different. If you look at individuals from the civil rights movement, women's movement, or the stonewall uprising, there was often a backlash by the majority aimed at those individuals who were honest and fought for their civil rights. This is true for transgender people today as well. Tammy, a practitioner said,

There is a uniqueness in the sense that um, a lot of people that I encounter, who are transgender, who are victimized, probably in the same way that LGB people felt maybe 20-30-40 years ago, kind of [feel] like this is a part of life. Its sort of them being victimized by in large feels like, [it] kind of comes with the territory.

Other research has shown that LGBT students who are more open and disclose their status as LGBT often experience higher rates of harassment than those who are not open about their status (D'Augelli, 1992; Rankin, 2003); thus, victimization among college transgender and gender non-conforming students who are open about their status is anticipated, and many of the students alluded to this idea. If students know or think that they will be victimized, it is harder for them to feel connected and accepted within their communities

In one of Adam's previous statements, he said he felt society perceived him as being a lesbian. I asked students if they thought their gender identity was ever misinterpreted for their sexuality, and many students confirmed that this happens. Casey said,

Yeah, I definitely did [hear a lot of conflating statements] in the beginning. A lot of people just thought, like I was a gay male... some of the comments were directed, you know, like in that way. You know, with getting called 'fag' or something like that...sometimes if I was with my partner, people would, you know, make some sort of comment like, what are you doing with this gay man ... there were a couple situations like that. I think...people don't understand how I can be with a woman and be transgender...there's some confusion with that.

It appears that society does not have a clear understanding that sexuality, gender, gender identity and gender expression are all separate constructs. Moran and Sharpe (2004) argue that gender bias exists because sexualities "co-exist and are co-complicated" (p. 403). Adam further described how people conflate gender expression with sexual orientation; he noted,

[I would hear comments] fairly frequently, among people who aren't actually aware the difference [between sexuality and gender identity], but usually once you go, um, sexuality, gender, and sex are three different...aspects of a person, then they usually [are] confused, but eventually they kind-of get it...I have been asked a couple times, 'so you identify as a guy does that mean, you want chicks?' or 'are you like gay?'

There seems to be confusion from others about transgender people's sexuality. Almost every student articulated that they have experienced some misunderstanding around sexuality in association with their gender identity. If this confusion is from someone in the medical or law enforcement field, it may impact reporting and help-seeking practices. Regardless of the source

of the confusion, these types of misunderstandings or overt acts of discrimination and victimization can be attributed to the social distance between community institutions and the transgender community. Society's lack of understanding and connection to the trans-community leaves many students' feeling isolated and as if they have nowhere to turn.

When examining students perceptions of their social connections and societies awareness of trans-related issues, it is evident that students generally feel connected to their communities but do not necessarily feel understood or accepted within all communities. Students' awareness of this distance is expressed further when they discuss some of the reasons why they are fearful of reporting hate crime victimizations or seeking help post-victimization.

### ***Vulnerabilities***

There are many risks associated with being transgender and these risks may influence students' fears and reporting habits. Transgender and gender non-conforming students discuss their fears of law enforcement, their fears around passing, their fears of specific locations, and their knowledge of other transgender victims.

#### **Passing:**

The first fear students mentioned was the risk of not passing in public places. As discussed in the literature review, students who do not pass are often fearful of being victimized because their status as being transgender/gender non-conforming is easily identifiable (Brown & Rounsley, 1996; Sousa, 2001). Some students discussed changing their gender expression to better fit into their environment and to feel safer. Sometimes, this can be dependent on where the student is going and with whom they may be interacting. Passing is a key component to feeling comfort and safety for many transgender students. If passing is not possible, some students may not alter their gender identity at all. In this study, only one student, Jane, discussed

not changing her identity because she feared the consequences of not passing. Not all transgender students feel this way, but some, such as Jane, do. Another student, Adam, discussed how sometimes he is clearer about how he presents his gender depending on where he is going. He expressed that he knows the climate downtown, and is fearful that he will be victimized if he somehow varies traditional gender norms.

In ways I've changed to be more clear about my gender presentation, uh, but I've never really been in a situation where I felt like I needed to change it so much. Maybe occasionally when walking around downtown...I might be safer playing up, you know, the fem part rather than the genderqueer part just 'cause, you know, downtown [city name] in the evening, like, they don't mess around.

Adam's statement is note-worthy because even though he feels as if he does not need to change his appearance too much, at times he does subtly change to feel safer.

Another student described an incident in which he felt vulnerable in a certain location. Matt heard a story about another transgender person who was attacked in a bathroom downtown; when Matt heard this, he was not binding<sup>2</sup>, so he felt he could have easily been interchanged with that victim. He said, "I think, generally now I pass as male, but maybe at the time that I was hearing this story, I wasn't binding and, it could have easily happened to me." Many of the students during the interview said they had heard of stories (or instances) where transgender people were discriminated or attacked because of their status and/or appearance as transgender. Many of these instances factor into how transgender students dress, where they go, and how safe they feel.

If students are able to transition, or choose to dress as the opposite gender, and they pass, they generally feel safer. Some of the students who did pass equate their passing with not

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<sup>2</sup> Binding is process of an individual flattening their breast tissue to appear more masculine or flat chested. Transsexual males usually do this, but not all trans-men bind.

receiving as much negative attention. Casey, for example, said, “I feel ...my appearance is somewhat helpful. I’m white and mostly passing [this] helps in ... not having as much negative feedback or attention and stuff like that.” For students who do not pass or would not pass, it is hard for them to “leave the house” or to be “alone” in public because they do not feel safe or comfortable. Jane, who is not out or transitioned, stated,

I’m sick of being called names all the time... it’s hard for me to leave my house under any circumstances because I don’t like leaving it as I am, and I can’t leave it as I want to be, so I’m just kind of locked up.

Appearance is a major challenge for many transgender people. They often have to think about where they are going, with whom they are going to interact and how they are going to be perceived. It is especially hard for someone like Jane who feels that she will be victimized if she presents as a woman. Rankin (2003) found that 51% of the LGBT college students in her survey concealed their sexual orientation or gender identity to avoid being intimidated by others (p. 25). Although Jane’s experiences and behavior are different from the other students in this study because she chooses to not disclose her status or appearance, when considering Rankin’s findings, it seems that she is just a part of the other half of the population that conceals her identity to remain safe and avoid victimization.

Students discussed their gender expression and behavior in relation to their feelings of safety. Sousa (2001) found that “everyday tasks that may seem ordinary to some individuals might be painstaking or anxiety inducing to some transgender individuals” (p. 48). Adding to the idea of presentation of self, Casey said she would try to be neutral about her appearances especially when she was first beginning her transition. She discussed how initially she would be quiet so that no one could detect that she was transgender from her voice and how she would

avoid certain places and change her appearances so that others would not notice her. Casey stated,

I would be really careful about where I went. I would try not to be alone often. I think at the beginning I really tried to play down my appearance, and have a very neutral and somewhat androgynous appearance ... that way I would blend in a little bit more. 'Cause I was very anxious about like what [and] how people were perceiving me. And like whether there was danger with that... and also trying to just be quiet too, so no one could detect anything in my voice. So just, like, really trying to keep to myself. And um ... trying to go places discreetly ... not trying to be where there is a lot of people and stuff like that.

It seems students change their appearances to remain safe, especially during their time of transition. During their transitional period, students articulated that they felt the most vulnerable to victimization and harassment because they could be identified more easily. Even though some students said they did not change their appearance or behavior much, students tend to present differently for others, especially if their safety was of concern.

A practitioner, Tammy, who works directly with transgender victims, expressed this idea:

[Society] see[s] things in such dichotomies... So, I think it's not about what [transgender people] are comfortable with; it's about what other people are comfortable with, and if you somehow vary outside of that; if you transgress gender norms, that definitely puts you more at risk. And that's true for non-transgender people too!

Transgender people have to continuously evaluate their presentation on a daily basis. They constantly have to think about altering their gender presentation depending on locations that may be dangerous for them to be in, and they may change their appearance, behavior, or out status to avoid victimization or discrimination from others. How others perceive transgender and gender non-conforming people is crucial in understanding why they have reservations about reporting victimization.

### **Locations:**

Certain locations present unique problems for transgender people. While a majority of society walks around feeling fairly safe in their community, there are certain places where

transgender people fear they may be more vulnerable. One specific fear that arose in a few interviews was transgender students' fear of bathroom situations. Bathrooms are a place where transgender people can be identified and potentially victimized more easily (Brown & Rounsley, 1996). David said,

I think when I feel most unsafe, is bathrooms, particularly going to the bathroom... somewhere [sic] in a more formal setting...I always feel a little more unsafe, as far as, what could happen specifically legal trouble... I just usually avoid bathrooms if I can.

Bathroom situations may present even more of a threat to those transgender individuals who do not pass. Brown and Rounsley (1996) point out that the public bathroom presents “formidable challenge[s] for transsexuals; it is the place where they are most likely to be questioned or confronted if there is any obvious gender ambiguity” (p. 136).

Recently there was an incident where two young women attacked a transgender woman, Chrissy Lee Pollis, in McDonald's restaurant in Maryland. According to the police report, the incident started because Pollis was using the women's restroom (Green & Madigan, 2011). The two ladies beat Pollis, spat on her face, and dragged her across the floor of the McDonalds restaurant. Pollis's story went viral because a McDonalds' employee videotaped the entire attack and was heard laughing in the background instead of helping Pollis. The employee who videotaped the attack was fired from McDonalds, but Pollis was left with injuries and fears about being victimized in the future. She said in one interview, “They kicked me in my face; they really hurt me...and I'm just afraid to go outside now because of stuff like this” (Martinez, 2011). These types of incidents surrounding bathroom situations probably happen often; unfortunately, they all do not get the media attention they should. Many college campuses, in the area, are moving towards providing gender neutral bathroom facilities and gender neutral

housing for students who would prefer to use these facilities; however, many public places lack these types of rooms leaving trans-students feeling uncertain and unsafe in public bathrooms.

Students also discussed being victimized in what they thought were safe spaces for LGBT persons. A few students described being made fun of or being victimized in “safe spaces.” The victimization in these spaces often comes from someone, in the gay, lesbian, or bisexual community. Students who experienced this felt unsure of their safety and acceptance from the LGB community. After being victimized in a supposedly safe space, the feeling of alienation from another group leaves transgender people feeling distant and as a result, unsafe. Casey had revealed that she was in a same-sex partnership and often felt unsure and sometimes unsafe in LGBT spaces with her partner. Casey describes how she still feels uncomfortable; she said,

I feel in certain settings, I still sort of-feel like I have to, uh, not be as open about being transgender for instance; just you know, being uncertain about certain situations...even in the LGBTQ community it's more, or LGBT friendly events... there's still like a sense of uneasiness that I receive.

This is probably true for many students, especially those who do not pass or who are easily identifiable. This feeling of uneasiness, even in spaces that are supposedly supportive of transgender and gender non-conforming people, only perpetuates the idea that victimization can happen anywhere at anytime and be committed by anyone.

Jane described an incident in which she was uncomfortable in a space that was supposed to be safe; after leaving she was threatened and pushed by a group of men who followed her to her hotel. Jane later told me that incident was the defining moment when she decided she would not present as a woman (or transition) because she does not feel safe anywhere. She said,

I was down in New York City and had gone out in public umm and, I got harassed at the first bar that I went to. Um, with just name-calling and comments that I was able to overhear in a place that was supposed to be safe. And then [I] went back to the hotel and

went to the bar at the hotel and five guys tried to... [sic] I got pushed, five guys tried to beat me up.

This victimization has significantly impacted how Jane views her safety as well as how she presents her gender on a daily basis. Being victimized in an LGBT safe space leaves transgender students feeling as if there is no safe place for them. If members from the LGB community are victimizing transgender people in LGBT safe spaces, where and how are transgender people supposed to feel safe? This idea, once again relates back to the theory of social distance. If transgender people feel disconnected from the LGBT community, where and who can they trust within the community at large?

### **Knowing Another Trans-Victim:**

Another concern that affected the students' sense of safety was if they knew someone who was transgender or gender non-conforming who had been victimized. Knowing another transgender person who was the victim of a crime, especially a bias crime, heightened the students' fears of being victimized. Makadon et al. (2008) note that many LGBT people will experience direct or indirect victimization or will have fears about being targeted for a hate crime at some point in their lives (p. 252). Hate crimes directly send a message to other people of the same minority group that they too should be fearful, and as a result they become "indirect victims" (Shoham et al., 2010). Jane was the only student who said that knowing another trans-victim did not change her perception of safety; instead, she said, "I had already known that I wasn't safe anywhere. It more just confirmed that there's no place to go." Other students reported that knowing someone else who was victimized affected how they perceived their own safety. I found it interesting that students mentioned the location where the incident occurred as being especially significant. One student, Casey, knew of an incident in which someone from

her hometown was victimized, and this incident heightened her awareness of her own vulnerability; Casey said,

It was like, really scary because I grew up near [name of city], and ... this is before I really came out and started transitioning so, that was something that was really scary because it hit so close to home... I'm very privileged coming to a college campus, so, I avoid some of the really terrible things that can happen; it's a whole different world for others.

One distinctive characteristic about hate incidents is that victims feel interchangeable with other bias crime victims (Levin and McDevitt, 2002; McDevitt et al., 2001). When victimization happens where the student lives or in a place that he or she frequents, it heightens the students fears and awareness about his or her own safety. This is exactly what Casey is describing.

Additionally, Casey acknowledged her privilege of being able to attend college. She was one of the only students who outwardly discussed how her situation is different from other transgender and gender non-conforming people in society. Casey discussed having some of the most serious victimizations among my respondents, yet she considers her situation to be better than most other transgender people because she is in college and employed. Stotzer (2009) discusses that multiple victimizations are a part of the transgender experience. She says, "These acts of violence are not single incidents, but happen across a lifetime and often a single individual experiences multiple acts of violence or intolerance on a daily basis" (Stotzer, 2009, p. 177). These persistent victimizations and acts of discrimination influence how transgender people perceive their safety.

Another student, Matt, discussed someone he knew being attacked in a city bathroom. The incident happened in a location that Matt often frequents, and after hearing about the incident, Matt said, "it could have easily happened to me...it's a place that I would feel safe, and [it] doesn't seem like any neighborhood I would be afraid of, but it could happen anywhere

apparently.” When incidents happen in locations where students live, work, or socialize, it makes the space, which initially felt safe, feel less safe because students feel more susceptible to victimization. They feel interchangeable, once again, with the victim because they were attacked usually due to their status as transgender or gender non-conforming.

Transgender students explained that there are specific vulnerabilities (passing, locations, knowing other victims) that make them feel more susceptible to victimization, but that does not necessarily explain why students are hesitant to report victimization.

### *Reporting Victimization*

#### **Perception of Law Enforcement Response:**

Students from this study expressed the belief that the police would not care or would do the "bare minimum" to help or protect them. Additionally, students thought the police have less "sensitivity" towards the transgender community in general. Casey stated that she feels the police have good intentions, but because many police departments lack specific policies concerning transgender people, misconduct and insensitive situations can occur. She explained,

I feel like police have good intentions but I feel ...sometimes, prejudice can get in the way. And I think without clear guidelines there is no possible way to, I don't know, trust that you are going to be safe and that you can safely report situations that happen. So if ...[a crime] was more serious... I wouldn't really know what to do. And I think that was a fear that was really on my mind, you know, throughout my time [at the university]. Just not knowing, if something happened, what I would do about it.

This constant feeling of not knowing what to do or where to go was confirmed by many of the interviewees. The feeling of vulnerability and disconnection from the police echoes the theme of social distance once again. Casey feels like she cannot trust the police as an organization because there are few laws and guidelines to protect transgender people from being discriminated or victimized by the police. If victimization occurs, how can she trust that her situation will be taken seriously?

While Casey remains uncertain about the police, Jane has a negative outlook on all law enforcement. Jane believes the police are just another group that will continue to “hate” transgender people. Jane’s view of law enforcement may be influenced by a previous negative encounter, during which she was verbally and physically assaulted by a few police officers. Even though this event may have influenced her perspective on the police, she still expresses an opinion that may be common among the transgender and gender non-conforming people (especially those who may have been victimized or had a negative experiences with the police). Jane said,

The police...just seem like another group that hates you. [They] put up with you because they have to, and they’ll still call you names and still do things to you because they can get away with whatever they want because nobody’s ever going to believe someone like me over them. And it’s just a pretty hopeless situation in general, where you don’t even feel like you can leave your house.

Jane, once again, expressed how distant she feels her position is from society. Her statement that no one would believe someone “like her” over someone who has authority comes back to the idea of hierarchy and social distance. It appears the social distance transgender and gender non-conforming students have from majority groups, especially those in authority positions, are used as mechanisms to understand their treatment in society. With no real guidelines or laws to protect transgender people, Jane feels hopeless. This hopelessness will factor into her feeling of safety and comfort with reporting to agencies and especially with her attitudes toward law enforcement.

Students mentioned that there were very few legal protections for transgender people and it is becoming more and more evident that even if there are laws, they may be limited in their protection of transgender people. Before the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes

Prevention Act,<sup>3</sup> which was signed into law in 2009, gender identity and expression were not officially recognized or represented in the Uniform Crime Report (UCR). Now that gender identity and gender expression are among the protected classes, anti-transgender violence will be tracked annually at the federal level; certain states have already included gender identity and expression in their state laws, but no anti-transgender hate crimes have ever been reported other than a few in Washington D.C. (Gorton, 2011; Stotzer, 2009). Massachusetts, in 2001, held that the Commonwealth should begin tracking anti-transgender bias crimes but none have ever formally been filed with the state's hate crime statistics; therefore, even if states and federal government are taking the steps to legally begin tracking and protecting transgender people, it appears there is still a disconnection between victims and the police recognizing/reporting anti-transgender related victimization(s).

Students also discussed a sense of hesitancy to call emergency personnel (police, fire, EMS, etc) in any type of emergency situation. There is a lack of trust towards these institutions; students described weighing costs vs. benefits when calling or reporting incidents to emergency personnel. David, a gender non-conforming undergraduate, described this hesitation.

I think if it were serious enough then yeah, I would call because my life is more important...[my life] comes first, um, it's definitely something I would have to think about beforehand. I would have to consider how serious it was and if I could get away without calling the police then I would.

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<sup>3</sup> The Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act was the first federal legislation that recognized sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression as federally protected classes. This law allows the Department of Justice (DOJ) to intervene and aid in hate crime investigations if local law enforcement needs help or is not willing to investigate a bias crime. The law authorizes the DOJ to provide grants to state and local law enforcement to cover expenses associated with the investigation and/or prosecution of bias crimes. The law also renews a previous requirement that the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) to track crimes based on an individual's gender or gender identity (along with the other classes already protected), and report them yearly in the Uniform Crime Report (UCR).

David's statement regarding "if he could get away without calling the police" is interesting because it echoes other students' feelings about reporting. Students described hesitating or not calling because there is an uncertainty about whether the responding person would be helpful, or if he or she would make the situation worse. The fear of secondary victimization limits many of the students from contacting or seeking out help for any type of situation (Berrill & Herek, 1990; Levin & McDevitt, 2002; Sousa, 2001; Witten, 2008). One student compared police treatment of rape victims to that of transgender victims and articulated that the police might blame the victim for the attack. The student said, "[the police might] say [to a rape victim] well 'you shouldn't have been wearing that slutty dress' and [to a transgender person] well, 'You shouldn't have been pretending you were a guy.'"

Other students articulated the fear of being revictimized by law enforcement or emergency personnel. The fact that students described that they had to think about whether or not they would call the police for any type of emergency situation because they were fearful of what might happen or that they may have to "educate" or explain their status was a common theme mentioned by the students.

Casey thought she would call, but she said she would have some uncertainty and anxiety because she might have to explain her gender identity.

I would think [I would call]... I mean, there's still that fear [of] having to talk about it. You know?! Like the fear that something might come up... it's really an anxiety ridden process...having to talk about [my gender identity] with authority figures, it's very scary, and I think, you know, I would be very anxious about doing that.

In D'Augelli's (1992) study, many of his respondents articulated that if they were attacked because of their "perceived" status, they feared they would have to discuss their sexual orientation during a police investigation. The fear of having to explain their identification (or status) to a member of the police force is a concern many students mentioned. If transgender

people decide to change their names, it can be difficult to get all forms of identification changed and can be very costly. For example, in 2011 National Transgender Discrimination Survey (NTDS), only 21% (n = 6,456) of the individuals who transitioned genders were able to update all of their records and forms of identification. In addition, 40% of the respondents in the NTDS survey reported being harassed when asked to present their identification and that identification did not match their gender presentation (2011). In one of the interviews, Casey described this problem,

Before I changed my name to ... I [had] to give [the police] my male name... so it's like, I definitely don't want anything to happen... underneath some records I'm still, you know, I'm still recorded as male, so it's hard, you know, in that way. Especially with police, often reporting crimes against trans people using male pronouns and using past names and um, you know, there's some concern with that.

Some of the students, as Casey mentioned above, said that the police historically have been known to write improper pronouns, or former names, on documents or police reports. Stotzer (2008) found that hate crime reports by various agencies had many confusing categories that referenced gender variant or transgender people. She noted the police recording transvestite, transgender, and hermaphrodite interchangeably to describe victims. In other cases, Stotzer (2008) found that officers only documented a transgender victims clothing because they did not know how to identify or did not want to identify a specific gender in the report. This type of mistake often leaves transgender and gender non-conforming people feeling, once again, as if they are not understood, respected, or lawfully protected by law enforcement.

Researchers have also examined victimization by law enforcement towards this community (NTDS, 2011; Sousa, 2001; Wolff & Cokely, 2007). Students stated that they had heard stories of police misconduct and neglect and that these stories factor into their decisions to report victimizations to the police. Tammy, the victim service practitioner, mentioned that she

has interacted with victims who are subjects of harassment and victimization from the police. In its most serious form, Tammy, discussed how some officers sexually victimize and exploit transgender people. She stated,

I've spoke to many transgender people who are, you know, Male to Female individuals, who ... are approached by police officers and told that they have to perform sexual favors or they will be arrested...there is a lot victimization by law enforcement [toward] transgender people.

Casey described an instance in which she and her partner called the police and had a positive interaction, but Casey still has hesitations about calling law enforcement. A group of young men had followed Casey and her partner home and began yelling derogatory and homophobic threats outside her front door. Even though, both Casey and her partner felt threatened and very scared, Casey did not want to call the police. Her partner eventually called the police because the harassment and threats did not stop. The police responded and Casey's partner spoke with them. The police filled a bias crime incident report and did everything properly; however, Casey still has doubts about calling the police. She said,

[My partner is] not transgender, so uh, for me it was scary because I didn't know if they would take me seriously as a trans person and also...I think it's harder too, 'cause the laws [on] LGBT or transgender hate crimes, are much less defined in Massachusetts and ... it's hard to prosecute... so she was, she was much more comfortable with that and I was just not ... if it was up to me I don't know if I would have said anything.

The fear of law enforcement not taking her seriously deterred Casey from calling the police. It appears that even if the police perform their duties properly there may still be considerable amounts of distrust felt by transgender students towards law enforcement.

Casey's perception is that the LGB community has more protections from law enforcement than the transgender community. Her perception is probably accurate; when you consider what types of crimes get written up and prosecuted as hate crimes. More anti-LGB crimes are reported and prosecuted than anti-transgender crimes; however the population is

understudied (and victimization is underreported); therefore, researchers have no way of knowing how many anti-transgender crimes are actually happening. We also have no concept of how big the transgender population is, making comparisons to the LGB population difficult. Unfortunately, this produces a climate in which transgender individuals are scared to report victimization or call the police in emergency situations. The NTDS report (2011) showed that 20% of the respondents reported being treated with “disrespect” by law enforcement; eight percent reported being physically attacked and three percent reported sexual assaults. Fears surrounding being victimized by the police influence how transgender and gender non-conforming people report victimization(s). Forty-six percent of the respondents to the NTDS study revealed that they did not feel comfortable receiving police assistance as a transgender or gender non-conforming person (NTDS, 2011). This is significant because almost half a population is fearful to contact law-enforcement due to their gender presentation and the fears associated with being identified as transgender.

Another interviewee, Matt, said he would avoid calling the police because it adds "another element" to an already difficult situation. He felt that if he were already dealing with the trauma of victimization, he would not want to add another person to the mix and potentially add more pain to an already complex incident. Transgender people are not always protected legally; therefore, many feel they cannot report victimizations when they do occur, and especially if law enforcement personnel are the perpetrators of the victimization (Sousa, 2001; NTDS, 2011). Matt describes how he would have to evaluate the emergency situation. He felt that the severity of the emergency as well as how he was presenting at the time, would influence his decision of whether or not to call the police. He said,

Actually it kind-of depends on what the emergency is. Which is something, strangely I have thought about. But um, if something should happen where, um, for whatever

reason, like I wasn't wearing my binder and there was an emergency, I would have reservations about calling the police.

Matt also shared that his race would be another reason for him not calling the police in emergency situations. Both Matt and David, the two black students in this study, specifically brought up race as being an additional factor in not reporting victimization to law enforcement. Historically, racial minority groups have reservations towards reporting to the police. Being black and transgender these students have a double disadvantage and are often left questioning how law enforcement and service providers will treat them.

Race also factors into students' feelings of acceptance in the community. Rankin (2003) notes that the concealing "behavior" of racial minority students in her study was greater than that of Caucasian students. Minority students feared more for their physical safety, concealed their sexual/gender identity more often, and avoided disclosing their sexual/gender identity more so than white students. Rankin also discussed that many of her respondents felt that LGBT areas on campus were "for white people" and that they did not provide the resources needed for minority students of color (2003). At one of the meetings I attended, the LGBT group had a discussion about their outreach to other minority populations because they were a predominantly white LGBT group. The members discussed pairing with other multicultural organizations on campus to better connect and provide outreach to diverse LGBT persons.

The practitioner, Tammy, also said her organization has had to adapt their outreach efforts to reach other diverse communities. Tammy said,

I think for a long time, we were seeing, by in large, white, gay, men...we really started in a reaction to the AIDS epidemic. And uh, people who were identifying as gay were mainly white. So we had to change our outreach efforts to be about "men who have sex with men," as opposed to using the word "gay." And I think there has been more and more outreach ... to do larger amounts of outreach to harder to reach populations. So now we probably have a fifty-fifty male/female split. We still have a much lower transgender

population, but we have a ways to go with that. And in terms of diversity, we are probably fifty-percent white and the rest, multi-[ethnic] or different races.

It appears as if organizations are trying to not only reach out to the transgender population, but to LGBT persons of different races and ethnicities as well. Even though it appears that many of the organizations are trying to diversify and include all types of people, there is still hesitation from transgender students to use their resources, no matter what their cultural background.

Students did not report a majority of their victimizations to law enforcement or seek out services because many of them were fearful of secondary victimization. Witten and Eyler (1999) found that transgender people were more likely to be victimized and less likely to have access to medical and legal services. Instead of using LGBT friendly resources, a majority of the students from the present study said that they discussed their victimization with someone they trusted (a friend, teacher, or therapist). No student mentioned family as a source for help, even though previous literature presents family as a source where hate crime victims discuss victimization (Levin & McDevitt, 2002; McDevitt et al., 2001; Shively et. al, 2002). In Shively et. al's (2002) study of bias crimes in Massachusetts high schools, students reported their friends (67%) and parents (32%) as people with whom they discussed their hate crime victimizations; however one third of their respondents said that they did not discuss their hate crime victimization with anyone.

It is possible that students in this study did not discuss victimization with family members because their families do not support their transgender identity or families do not know of their child/siblings status as transgender. It seems that in discussions of victimization, students rely heavily on people who they trust. When I would talk to interviewees about why they chose a particular person, students said that they wanted someone who would be sensitive and understanding of their situation. All of the students except for Jane expressed having positive

experiences with reporting to these people. Jane expressed that her friends were unsympathetic and told her to be prepared for these types of incidents to occur. Jane stated,

I talked to just a couple friends. I thought they would be understanding and I thought that people shouldn't, you know, know that I'm making this stuff up. That things are as bad as I say they are. I'm not embellishing to get people to care...A few of them said I need to expect that kind of stuff...to get used to it.

Jane's friends were unsympathetic to her situation, which has caused Jane to feel helpless. What her friends expressed supports the idea of transgender people normalizing victimization. This experience left Jane feeling as if she had nowhere to turn and no one to help her cope with her victimization. Bias crime victims tend to suffer and experience more severe psychological consequences (and for longer periods of time) than other non-bias crime victims, so it is important that they seek out help (McDevitt et al., 2001). The hopelessness that many transgender people feel after victimization and the reactions to "normalize" that victimization confirm that transgender bias crime victims have a unique victimization process that should be explored more closely.

I discussed some of the obstacles transgender and gender non-conforming people have when help-seeking with the service provider, Tammy. She talked about some of the specific barriers that the transgender community faces post-victimization. She discussed how hard it is for many people to approach any type of service provider for help because of a lack of trust. She described that there is a perception that transgender people should be "tough" and accept that victimization is associated with being transgender. Tammy explained,

For some people, not all, there's a little bravado, there's a little bit of... not seeking help [and] distrust...I think there's a larger amount of distrust in terms of services and systems and [instead they] turn [sic] to their own community for help. If someone is victimized physically, and really badly victimized, they are less likely to seek medical services just because the medical profession is just catching up on how to [treat transgender victims] especially with sexual assaults and rapes. I think people go through high rates of re-victimization when seeking medical services.

This type of re-victimization (and the barriers associated with seeking medical help) make it difficult for transgender people to report and seek out services. It is hard for transgender people to walk through the door and seek out services anywhere because they do not know how they will be received or treated. If transgender people have been victimized or potentially may be victimized again, it deters them from reporting and getting services post-victimization. Tammy added,

I think walking through the door anywhere...and if you present a certain way, [if] someone uses the wrong pronoun, I think it's hard for people to know if that's outright disrespect, ... or if it's just, uh, an ignorance on the part of the provider, whether it's law enforcement or medical, but just even having to question that, like you've been victimized to think, you ... constantly [have to] worry about how you're going to be treated.

All of the students knew of LGBT specific services in the area where they could go if they were victimized, but none of the students concretely said that they would use these services. This means there are still reservations and fears associated with using LGBT services among transgender students. Casey said,

“We have some great groups... who are really great with trans people from what I know of. But at the same time, I think there still should be more. I think [there needs to be] other services that are related [to] homeless shelters, and [those] services should also be competent. Like, there shouldn't be a concern of what is someone's surgical status or anything like that. Or how they look to be able to access these services. I think there should be more trainings... and the services we have should be expanded.

While transgender students are still fearful of seeking out services, it is important to note that outreach to this community seems to be working. All of the students could articulate different centers, therapists, and recovery programs they knew of that were trans-specific. This is significant in that outreach is getting to the students, but there still seems to be some hesitations between knowledge of services and seeking out these services post-victimization. Witten, (2008) examined five distinct areas that transgender people struggled with concerning the healthcare community. The respondents in Witten's (2008) study had numerous concerns: they feared for

their confidentiality; they feared that the provider would lack experience or qualifications or that the respondent would have to educate the staff; they feared that the medical environments would not be safe and they would be outed; and lastly, they feared the costs of being outed because most insurance providers do not cover trans-related issues. Kidd and Witten (2008) say that when transgender victims do not seek out medical or victim services due to the fears associated with help-seeking, “a negative cycle is established in which victims of violence endure their pain in silence.” This puts victims at risk for depression, anxiety, and other mental illnesses (Kidd & Witten, 2008; McDevitt et al., 2001).

Another major issue Tammy discussed was the stereotypes service providers have of the transgender community.

Transgender people are generally seen in some pretty stereotypical ways, as, mentally ill (as still written in the DSM IV), so mentally ill [and] as somehow sexually perverse. And as you know, if you’ve been sexually assaulted and someone sees you as being sexually perverse, it’s hard to get services.

Until society and especially service providers begin to educate their staff on transgender issues, the misuse of pronouns, stereotypes, and secondary victimization will remain. As a result, the transgender community will fear reporting and seeking help from these institutions.

Overall, the findings from this study begin to show that social connections and distance do factor into transgender college students reporting and help seeking habits. Students discussed feeling somewhat connected to their communities, but that did not necessarily mean they were accepted within those communities. As a result, the distance felt from their community affected how they reported victimization and sought out help.

Transgender students also discussed having some unique vulnerabilities and fears post-victimization. Through some of the interviews, it became apparent that there is a normalization of victimization among the transgender community to accept victimization as a part of the

transgender process/experience. Some of the students (or people they know) believed victimization was a part of the transgender experience; this finding was significant because it shows the need for more outreach to the transgender victims and to the community at large. Victimization should never be accepted or normalized. In some ways this normalization of victimization is similar to other crime victim groups who have suffered or accepted and internalized their victimization (LGB community, domestic violence victims, etc.) long before communities and police began advocating for these victims. These groups are not being recognized and included in training for both law enforcement and medical staff. It is my belief that it will take time, more education, and awareness to ease some of the fears and vulnerabilities that the transgender community has of these institutions and the community at large. Social distance theory maybe an adequate way for researchers to begin examining this hard to reach population and the hesitation of its members to report victimization and seek help.

#### CHAPTER 5: LIMITATIONS

The results of this qualitative study should be viewed cautiously, and generalizations should not be made. The respondent size of five students and one practitioner is too small to make any type of generalizations to the larger transgender student community. Even though no generalizations can be made from this research, the individual experiences and perceptions of the interviewees have added some valuable insight in to this understudied community. It appears that a low respondent rate for qualitative research among this population is common. For example, in Kidd and Witten's (2007) qualitative study, the researchers only interviewed nine female-to-male participants; however, the transgender community seems to be more responsive to survey research as it can be done more impersonally and reach more people. Stotzer (2009), Gordon (2011), and Sousa (2001) have all had some success with surveying this population, but

only so much can be retrieved using this method. Researchers should continue to pursue both methods, and it appears social distance may be an appropriate framework to examine this population concerning victimization and reporting. That being said, victimization is hard to discuss in any population and because transgender students are hesitant to report victimizations to law enforcement and service providers, they are probably tentative discussing it in-detail with researchers.

The experiences of students from this study may not be generalizable to other places. The city itself has many transgender related services, making this location unique. A few health care centers cater to LGBT people's medical and mental health needs and provide services to victims through violence recovery programs. There are also victim service agencies that specifically support LGBT domestic violence victims. Politically, the state has numerous agencies that advocate for transgender related civil rights. Additionally, the local police department has an LGBT identified police liaison officer. The metro area also has a number of support groups that are specifically for transgender people. Transgender college students in other parts of the country and in more rural settings most likely have very different experiences and access to trans-specific resources. For example, in this study eight of the nine universities had LGBT groups on their campus; however this may not be the case in other cities and regions of the country.

Lastly, the students interviewed here may differ from transgender students because all of the students were affiliated with their universities LGBT college group in some capacity; therefore, many of them were out and connected to a specific network of people, making their experiences different from those of students who are not connected to these groups. This probably influenced the findings on connectedness and social distance as well.

Future research should try and incorporate both quantitative and qualitative methods when reaching this population, and include students from universities at which no LGBT groups exist. Recruiting participants through the student LGBT groups seems to be an effective and positive way to reach the transgender student population, but surveys may provide future researchers with more respondents initially. Getting students to commit to an interview was difficult, but if the students were asked to take a short survey at meetings, I think researchers would reach more respondents. Compensation for participating in interviews may also help improve response rates. Future researchers may also want to examine other non-trans identified students (as control groups) and make comparisons within a social distance framework. It is important that researchers continue to pursue both qualitative and quantitative methods; researchers need to learn through in-depth descriptive accounts and experiences and have the quantitative numbers to understand the rates, severity, and types of victimization that is occurring in and against this community.

## CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The major finding in this study is that students' fears and vulnerabilities do link back to social distance and their connections (or lack there of) with their communities. It appears that social distance does factor into students' willingness to report and seek-help and their overall feeling of comfort within their communities. Students said that they felt somewhat connected to their communities in which they lived and worked; however when students were asked if they felt that their communities were accepting of their gender identity, students gave less-inclusive answers. Students discussed specific vulnerabilities that make them fear for their safety within their communities. They mentioned how passing is crucial to avoid discrimination and violence; they described how certain locations can be especially dangerous; finally, they discussed that

they knew of other transgender individuals who have been victimized. Students in this study described numerous victimizations, but only one student reported one of her victimizations to law enforcement. This means that an overwhelming number of victimizations go unreported and undocumented by any agency (law enforcement or private LGBT service providers) in this area. These findings agree with previous research and continue to show that bias related crimes go undocumented even by LGBT specific organizations (NCAVP, 2009).

The transgender students in this study described some fears and vulnerabilities that influence their reporting habits. Their fears are mostly centered on being re-victimized or outed by police/medical staff, having to explain their status to these people, and not having concrete laws that protect them. These conditions leave students feeling isolated and more distant from their communities and the people who are supposed to protect and help them; this leaves many of the students reluctant to report victimization or seek out services post-victimization. They do not trust that these institutions will be supportive or know how to aid them; thus, they do not report most victimizations.

Transgender students also normalized less serious forms of victimization as something that should be expected or anticipated. This normalization of victimization in the transgender community is something that needs to be examined more closely by researchers. Further investigation as to why students are willing to diminish and normalize their experiences may be the answer to understanding students' experiences and coping processes.

Another interesting finding is that the students in this study preferred to discuss victimization(s) with someone they trusted. The most common source of support is friends, followed by therapists or teachers. Few students acknowledged that they would seek out services after victimization because of the fears discussed above even though they are aware of

LGBT identified services in their area. There still is distrust from the transgender community towards law enforcement and victim service providers even those that are there to specifically serve the LGBT community.

In conclusion, it appears that social distance does factor into students' perceptions of institutions and, in-turn, their reporting and help-seeking habits. So how do we (as researchers) better serve this population? Stotzer (2009) says, "Policy is often based on 'official' sources such as law enforcement crime statistics; however, transgender victims of violence are almost absent from the law enforcement view of crime" (p.178). Even as research is beginning to be more trans-inclusive, researchers still do not have a clear picture of the amount and severity of violence that is actually happening within this community. While legislation and protection from employment discrimination and hate crimes is important to have, it would be naive to think that creating laws and tracking trans-related hate violence will change the problem. Rather, institutions and society at large need to start changing their ideologies about gender and gender variance. We should educate law enforcement, medical staff, and school personnel about transgender/gender non-conforming peoples' needs and how to better serve this community. The state where this study was held is in the beginning stages of adding trans-specific sections to their police officers recruit and in-service hate crimes training. This is a step in the right direction and will provide some insight for officers to begin to understand transgender victims' needs post-victimization. It appears that the major issue right now is learning more about transgender peoples' fears, vulnerabilities, and victimization experiences and using that knowledge to inform policy, provide resources, and provide training to community members so that they can better serve this population. It may also be beneficial to have transgender specific liaisons from trans-specific service agencies and law enforcement agencies collaborating and

trying to build relationships with this community specifically and on college campuses. This interaction may strengthen relationships and encourage reporting.

Researchers already know transgender people face multiple victimizations throughout their lifetime, and many of these go unreported (Stotzer, 2009). This victimization not only has direct consequences for the victims, but it also paralyzes the transgender community at large. It increases the fears held by transgender and gender non-conforming individuals about their safety and makes them aware of their vulnerable status within society. It also affects their sense of connectedness and places distance between them and others in their community. These findings paired with previous research on the transgender population, demonstrate a need for future research to continue to examine the causes and consequences of victimization, reporting, and help-seeking practices in this community.

## APPENDIX A: DEFINITIONS

*Transsexuals:* This term refers to people who feel as if they were born into the wrong gender. They often see their biological body as not matching their gender identity and they feel the need to live their life as the opposite gender. Transsexuals are often referred to as Male-to-Female (MTF) or Female-to-Male (FTM) depending on their original and following status, but not all transsexuals adapt these labels. Some transsexuals will have Sex Reassignment Surgery (SRS) or undergo Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) to help their bodies' better replicate their gender identity and to match their internal feelings. While some transsexuals decide to alter their bodies, not all transsexuals choose to undergo SRS or HRT. To most transsexuals, who do alter their gender expression, passing is a huge component.

*Cross dressers:* Cross dressers generally wear clothing of the opposite gender because it gives them a sense of gratification and some cross dress for emotional reasons as well. According to Brown and Rounsley, (1996) most cross dressers are heterosexual, married, males, many of whom are well educated (12). The major difference between transsexuals and cross-dressers is that cross-dressers embrace their biological bodies but do not wish to change their gender identity. They only alter their appearance for a short time period.

*Drag queens and kings:* These individuals are cross-dressers who are also homosexuals. They do not aspire to alter their gender identity permanently, but rather, just imitate the opposite gender for theatrical (or show) purposes. They do not permanently want to alter their gender identity.

*Gender non-conforming individuals:* These individuals are also sometimes referred to as "gender-variant." This category has arisen more recently and is typically used to classify individuals who do not conform to a gender role or to traditional gender norms. They often want

to break away from stereotypical gender roles, but do not desire sex reassignment surgery. This category can include all transgender-identifying people: gender queers (definition below), females who are masculine, males who are feminine, etc. (Wyss, 2004).

*Gender queers*- These are individuals who chose to not identify with a specific gender. Rather, they see themselves as neither male nor female. “Gender queer” is often a term used by youth (and some adults) who feel their gender identity does not correspond with the gender assigned to them at birth. In addition, they do not feel the need to transition to another gender (like transsexuals), but rather characterize themselves as both male and female or somewhere in between (Beemyn, 2008). Gender queers challenge the idea of their being two specific genders. Wyss (2004) further adds, “Being trans and being genderqueer are not mutually exclusive, and there are people who identify as both” (p. 714).

*Intersexed Individuals*- are people born with both male and female tissue and/or hormonal attributes (Brown & Rounsley, 1996; ISNA, 2011; Sousa, 2001). Some individuals are born with more severe or obvious ambiguities, which at times can leave parents and doctors with the difficult decision of whether or not to change the child’s genitalia. The Intersex Society of America, (ISNA) claims that approximately 1 in every 1,500-2,000 births results in a child born with “noticeably atypical” genitalia; however they also report that many people are born with less obvious forms of sex variations, many of which do not show up until much later in life.

## APPENDIX B:

**GENDER IDENTITY: AN EXAMINATION OF FEARS CONCERNING REPORTING**

Script to be read at LGBT Meetings

.....

Hello,

My name is Jamie Lepak and I am a graduate student in Northeastern University's School of Criminology and Criminal Justice. The reason I am here today is because I am conducting research on transgender college students throughout the Metropolitan area. I am hoping to learn more about potential fears that transgender students may have when thinking about reporting victimizations to the police, who they discuss their victimization with, and what services if any, they would like to see developed within the community to better help them cope with victimization.

Many studies previously have looked at gay and lesbian communities, but the transgender (or gender non-conforming) community is often left out. We know from preceding research that victims who are targeted because of their status, or perceived status, generally have lower reporting rates. There are a number of different reasons why people choose not to report crimes, but among LGBT communities fears generally reside because an individual isn't "out" or fears that the police may not take their situation seriously because of who they are. In addition, other research has shown that victims of bias crimes tend to suffer longer psychologically than victims of similar non-bias crimes. This body of literature continues to be growing within the criminology field, but it seems that transgender or gender non-conforming individuals are severely understudied or under-recruited within this research. My goal with this research is to get a better understanding of fears that the transgender community may have surrounding reporting victimizations to the police.

If you're interested and would like to participate, I have flyers that I'm passing around which contain an email address and a phone number where you can contact me. Please note that all information you share is confidential and interviews will last approximately an hour. If you have any questions I will be here after the meeting so feel free to say "hi" and ask me any questions that you may have.

Thank you for your time!

## APPENDIX C: STUDENT QUESTIONS

**GENDER IDENTITY: AN EXAMINATION OF FEARS CONCERNING REPORTING**

## INTERVIEW GUIDE/QUESTIONS

Interview Code Number:

Interview Date:

Consent for Audio Recording: Yes or No

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*Researchers at Northeastern University's School of Criminology and Criminal Justice have an interest in learning about some of the fears that transgender and gender non-conforming individuals may have when thinking about reporting victimization to the police. Much of the previous literature on victimization concerning the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) community focuses on victimizations due to an individuals' sexual preference. Few studies have looked directly at transgender or gender non-conforming individuals within the criminal justice field. The researchers want to look at gender and sexuality as separate constructs and hear from the transgender community. The research team hopes to learn more about your experiences and fears in relation to reporting victimization. We also would like to learn more about the services that are available and used within the transgender/gender non-conforming community and what services you would like to see better developed or created.*

*To perform the study, we are conducting interviews throughout the Metropolitan area with people who self-identify as transgender or gender non-conforming. These findings will help us identify what fears may exist within the transgender community and will help fill in the gaps in criminal justice literature. At the conclusion of the study, we will publish major findings, but no identifying information will be included. Thank you for taking time to participate in our study. Your participation is completely voluntary and your responses will be kept confidential. This interview should last approximately 1 hour. Do you have any questions before we begin?*

*In the first set of questions I'm going to ask you about your connections to the community.*

1. How long have you lived in the area?
2. Do you feel connected to the [name of city] community? Why or why not?
3. How connected do you feel to the transgender/gender non-conforming community?
4. Did you have a good support system when you were coming into your gender identity?
  - a. If yes, can you describe who was supportive?
5. How would you characterize your gender identity today?
6. Do you feel that the community you live in is accepting of that identity? Why or why not?
7. Do you feel safe in your community? Why or why not?
  - a. Do you feel safe on your college campus?

8. Are there any particular events, circumstances, or places that make you feel unsafe?
9. Do you ever hear derogatory comments referring to your gender identity or perceived sexuality because of the way you present your gender?
  - a. Do these comments affect how you perceive your safety?
  - b. Can you tell me about the degree to which you may have changed your behavior and/or identity to remain safe and avoid violence? (Answers may include, avoiding certain locations, events; avoiding others who are “out” or don’t “pass”, etc).
  - c. How often do you think your gender identity/expression is misinterpreted for your sexuality?
10. Do you have any fears or reservations concerning reporting incidents to the police?
  - a. How might these fears differ if the crime was motivated by bias because of your gender identity or perceived sexuality?
11. Do you think you would you call the police if you had an emergency?
  - a. Can you tell me why or why not?

*I am now going to ask you about other transgender/gender non-conforming victims you may know. You do not have to say names or give any identifying material. I just want to remind you that you have the option to skip any question or not answer if you don't want to talk about it, okay?*

1. Have you ever known anyone who was transgender or gender non-conforming who was the victim of a crime due to his or her gender identity?
  - a. If yes, Can you tell me briefly what happened?
    - i. Did this incident change the way you perceived your own safety?
2. Have you ever known anyone in the transgender community who has been victimized by the police?
  - a. What type of victimization was it? (Note: the subject may see police neglect as a victimization; make sure that subject is specific in what type of victimization/misconduct it was (physical, verbal, or neglect))
  - b. Did this incident change how you view the police?

*In the next set of questions, I would like to ask you about previous victimizations that you may have experienced within the last five years. I just want to remind you that some of these questions may be difficult to answer and that you can end the interview at anytime. Okay?*

3. In the last five years, have you ever been the victim of the following crime(s)? *You just have to say “yes” or “no” to the victimization category and whether or not you reported it to the police. We will discuss, in detail, what you would categorize as your most serious victimization (if any) in further detail in a minute:*

[Please see attached chart for a clearer breakdown of the victimization categories. The researcher will use this chart during the interview to track respondent’s answers].

- a. harassed; verbally threatened; had objects thrown at you or were spat on; were chased or followed; were you punched, kicked, or beat; Assaulted or wounded with a weapon; was your property vandalized or set on fire; were you involved in a domestic dispute; were you robbed (person or property); were you sexually assaulted or raped; were you victimized by the police (verbally harassed or threatened or physically injured).
    - i. If participant answers “yes” to any of victimizations above, Can you tell me about your most serious victimization? *(Participant will self-select what they believe is there most serious victimization).*
      1. What type of crime was it?
      2. Where did it occur?
      3. Do you think the motive was based on your gender identity? If yes, what gave you that indication?
      4. Did you need medical treatment, if so, what kind? Did you seek out that treatment?
      5. Did you call the police? Why or why not?
        - a. If yes to calling the police, were the police helpful and supportive? Did they file a police report?
          - i. Did you feel the police took you seriously?
        - b. If no, can you tell me your reasoning in not calling the police?
      6. Did you seek out any other outside services? If so, who?
        - a. Were they helpful? What types of services did they offer?
      7. Did you talk about your victimization to anyone else (such as a friend, family member, teacher, etc.)?
        - a. Why did you choose them?
4. What types of services would you say you have used or would use in the future, if you were the victim of a crime?

- a. Why this agency or service provider?
5. What types of services would you like to see constructed to better support the needs of the transgender or gender non- conforming community in the Metropolitan area?
  - a. What about this service/organization might ease some your fears?
6. Is there anything else that I didn't ask, that you think might be useful to know or include? Do you have any further questions, comments for me?

*Thank you for your participation in this study. You have been very helpful. If you are feeling any emotional distress or discomfort please do not hesitate to call Fenway Health's Violence Recovery Program. They have free services specifically for LGBT people and would be more than willing to align you with some of their services. Thank you for your participation in this study!*

## APPENDIX D: PRACTITIONER QUESTIONS

**GENDER IDENTITY: AN EXAMINATION OF FEARS CONCERNING REPORTING**

## INTERVIEW GUIDE/QUESTIONS

Interview Code Number: (Practitioner # \_\_\_\_\_)

Interview Date:

Consent for Audio Recording: Yes or No

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*Researchers at Northeastern University's School of Criminology and Criminal Justice have an interest in learning about some of the fears that transgender and gender non-conforming individuals may have when thinking about reporting victimization to the police. We are also hoping to learn who victims discuss their victimization experiences with and who they seek out services from post-victimization. Much of the previous literature on victimization concerning the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) community focuses on victimizations due to an individuals' sexual preference; however, few studies have looked directly at transgender or gender non-conforming individuals within the criminal justice field. The researchers at Northeastern want to look at gender and sexuality as separate constructs and hear from the transgender community, as well as, practitioners that work with this population. The research team hopes to learn more about the experiences and fears of transgender students in relation to reporting victimization. We also would like to learn more about the services that are used within the transgender/ gender non-conforming community, and what services need to be developed or created.*

*To perform the study, we are conducting interviews with transgender college students as well as practitioners who work with transgender or gender non-conforming people. At the conclusion of the study, we will publish major findings, but no identifying information will be included. Thank you for taking time to participate in our study. Your participation is completely voluntary and your responses will be kept confidential. This interview should last approximately 1 hour. Do you have any questions before we begin?*

*In the first set of questions, I'd like to ask you about your job, as well as your involvement with the transgender community. Is that okay?*

How long have you been working, involved, or advocating for the transgender community?

a. Can you tell me a little about your experiences or involvement?

How long you have been working here at [organization name]?

Can you tell me a little bit about what you do at [organization name]?

Do you work directly with the transgender/gender non-conforming population?

What types of services does [organization] offer transgender or gender non-conforming people?

- a. Do you feel that the transgender community is aware of these services?
- b. Do you feel that they are using or seeking out these services?
  - i. Can you describe what the population is like that uses your services?
    - Is the population diverse?
  - ii. Do you track victimizations?
    - If so, do you report them to anyone? Who?
- c. Are there any other services in the Metropolitan area that transgender people may use or seek out, that you are aware of?
  - i. IF YES, do you know if they have had a positive experience with this organization(s)?

Do you currently, or have you ever, worked with any victims of bias related violence?

IF YES:

- a. Can you tell me a little bit about your experiences with transgender bias crime victims?

In your experience, do you think transgender or gender non-conforming victims experience any fears that are unique or different from other victims?

- a. Can you tell me about some of them?
- c. Do you think these fears differ if the crime is bias motivated?

Do you think the transgender community has fears about reporting victimization to law enforcement?

- a. What do you think are some of those fears?
- b. How do you think, we can better ease some of those fears?
- c. Do you think victims have any fears about reporting to your organization?

Do you or your organization ever collaborate or work with law enforcement?

IF YES:

- a. Can you tell me to what capacity you (or your agency) has worked with law enforcement?
- b. Was it a helpful or successful collaboration?
  - i. Why or why not?

What do you think are some of the challenges that transgender people encounter when trying to seek out help post-victimization?

Does your agency ever encounter any problems with helping or aiding transgender people? If so, can you describe some of these challenges?

*In the research that I've obtained so far, I'm noticing some common themes. In the next set of questions, I'd like to ask you a little bit about some of them, is that okay?*

*Some students have articulated that they feel "connected to their community," but when asked if they thought the community was accepting of their identity, I received less inclusive and accepting answers. Do you feel that the Metro area is accepting of transgender people? Why or why not?*

- a. Do you think transgender people feel safe in the Metropolitan area?
- b. Do you have any ideas as to how to make the Metropolitan area more accepting and safer for transgender people?

*Some of the transgender and gender non-conforming students I have interviewed, have articulated that they sometimes change their behavior and/or appearances to remain safe and avoid violence. Can you think of any situations, stories, or experiences where you have seen or witnessed this?*

*In some of my interviews, students have expressed that when they were going through their transition, they felt less safe. Other students have also articulated that once they "passed," they felt more safe and comfortable in their environment.*

Do you think transgender persons' perceptions of safety are affected by their transitional status or ability to "pass?" Why or why not?

- a. In your experience, do you know of any events, circumstances, or places that transgender people feel especially unsafe?
- b. Some students talked about being victimized in a "safe-space" (often a LGBT friendly place); do you think this changes the way transgender people perceive their safety?

Some transgender students have alluded that there is an expectation or acceptance of victimization that is associated with being transgender. In your experience, would you say this is a true statement? Why or why not?

- a. Do you think this may be a coping mechanism for some transgender people to deal with the victimizations they face?

*Another major theme I am noticing is transgender students tend to hesitate when they think about calling the police for any type of emergency situation (such as a medical emergency). Almost every student I interviewed said they would have to think about how serious the situation was before calling 911 because they either feared the police officers' response or feared having to explain their situation/status to emergency personnel. Do you think transgender people may experience similar feelings when they think about seeking out services from your agency? Why or why not?*

Is there anything else that I didn't ask that you think might be helpful or useful to include in my research?

*Thank you for your participation in this study. You have been very helpful. I appreciate you taking time to speak to me.*

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