

DEFINING THE FINE LINE: GENDER IDENTITY AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION
IN THE 21ST CENTURY, 5 NARRATIVES OF EXPRESSION

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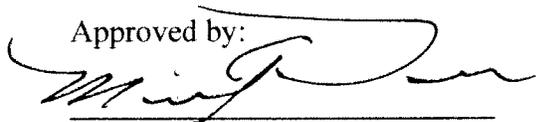
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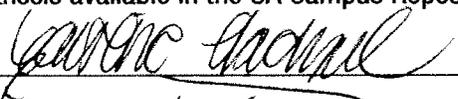
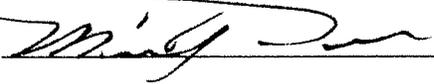


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Abstract: Gender identity and sexual orientation have often been confused as being synonymous. There is a fine line, which differentiates the two. Current research and education regarding the gender identity and sexual orientation of people that identify with the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning population is limited. The thesis explores what the current research says about both gender identity and sexual orientation and how it is explicitly defined. Five narratives of expression were collected from real human individuals who suffered an identity transformation crisis. The narratives both illustrate and contradict what research says and thus proves how much room there is for a broadening definition of identity expression. Gender identity and sexual orientation are not overlapping concepts. They are ultimately defined through an individual's life experiences, which are more complex than the definition of gender itself.

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Statement of Purpose:

As the Supreme Court ponders the constitutionality of Proposition 8, California's ban on gay-marriage, it is more important than ever to address the needs and understand the culture of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender population. It was estimated in 2012 that about 9 million Americans identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender, making up almost 4% of the entire United States population (Williams Institute). A national social media campaign began March 26, 2013. A symbol, as simple as a red box with square lines in the form of an "equal" sign, has circulated around millions of social media users. The Human Rights Campaign created this logo to unite the nation in support and awareness for LGBT equality. Although true societal equality is only an ideal, better understanding of human gender and sexual orientation may help us all understand why humans love the way they do and how gender roles will continue to evolve.

Statement of Relevance:

The sex of a human fetus is determined in between the 4th and 5th month of pregnancy. However, sexual orientation is a trait that humans develop over time (Williams and Stein, 2002). A combination of many factors probably determines whether a person identifies as heterosexual, bisexual, or homosexual. Sexual orientation has become one of those hushed topics that are heavily ignored or attentively disregarded in society. It can bring about anxiety, discomfort and confusion to those who have conservative views on sexuality or to those who have dissonance about their own identity. Regardless, homosexuals are the current oppressed group in society. Assumptions and stereotypes about a person's sexual orientation formulate around the gender norms of that person's personality. But how are norms determined? And how can norms be objectified over time. Our society today is much different than it was 20, even 10 years ago. We live in a world highly dependent on technology and information systems. We also live in a world where homosexual marriage is becoming increasingly "normal." Gender transfiguration surgery is becoming accepted. Sexual orientation is becoming a separate demographic from gender. There is a defined difference.

The demographics of the today's population are becoming increasingly more diverse. For example, the ratio of women to men in executive positions has leveled out in the past two decades; minority populations in both higher education and professional environments have increased; and most importantly, identifying as a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or questionable is on its way into becoming a social norm. The 24th National Coming Out Day was celebrated on Oct. 11, 2012 to honor the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender population and the triumphs they overcame to be respected in society. Universities around the nation are beginning to explicitly show their concern for respecting the LGBTQ demographic. Elmhurst College in Chicago was the first university to ever include a question about sexual orientation on their application. This year (2012-2013) was the first year the college implemented the question. Aimed at targeting students who identify as LGBTQ, Elmhurst opened doors for students worried that they would not be accepted for their sexual identity. The college provided students who answered the question with resources about LGBTQ clubs and groups on campus giving them an opportunity to connect with other students in their situation. In addition, the numbers of Fortune 500 companies implementing non-discrimination policies that include gender identity or expression have increased by 58% since 2003 (Human Rights Campaign, 2008). Additionally, non-discrimination policies relating to sexual orientation have reached a 94% implementation rate in all Fortune 500 companies (Human Rights, Campaign 2008).

These efforts provide both qualitative and quantitative evidence that gender and sexual orientation are demographics that are becoming increasingly more important in society. Gender identification is not synonymous with sexual orientation. What society

has perceived as normal behavior for each gender cannot be objectified in today's culture. Just as any other trait society, the norms have changed and will continue to grow and be cultivated with time. People are becoming more comfortable with the idea that gender and sexuality are different. This thesis explores what five people already know about gender identification and how that information changed over time. Communicating one's gender and his or her sexual identity have become two separate concerns.

Part 1

Literature Review:

The Social Science Behind Sexual Orientation

Current research on sexual differences in the brain and gender identification is a combination of scientific observation and cultural bias. "Our society traditionally has insisted that there are only two 'sexes'-male and female-and only two corresponding 'genders'-masculine and feminine," (Williams and Stein, 2002). Certain traits have been classified as "normal" traits of the male gender while others have been classified as norms of the female gender. This classification is used to assume the sexual orientation of a person's gender. This assumption strategy is called gender diagnosticity (Lippa and Hershberger, 1999). Gender diagnosticity is explicitly defined as an "instance when an individual is predicted to be male or female based on some set of gender-related indicators," which are measured by both biological and psychological theories (Bailey and Zucker, 1995). The biological factors that influence one's sexual identity include genetic factors, hormonal influences, and neural structure, which play a central role in the development of sex-type behaviors ultimately cultivating sexual orientation (Lippa and Hershberger, 1999). Psychological theories include socialization, peer influences,

parental reinforcement and the development of gender-related self-concepts. These specific sociocultural interactions can perhaps be the most heavily influencing factor in developing adolescents (Shields, Cohen, Glassman, Whitaker, Franks, Bertolina 2013).

The assumptions about an adolescent's gender/sexual orientation are the following: (1) The child is born with it, mentally and genetically instilled in their DNA, or (2) The child chooses to be hetero or homosexual (Shields et al., 2013). However, the gender diagnosticity theory suggests that those assumptions are equally irrelevant (Lippa and Hershberger, 1999). The exposure a child has to specific traits may impact that child for the rest of his or her life. But this is not true for all adolescents (Shields et al., 2013). A 2011 study was done in the first United States school district to ever include gender identity and sexual orientation in a school wide youth behavior survey. Students at San Francisco middle schools were given a "Youth Risk Behavior Survey" to measure the likelihood of specific students to be bullied or become a bully. The study actually provided more data that validated both the biological and psychological theories about gender evolution than it provided for its original purpose, which was to build better understanding of middle school bully demographics. The study found that of the middle school students ages 11-14, 3.8 percent of them identified as gay or lesbian. Additionally, 1.3 percent identified as transgender and 2.0 percent as bisexual. The survey asked questions pertaining to the students' upbringing and the types of personalities that influenced their current persona (Shields et al., 2013). Gender diagnosticity came into play when the researchers assessed the typicality of the male versus female interests, "instrumentality" and expressiveness (Lippa and Hershberger, 1999). Ultimately, the study showed that gender identification and sexual orientation is a prevalent demographic

among “young adults”, or the middle school students that were examined. Also, the psychological factors of the adolescents’ personal life combined with the biological instruments and expressions of the personality are what influence how adolescents express their gender.

The Journal of Personality (1999) defines masculinity in terms of “instrumental” personality traits while it defines femininity in terms of expressive traits. Common stereotypes generally reverse the “normal” gender roles. Stereotypically, heterosexual males are considered to be more “instrumental” in their behavior. This simply means that masculine personalities are based upon habit, logic and needs. Heterosexual women are considered to behave more “expressively,” which is just the opposite of instrumentally. Women are said to behave based on emotion and desires, rather than on strictly what they need (Diamant and McNulty, 1994). When males and females are homosexual their stereotypes become reversed. Homosexual men scored higher in expression while homosexual women score higher in instrumentality (Lippa and Hershberger, 1999). In this case, the gender diagnosticity becomes the “bipolar masculinity-femininity scale” as defined by Schwartz and Rutter (1998). The roles of the genders have been reversed, thus causing sex a-typical behavior (Bailey & Zucker 1995) (Else-Quest, Higgins, Allison, Morton, 2012) (Herbst, 2001).

Gender Identity

A native Kenya man had his life completely planned out, until he realized he was gay. When he was young, he knew something was not “normal” because he found himself always gravitating towards girls at school, in friendships and in most aspects of his life. He describes a time when he was in elementary school where he felt extremely

inferior around a group of boys his age. They surrounded him, pushed him down to the ground and demanded to know if he was really a boy. He was confused about why he was so different from the rest of the boys and wondered why he sometimes wished he were a girl (Arunga, 2012).

The man described above, Nathan, went through a gender crisis. A common diagnosis when realizing that one's gender role strays from the societal norm. "Our expectation that men should be masculine and women feminine sometimes obscures the variation that occurs in nature, and limits our collective ability to recognize and imagine alternative possibilities," (Williams and Stein, 2002) (Ekins and King, 2006). When people survey their own personalities based on what society says is acceptable, they go into crisis mode (Lippa and Hershberger, 1999). When humans feel that they are not what society expects, cognitive dissonance occurs. Existing outside the lines of what society sketches for us gives us anxiety. It is a psychological fact (Diamant and McAnulty, 1994). Nathan became circumcised at the appropriate time in his Kenyan culture, post-adolescence. But it pushed him in an unexpected step even further away from what he thought was his proper identity. In his culture, it was normal for the newly initiated adult males to begin showing interest in girls to begin the courtship process for marriage. Nathan felt no desire to engage in this cultural tradition and felt even more isolated than he did back in elementary school. He chose to outlet his gender frustrations through religion. He knew he would not be forced to focus on females and marriage and could alternately only focus on prayer and faith. Unfortunately, the cultural expectations for Nathan followed him through his pathway to faith. He became a leader in his church, which increased the expectancy for him to find a wife and marry, to be a role model for

his community. He was convinced that through faith, he could “cure himself” of his asexual desires. However, faith led Nathan into an unwanted marriage that he felt he needed to pursue in order to maintain his established role in his community. He was now 45 years old and stuck in a heterosexual marriage. More confused than ever, Nathan was deeply invested in the wrong gender identity and was a victim of complete reverse self-actualization (Williams & Stein, 2002). Reverse self-actualization occurs when individuals trick both their minds and their bodies into behaving in a way that is unnatural to their gender identity (Rosenblum and Travis, 1995). “It was expected of me, but I did not want it. I did not want that lifestyle, the heterosexual lifestyle,” Nathan said in his interview with *Daily Nation* (Arunga, 2012).

When men become “feminized” (Williams & Stein 2002) (Herbst, 2001) they become prone to certain behavioral tendencies of females. Men will often become inverted and distant as they are continually unhappy in their current state of life. Nathan became another victim of society’s culturally restricting norms. His sexual orientation was different than his gender identity and he had no means of expressing that. In Kenya, it was not uncommon for gay men to be married to straight women for fear of rejection and “reprisal” where the men could have everything they’ve worked for taken away from them. Having a homosexual orientation in Nathan’s land was considered “unnatural and unAfrican” (Arunga, 2012). The hatred and contempt for homosexuality has been largely due to the amount of fatal sexually transmitted diseases in Kenya. It is a high “risk” to be honest about being a homosexual male in a community where status and health is everything. Unfortunately, there is no happy ending to Nathan’s unromantic life. He remained in his marriage because without it he would be an outlaw in a society where he

worked hard to remain highly respected (Arunga, 2012). Nathan is one of millions of people who feel that they are stuck in the wrong gender and have no means or ideas of how to properly express and communicate their gender identity (Herbst, 2001) (Serwatka, 2010).

Gender as Foundation for Sexual Identity

Schwartz and Rutter (1998) argue that gender differences stem from reproductive differences. People are genetically born with sex drive, attraction and a certain nature that develop over time. However, regardless of which gender a person identifies with, he or she is instilled with a fundamental human nature. Men have the roles of playing the hunter; warrior and trailblazer while the women are the gatherers, nurturers and reproducers (Schwartz and Rutter, 1998). Communicating these roles is easy when a person has self-actualization with the given role. In Nathan's case, he did not feel that he embodied these manly gender roles. There are two approaches used to examine the constraints of gender identification and expression: the social constructionist approach or the essentialist approach (Schwartz and Rutter, 1998). Essentialists believe that gender identity is solely based upon the biology of evolution and attraction. They are the more concrete, objective thinkers and see gender in black or white, male or female roles only. They believe that men are men, and behave all in the definitions of masculinity with the same regards to women. Essentialists are often blamed for the assumption that because a man is male, he must be the hunter and therefore must only be attracted to a gatherer, a female (Bailey & Zucker 1995) (Serwatka, 2010) (Herbst, 2001). In contrast, social constructionists take on a much more subjective, socio-biological approach to gender identity. They believe that despite the biological sex drives, attractions and natures that

people are genetically exposed to and born with, people develop them over time and form their own expressions of those characteristics. For example, an essentialist would say that Nathan was born male and therefore was obliged to marry the woman he did not love and that he should feel attracted to her. A social constructionist would argue that although Nathan was born a man, his sex drive, attraction and nature developed into homosexual attraction (Virginia & Schwartz 1998) (Herbst, 2001) (Serwatka, 2010) (Rosenblum and Travis, 1995).

Additionally, Schwartz and Rutter (1998) bring in a consequent approach that they all the integrative approach. This view on gender identity and attraction says that it is strictly based upon sexual desire. Integrative thinkers do not feel that sex is strictly a biological function and feel that the reproduction factor is completely irrelevant in regards to attraction. While social constructionists believe that sociological factors such as family relationships, social constructs and fertility influence attraction, essentialists believe that anatomy, hormones and the human brain influence attraction, the integrative approach is that neither social nor biological factors influence sexual attraction at all. The integrative approach is perhaps the most open-minded method of understanding gender identity. It allows gender norms to be redefined and disregards typical gender roles. An integrative thinker would evaluate Nathan's a-sexual attraction to his wife and argue that his attraction to men was strictly based upon what he physically desired. Integrative thinkers base their theories heavily on lust and the context from which the lust emerges. They would say that Nathan's interest in his church and being constantly surrounded by the powerful men that ruled his community had a strong impact on why he was attracted to men. In summary, essentialists make sense of their gender by considering only

biological and evolutionary factors while blaming sexual desire on the genetically programmed roles specific to males and females; social constructionists base their gender identity on sociological and socio-cultural contexts in which they were brought up while understanding their sexual desires through the social interactions they make with members of their same gender versus the opposite gender. Lastly, integrative thinkers do not consider biological or evolutionary factors in their explanation of gender identity (Virginia & Schwartz 1998) (Herbst, 2001) (Serwatka, 2010). Ultimately, these three approaches allow humans to process the meaning behind their own and others' sexual desires.

Gender Communication Through Emotion

Perhaps the most stereotyped gender quality in North American culture is the overly emotional woman (Else-Quest al., 2012). Gender stereotypes emerge commonly through the way humans communicate their emotions. The “self-conscious emotions” (SCE) used to make the gender stereotypes are guilt, shame, pride and embarrassment (Else-Quest al., 2012). These are considered the “moral” emotions of the human palette, which dictate the human response to social norms and standards in society. Women are categorized as experiencing more guilt, shame and embarrassment but less pride than men. This type of statement is the foundation of a stereotype of gender communication. For example, a man who feels strongly in the SCE would be considered “feminine” because of how he communicates with his emotions. Communicating emotion is much more complicated than the basics of nonverbal human communication. It goes beyond the basic nonverbal functions of eye contact, proximity, pitch and adornment. Rather, emotion can be communicated more meticulously than any other human function (Else-

Quest al., 2012). Emotions are embedded in every human interaction. When women are stereotyped to be more emotional it is due to the type of emotions they portray. Research does not support that men are excessively vocal about their SCE emotions. However, they are vocal about different emotions that do not fall into the SCE bracket. The stereotypical male depicts masculine emotions to be expressed through anger, distress and fatigue (Rosenblum and Travis, 1996). A male who expresses these emotions as expected by society is considered to be “masculine.” How is it that every human, male or female, can be classified based on the four emotions that comprise the SCE?

Research regarding male and female sex typing heightened in the 1970s when study of gender stereotypes reached a peak (Rosenblum and Travis, 1996). There were ultimately two sets of personality traits that defined gender. The active-instrumental traits (Lippa and Hershberger, 1999) became the masculine gender norm while the nurturing-expressive (Lippa and Hershberger, 1999) (Rosenblum and Travis, 1996) were the feminine gender norm. People were considered “androgynous” if they had both active-instrumental and nurturant-expressive traits and “undifferentiated” if they identified with neither set of traits. Four personality identities pertaining to emotion now existed rather than just masculine or feminine. Having an androgynous or undifferentiated personality does not imply anything about one’s sexual orientation. It simply pertains to how one communicates emotionally. Furthermore, it explores the degree of “flexibility a person has regarding gender-stereotypic behavior” (Rosenblum and Travis, 1996). Similar to how the social constructionists differ from the essentialists, the expressiveness of emotions can be solely based on the context of the human and the human interaction. For example, an undifferentiated female may never show signs of compassion or ambition.

But, when that female is thrown into a certain social situation, the feminine traits she never shows may be revealed. When a friend of hers is in need, she may become an empathetic listener and go out of her way to cheer her friend up. Thus, showing bowing compassion and ambition, traits of an androgynous identity. Compassion falls under the nurturant-expressive, or feminine traits, while ambition falls under active-instrumental, or masculine, traits (Serwatka, 2010) (Shields et al., 2013) (Herbst, 2001).

Sexual Orientation and Emotion

Empirical studies of gender differences through emotion show that although women are more vocal about their emotions and are portrayed as “more emotional” than men, emotional experience plays an important role, too. Self-esteem and well being are two qualities that men represent more strongly (Else-Quest et al., 2012). Men are more vocal about these emotional qualities. Regardless of whether men are attracted to women or men, it is “normal” for them to behave showing more emotion in regards to their physical appearance, athleticism and self-satisfaction (Else-Quest et al., 2012). An athlete at Ohio State University recently became public about his homosexual orientation (Lesmerises, 2013). Prior to coming out to his coach and team earlier in the year Derrick Anderson, a sophomore hurdler from Texas, was alone in a world where confusion and identity development were becoming everyday challenges. According to his interview with Lesmerises (2013), becoming openly gay at Ohio State University was more of a feat than winning a national title. Anderson states that if he had never opened up to his teammates, his sexual identity would have never been questioned. “It came as a complete shock,” he said. In other words, he had a conflict of interest between his identity and his “emotional biology” (Biegel, 2010). He looked, felt and acted like a heterosexual male.

He portrayed the normal masculine emotional norms; he became aggressive and competitive through sports and felt strongly about his physical appearance and staying in shape. However, his sexual identity proved otherwise. While Anderson identified with a male gender norm, his sexual identity was conflicted. Anderson thoroughly defies the stereotype that a homosexual male identifies with female emotional traits (Lippa and Hershberger, 1999). This is where the important difference between gender and sexual orientation becomes evident.

Ohio State University is the first college to ever promote “Pride” through an athletic department. This speaks volumes for the future of gender discrepancies. A gender discrepancy defined by Biegel (2010) is when the predicted norms of a male or female do not match with that individual’s personality behaviors. For example, when a homosexual female is not expressive in “masculine” traits, as predicted (Else-Quest et al., 2012). Anderson’s case is a common one among people, specifically athletes, who feel pressure to conform to what society perceives them to be. In 2007, NBA star John Amaechi became the sixth professional male athlete and the first NBA player to ever openly come out. According to Biegel (2010) the reactions of the professional basketball community were more significant than the story of Amaechi’s coming out itself. Amaechi began an avalanche-type movement among athletes regarding their comfort with homosexuality making it’s way into the sports world. Thirteen-year NBA all-star Tim Hardaway was interviewed shortly after Amaechi’s sexual orientation revelation. He was asked how we would interact with a gay teammate. His response was extremely homophobic where he openly claimed that, “he hates gay people,” (Biegel, 2010). The history of the anti-LGBT climate of the sports industry stems from the stereotyped gender roles of American

athletes. The culture and traditions surrounding the “masculinity-dominated” (Biegel, 2010) sports culture were not accustomed to openly gay athletes in the league. Some even argue that this prejudice is established as early as Little League games (Biegel, 2010). Kids learn behaviors early that stick with them through adolescence and adulthood (Shields et al., 2013).

A New York University professor who specifically researches the socio-psychological aspects of gender and sexuality issues in sports explains that athletes are presumed to be “heterosexually virile and desirable” (Biegel, 2010). When gay men cut into this presumption they are essentially breaking the mold of the sports culture. But it’s rather the opposite for women. There is a double standard that female athletes have a natural presumption to be lesbian or possess “more masculine” (Shields et al., 2012) traits. NYU research found that lesbianism is directly tied to masculinity among female athletes and straight women in the environment must make vigorous efforts to avoid the stereotype. Similar to Hardaway’s response to Amaechi’s public orientation, when female athletes try hard not to be seen in the same light as their homosexual teammates, it causes a huge barrier between the straight and homosexual team members (Biegel, 2010). In 2010, not one member of a professional men’s baseball, football, basketball, or hockey team was openly gay (Biegel). At the NCAA and high school levels, openly gay athletes are rare, i.e. Anderson (Biegel, 2010) (Lesmerises, 2013).

Transgender Identity

Current research is extremely limited on the future of America’s third gender, transgender (Ekins and King, 2006). Defined by Biegel (2010), transgender persons are distinguished by their gender identities, which are different from the ones they were

genetically assigned to at birth. They may or may not fall in between the traditional barriers of male or female gender roles (Biegel, 2010) (Ekins and King, 2006). Research states that transgender is an area full of misconception (Lippa and Hershberger, 1999) (Williams and Stein, 2002) (Biegel, 2010). For example, the common assumption for transgender is that the majority of people who identify with this identity chose to undergo some type of gender reassignment surgery. However, the numbers show that more people chose to not undergo these surgeries due to financial, physical and personal reasons (Bailey and Zucker, 1995). Additionally, some take a lot of pride in being publicly open and out about their gender change while others feel that surgery is necessary in order for them to live happily concealed in their new gender (Biegel, 2010). Just as there are many ways to express being gay, straight, male or female, there are many ways to express transgender (Lippa and Hershberger, 1999). The nature of a transgender identity will change over time just like the identity of the male and female genders.

Another common misconception is that a transgender will always identify as a gay or lesbian. In actuality, a transgender can identify as heterosexual, homosexual or bisexual. They have developing and overlapping views of their identity. Identifying as transgender allows for them to identify with more male than female traits or the contrary, but is not limited exclusively to one or the other (Biegel, 2010) (Williams and Stein, 2002). Furthermore, not every transgender human is comfortable being classified in the LGBTQ population. The homophobic prejudices, which exist more commonly in society currently than any other racial prejudice (Lesmerises, 2013) (Biegel, 2010) (Ekins and King, 2006), are often an umbrella to the transphobia that exists. This commonly results in violence and discrimination against those who are seen to be defying traditional gender

roles (Lippa and Hershberger, 1999). As these identities become more meticulously studied and better understood we can expect changes in how society protects this population from the discrimination. In October 2011, President Barack Obama initiated the anti-hate crime movement, which started tangibly punishing people for using the word “faggot” and making slurs against homosexuals (Diamant and McAnulty, 1994). Today, legal developments are being drafted to start educating and informing about the future of the third gender, transgender. For example, the transgender option for middle school students to bubble in on selected standardized test for a San Francisco school district (as mentioned previously). These types of implementations prove that the presence of a transgender population and the increasing defiance and development of traditional gender norms is increasing and becoming more accepted.

Part II

Hypothesis:

There is a fine line between gender identity and sexual orientation. The distinction is hard to define and interpret. That a male identifies with masculine physical and emotional gender traits does not mean that his sexual orientation correlates. The same goes for women. Stereotypes do exist, but more importantly, they are reductionist. The stereotypes that society has cultivated into “norms” that males and females should follow do not apply to every human. Neither all males nor all females can be expected to live within the “lines” that society has defined as identity. The transgender population has become increasingly more visible in society. As education increases about this identity, perceptions of gender will change. Schools have already started implementing “transgender” as a demographic option. I predict that transgender will become a third

gender. In a society where gender has been black and white, male and female, transgender is the grey area.

Methods:

To provide evidence for my thesis that gender and sexual orientation are two separate identities, I set out to interview an abundance of people who identified with the LGBTQ population. I found that each interview was unique, complex, and impossible to objectify. There is so much to be said for the struggles of this population. Each story is different and more complex than the last. By hearing over 20 different accounts from homosexual and transgender people, ages 18-30, my research was put into reality. I developed a deeper understanding about gender evolution and the struggles of coping with an “unusual” sexual identity. The theories and social science from my literature review allowed me to understand the technical aspects behind gender identity and sexual orientation. However, hearing the first-hand accounts and experiences made me realize there is so much more behind sexual orientation and gender identity than evolution and biological or socio-cultural factors.

I reached out to some students I knew personally from the University of Arizona Pride Alliance who connected me to a network of people. I sought out people who were open to allowing me to listen to their stories about coming out, dealing with their sexuality and transgender. I struggled to come up with a way to standardize all of the stories into qualitative data. I started breaking down every story into sub sections: adolescence, identity transformation, opening up, and relationships. Then I realized that it was unfair to categorize human experience. I ended up with more than 20 stories of emotional heartbreak, identity transformation and sexuality exploration. I went through

each story to find any sort of commonality and observation but it did not feel natural. In doing so I discovered myself making assumptions and stereotyping. I started pulling my research from above to justify the descriptions of the real experiences to what research states. I did the same for every homosexual male story and transgender stories.

I reached a point in my efforts where I began to reevaluate the ethics of my analysis. It did not make sense for me to continue categorizing the real experiences I was using to explain concrete research. I decided to take a more radical approach and broaden my efforts. I realized that by interviewing and collecting only stories of homosexual identities I was neglecting crucial aspects of gender. Heterosexuality, the “norm”, is equally as important to understanding the evolution of identity both sexually and with gender.

To explicitly use my research to draw a conclusion about gender identity and sexual orientation in the 21st century I decided to compile five narratives of expression. Five individual stories to illustrate each of the gender identities and sexuality orientations provide only a taste of what society needs to hear in order to make more concrete realizations about the current state of gender. I hope to shed light on how the existing research is demonstrated in reality. The experiences of a heterosexual male, homosexual male, heterosexual female, homosexual female, and a transgender all between the ages of 18 and 30 are detailed narratives of real people who developed their gender identity and sexual orientation in the 21st century. I let the narrators unfold their own stories. I asked the following questions to each to keep each narrative on topic and whole:

1. Tell me about your family life from childhood through adulthood.
2. What was your political upbringing and what are your political views now?

3. What were some of your internal struggles as a child (before college)?
4. What are some of your internal struggles now?
5. At what age was your first sexual attraction?
6. How would you describe your sexuality?
7. How would you define your gender?

Narrative of a Heterosexual Male:

He grew up in a conventional family with an unconventional hidden home life. He was raised in an extremely affluent part of southern California with every bell and whistle at an arm's reach. His father, a hedge fund genius, was rarely home and his mother, a real estate powerhouse, picked him up from school every day in their Range Rover from kindergarten through his 16th birthday. Friends of the family seemed to be jealous of how simply Shane, his older sister Remy, and the parents, Marlow and Shane Sr. lived in what seemed like complete harmony. Shane recalls his earliest memories from childhood and cannot remember a time where his parents ever showed love towards one another. He and Remy became very close, as they only had each other when their parents were constantly arguing.

Shane's family's socio-cultural background was extremely conservative. His parents never spoke negatively of liberal topics such as homosexuality and pro-choice but they certainly were not open to them. He grew up in a wealthy, Republican society where gay couples were not present and homosexuality was never discussed. Once Shane hit puberty he immediately became fascinated with the female gender. "It was like one day in social studies a light turned on or something and all I could see were women," he recalls of his sexual peak. He was instantly attracted to females and never once had

sexual thoughts about males, until he became avid in his high school theatre program. Shane had had plans of joining his high school's theatre troupe since he was young and always heavily involved in school plays, talent shows and neighborhood theatre productions. However, in high school it became "weird" that Shane wanted to spend his extracurricular hours on a stage rather than on a field. He started hearing rumors about himself. "Several people would ask me if I was gay and why I became a 'queer'," he said. Shane became severely confused and started questioning his identity. He asked himself why he liked acting and why was he the only one out of his immediate friend group that did not play a sport in high school. He had many female friends but only by association with the theatre program. Shane knew that he was not gay but hearing the constant criticism and judgment was a true struggle for him. His gender identity expressed something contradictory to his sexual orientation. At his high school, he was considered "gay." Only those who knew him personally knew the truth behind his identity. Because he did not live within the lines of "normal" male gender identity, he was stereotyped. He was different from his friends who were obsessed with football and soccer. He was obsessed with performing arts, which was not normal for a heterosexual male in his setting.

After struggling with his identity the first two years of high school, Shane finally accepted that he was different. He was straight but his interests, expression of emotion and hobbies said otherwise, according to those around him. His junior year, all he wanted was to walk down the halls of his high school feeling completely himself and not worried about the daily discrimination he faced because of his natural born theatre talent. He tried out for the soccer team and made the junior varsity team. He abandoned the theatre

troupe and soon people forgot about him. Since he became an athlete, he was considered normal. “It was not until my freshmen year of college that I realized how messed up I was,” Shane says of his identity crisis. He was a victim of gender stereotyping and had contributed to the conformity.

He struggled with the perception that was placed on him. He felt as if he was a straight male stuck in the world of a gay male. “I was not even gay and sometimes I questioned if I was really even into girls just because I was not obsessed with sports,” he said. Shane’s gender identity came from his deviation of normal gender behavior. Since being at the University of Arizona, Shane’s interest in theatre has only been praised. “I think gender and sexuality is something so hard to define and understand. At a high school age, where people have only been exposed to what their parents brought them up with, people do not understand that gender and sexuality goes further than what is normal and ‘not normal’ behavior like guys who do not want to play sports,” Shane said. His parents fighting and messy divorce taught him a lot about relationships but he said that his father never pressuring him to do sports and always supporting his performing arts passion is what truly made him comfortable in his own skin. As a heterosexual male, Shane experienced the discrimination, gender confusion and sexual identity crisis that almost all homosexual people experience when first coming to terms with their own identities (The Right to Be Out CITE).

Narrative of a Homosexual Male:

Andrew immediately began talking about the first time he ever had a sexual encounter with a male. It was on a 7th grade field trip, away from the rest of the class, behind a museum building. After it happened, he was not sure how to handle it. He and

the other 7th grade boy that it happened with pretended it did not. The word confused did not even begin to explain his feelings during that time in his life. He felt that he had just opened a chapter that he never wanted or expected to read.

Andrew grew up in the average middle class American family. His parents met while both working in the flight industry. His mother, Cheryl, a flight attendant, and his father, Mitch, a pilot, are happily married and have been for over 25 years. Andrew grew up in a household filled with love and celebration of Catholic holidays. He understood what a happy marriage looked like and grew up wanting one of his own. The first time he engaged in a sexual act was the field trip in 7th grade. He does not go into explicit detail but describes the sensation that came over him when it happened. "It was honestly as if my body was speaking for my mind. I felt that it was an out of body experience but at the same time I felt there was nothing wrong about it. It was not forced, we both allowed it to happen," Andrew said. After it happened, Andrew and the other male remained friendly at school but never talked about the occurrence to anyone or even themselves.

As Andrew entered high school he began dating like any other adolescent teen. However, he felt a strong sense of dissonance as he dated girl after girl. Girls were very attracted to Andrew. Not only was he physically attractive but he also had one of those personalities that naturally drew people to it. "I'll be the first one to say it, I knew I was attractive and physically blessed and I let that work for me in high school," said Andrew. His parents never questioned his sexuality nor did anyone else. Andrew recalls "liking" all the girls he dated and seemed to forget about that one day in 7th grade. "I really did not think about being gay or think about lusting after males, I was dating girls and that

satisfied me, at the time. I blocked out that day in 7th grade until I was mature enough to realize my true identity,” said Andrew.

When Andrew got to the University of Arizona he started meeting and hanging out with all types of people he had never previously interacted with. His high school in Scottsdale, Arizona did not expose him much to diversity. He started working at a Starbucks near the campus and became friends with a myriad of types of people. Andrew was never one to close himself off from new people and new experiences but he felt that college was the place to do so. He began dating a girl named Sarah very seriously. He met her in class and they cliqued immediately. After only one year of dating, they moved in together during their sophomore year. Andrew said that it was not until he was living with his girlfriend that he became extremely unhappy. “I became way more involved with my Starbucks clique. I found myself never wanting to go home and constantly found excuses not to,” Andrew said. He was not influenced by anyone or anything in particular but his unhappiness hit him like a pound of bricks.

He really started questioning his sexuality. “I loved my girlfriend but in a completely unromantic way. No one man distracted me from her but I became so indulged in exploring that side of my past that I had blocked out,” Andrew reminisced of his 7th grade experience. One night, while Sarah was asleep, Andrew moved out all of his stuff in the middle of the night and slept in his car in the Starbucks parking lot. He said that he just needed to get out of there and be away from her. He felt like he was breaking her heart while she was breaking his for not allowing him to be himself. He defines that night as his “breaking point,” the night he truly turned over the leaf of his gender identity and sexual orientation.

Prior to these feelings of ambiguity, confusion and identity crisis, Andrew never experienced any other indicators that he had a homosexual orientation. His experience contradicts the belief that homosexuality is biological. He played sports in high school, he never was extremely emotional or into fashion. Three things he felt were “gay stereotypical behaviors.” He was the “normal” all-American boy and literally found himself in college. Currently, Andrew has been openly gay for two years and celebrated the two-year anniversary of what he calls his “real self” this year at the Phoenix Gay Pride festival. As a homosexual male, Andrew experienced the ultimate heartbreak and suffering of hurting someone he really loved. He said that one of the more painful aspects of coming out was being honest to those around him. His parents, his ex-girlfriend and his closest friends welcomed his new identity with open arms. Nothing about Andrew’s gender identity was different. He still loved playing baseball, remained friends with all of his heterosexual male friends and continued working at Starbucks. The only thing that Andrew evolved was his sexual orientation. His experience was completely isolated from his gender role as a male. Through heterosexuality to homosexuality, Andrew’s gender roles and identity remained the same.

Narrative of a Heterosexual Female:

She grew up without ever knowing her mother. Cheyenne was the oldest of three with two younger brothers whom she spent the majority of her life taking care of. Her mother passed away before she was even a year old and her father raised Cheyenne and her two brothers as a single father. She never felt surges of self-pity that she never got to know the care of a mother but she was instead consumed with her mother as a person. She was constantly flipping through her father’s old photo albums and grilling him about

the woman she never knew but wanted desperately to be like. Her father, Anthony, was 100 percent Italian and married the first woman that brought down his ego. Cheyenne was amazed by her father's courage and strength of raising his three kids alone but always wanted him to be happier. She recalls how she would constantly probe her father to go on dates and ask him if he would ever love another woman. He would always brush Cheyenne's naïve romantic thinking aside and constantly told her that she was the only girl he could ever love as much as he loved her mother. As Cheyenne became older and started applying for colleges she realized that she could never be too far from her father and two brothers. They counted on her too much, and as she neared adulthood, she started becoming very resentful of this.

“I was 18 about to graduate from high school and start my independence and I realized that I could never have any because of how much my father relied on me,” Cheyenne said. She felt like the mother, housewife, chauffeur, maid, sidekick, and every other role that the men in her life needed to be. She questioned whether or not she should even pursue a college degree but her father made sure she knew how important it was to her future. She was a smart girl, in all honors and advanced placement classes at her high school in Tucson, Arizona. She and her father finally agreed that the University of Arizona was the place for her and she would live on campus like any other incoming freshman. Cheyenne never had time for boyfriends in high school because she took on full-time roles of caring for the other men in her life. She did not even know how to handle a relationship or a boy having affection for her. She did not have a mother or sisters to ask for advice and barely had any friends because she spent all of her time outside of school with her two brothers and father. “To be completely honest, I was

terrified of moving into that dorm. No parents, all kids my age, I had no idea how to act,” Cheyenne said.

Prior to starting her freshmen year, Cheyenne had never even considered romance or sex. Her father never dated and she had no relationships in her life to model a romantic one after. She knew her parents had been madly in love but she did not know how to express herself as heterosexual female. She was not even sure if she was attracted to boys. After all, her whole life revolved around caring for three of them. Cheyenne spent a lot of time in the library freshmen year after choosing to major in mechanical engineering. Once again, she found herself constantly surrounded by men. In the mechanical engineering program the ratio of men to women was about 8:2. Her closest friends became the other students in her cohort, 15 males and one other female. She became really close to one guy in cohort, AJ. They spent about 22 out of 24 hours together every day and he was easily her best friend. It was obvious to everyone but Cheyenne that he was in love with her. The first time Cheyenne opened the door to her sexual orientation was one night around 4am in the library when AJ finally grabbed her face and kissed her. After it happened, she was not sure how she felt about it. She seemed to have been waiting to find out if a kiss would bring out her sexual orientation.

Cheyenne became sexually involved with AJ while they remained best friends. He asked her to be his girlfriend but she was scared of what that label entailed. She was so different from all the other girls she knew who were constantly complaining about how the guys that they liked just wanted to have sexual relations with them and nothing more. That is what she wanted from AJ. She did not need a man to take care of her and never allowed one to. She was used to being the caretaker and already had 3 men in her life to

care for. She did not need a fourth. At the end of her freshmen year, she and AJ said their goodbyes, he was sad and she was excited to be done with school and go back to only worrying about her family. The summer in between her freshmen and sophomore year is when she truly questioned her identity both as a woman and as a heterosexual. She had no one to express her confusion to and the week before she started her sophomore year in the dorms again, she finally confronted her father.

“I asked him ‘Dad, what is wrong with me?’ I do not want a boyfriend but I do not want a girlfriend, do you think I am gay?’” Her father was taken aback. Cheyenne said that he asked her if she was attracted to anyone and she was honest. “It was that moment that I realized maybe I would love AJ if I allowed myself to. I enjoyed the time I spent with him regardless of the sexuality,” Cheyenne said. She never questioned if she was making the proper choice between men and women she just did not know it was possible to be straight when she acted more like a boy than a girl. She talked about how she felt that her emotions were different than other girls’. She never worried about boys liking her and never cared about fashion or other topics she felt were normal for girls her age.

As a heterosexual female, Cheyenne’s gender identity did not match her sexual orientation. Gender stereotypes would assume that Cheyenne’s emotions scored high in instrumentality (Lippa and Hershberger 1999) and low in expressiveness, which are two indicators of a homosexual female (Lippa and Hershberger 1999) (Wimpin, Wimmin CITE). She is currently in a romantic relationship with AJ and has been for the past year and a half. Her sexual orientation was probed by her self-actualization. Once she realized more about herself both as an individual and a female she was able to evolve her sexual

orientation. Cheyenne experimented with her sexuality before she knew which orientation she identified with. She was not the “typical female” with the correlating gender roles. Her sexual orientation influenced her gender identity.

Narrative of a Homosexual Female:

Rory was ten years old the first time someone ever asked her if she was gay. “It was at a sleepover in elementary school and everyone was talking about who they liked in our class. Someone asked me if I was gay and I did not know what that meant,” she said. Rory is currently the president of her sorority and has been in a healthy, happy relationship with the same woman for three years. The most difficult part of her life was when she decided to become openly gay and no longer “hide behind the label of ‘bisexual.’”

Rory grew up in a traditional family setting with happily married parents and was an only child. She was active in gymnastics, swim team, and art all throughout her life but really began to shine as an artist in high school. She lived in the same house her entire life in Denver, Colorado. She was the typical high school teenager, obsessed with hanging out with her friends and never wanting to be at home on a Friday or Saturday night. The only difference between her and all of her friends was that she knew she was gay. “From the minute I learned what the word ‘gay’ meant after asking my parents about it after that sleepover, I knew that that’s what I was,” Rory said. Prior to understanding the definition of being gay, she was too young to start thinking of her sexuality. When she hit puberty, the age where all her friends cared about was gossiping, she knew immediately that she was attracted to women. During sleepover conversations and recess chats she would engage in the conversations with her friends, waiting for a good time to

open up. “But when is there a good time? ‘Good times’ do not exist when you have to tell the people that think they know you the best that they are wrong and in fact know nothing about who you really are,” said Rory.

Rory had no problem accepting her own sexual orientation but she struggled with expectations of how others would accept the news. “I lied,” she explained. “I would just say I had crushes on boys in high school and acted excited when I got asked to prom. I never hit on anyone at my school or even thought about trying to find a girlfriend. Yeah, I was like every other high school girl, day-dreaming about my picture perfect romance except instead of seeing a tall, broad-shouldered boy, I dreamed about the perfect girl.” When Rory felt that it was time she had reached a maturity level where she valued her own happiness above how others perceptions of her would change, she came out. She returned home from Christmas break to Colorado and all of her friends were reuniting at their favorite pizza joint to catch up on everyone’s first semester of college. Rory decided to tell her parents first. They were shocked but supportive. “It seemed as if I had told them something as insignificant like my favorite color had switched from red to blue,” Rory said. Her parents had not seen the news coming but it did not seem to matter to them. Rory was still their daughter and whether she was sexually attracted to men or women did not change that. Ultimately, both Rory and her parents were on the same page. Her sexual orientation had no impact on her gender identity.

When it came time for Rory to open up to her friends, she became shakier than she had ever felt in her entire life. She had grown up with this group of girls and they had been through everything together. “I blindsided them,” Rory said. When it was her turn to update the table of friends she stared down in her lap and said, “Well, I am dating

someone.” The entire table gasped and screamed with excitement. “Her name is Emily.” Silence. Rory’s closest friend in the group, Briony, stood up and wrapped her arms around her. “I will never forget that moment for the rest of my life,” Rory said. Briony was all smiles while Rory was all tears. Rory described in great detail the overwhelming avalanche of emotions that flood through her once she was honest to her friends. She felt that it was the happiest and most scared she has ever felt and probably will ever feel. A couple of the shyer friends at the table began to slowly warm up to the idea that their best friend was a lesbian. After a maximum of about 30 minutes, it did not matter. And that meant everything to Rory.

As a strong, confident, driven woman Rory always felt comfortable in her own skin. When she realized she was gay she did not feel the need to hide it or conform into someone who would be stereotyped as a lesbian. She remained true to her gender identity until she felt mature enough to be honest about it. She and her current girlfriend, Emily, met at the student union within the first month of school and fell in love. They each were each other’s first girlfriends and went through their sexual orientation transformations together. “I could never imagine doing it alone. Emily did not make me do it or inspire me to open up or anything, I just finally felt like I was able to. As if my wings had been clipped and they were finally free,” Rory said. She was open about her sexual orientation and her gender identity was untouched.

Narrative of a Transgender-Female to Male:

She tried everything in her capability to stop it. Every ounce of energy in her body was used for years to cope with her female gender. At age 18, she moved out, began working part-time, started dressing how she wanted and began expressing herself the way

she had always envisioned. Theresa started identifying as a transgender when she was finally able to be free from her parents.

She grew up with a divorce that constantly weighed her down until she was out of the house. Her parents were violent with one another and she often was caught in the middle of it. She was the youngest of four children. Her two brothers and sister were either gone in college or married with their own families. She basically grew up alone with a journal as her closest confidante. Theresa had a group of diverse friends at school. She talked about the heavy influence that two males at her high school had on her. “They were openly gay and helped me realize that I was too,” she said. Theresa did not go through any big reveal or make a deal about openly coming out. Her parents told her they had seen it coming and her friends felt the same. She had always had more masculine gender roles. She started practicing mixed martial arts at the youngest age possible and used it as an emotional release from her rough home life. The gay couple at her high school made her jealous. Why couldn’t she be a normal “guy” with a normal “girlfriend” is the question that kept her awake at night.

When she turned 16 she began working at a Sports Authority retail store in her Tempe, Arizona neighborhood. She was determined to be out of her house by the time she was 18 and began saving in a checking account that her parents did not even know existed. On her 18th birthday she had saved over \$4,500 to get an apartment and figure out how to live the rest of her life. Most people her age were making decisions regarding college and what career path to follow. Theresa had to make a change regarding everything in her mind, body, and soul. She was blessed with a beautiful female body but she was so unhappy and felt that she was physically stuck in the wrong skin. She never

considered shaving her head because she knew her parents would be ruthless. However, now that she was living on her own paying for everything herself and ultimately making every choice independently, she took her gender into her own hands. She made a consultation appointment to learn more about testosterone shots and joined an Arizona Transgender Support Group that she found through students she knew from Arizona State University. After deciding to start making payments for testosterone shots and begin the process, Theresa decided to go through with the identity change process. She shaved her head, started calling herself “Reese,” and began more meticulously researching the Arizona transgender process.

Currently, Reese is single in Tempe, Arizona and happily working full-time at a restaurant. Reese is unsure of how to define her gender at this time. Although she is still physically a female with reproductive parts, she has weekly doses of testosterone shots. She is confused about how to identify with a gender. She defines her gender as “transgender” and neither male nor female. She once considered her sexual orientation, homosexual, however now that her gender identity is undefined, her sexual orientation is also. If she identifies with the female gender, she is a homosexual. However, if she identifies as a male, her orientation would be defined as heterosexual. Reese is more concerned with feeling comfortable as an individual rather than being defined. “Homo, hetero, male, female, call me what you want, at the end of the day it’s me in this body and how I identify with myself,” she said.

Part III

Conclusion:

The literature review provided me with evidence that there is both social and biological science behind human gender identity. A human gender is scientifically determined within the fourth and fifth month of pregnancy however the gender behaviors are a subjectively defined set of traits. In all five of the narratives, each of the narrators' life experiences contributed something to how they identified, male or female. Shane, Andrew, Cheyenne, Rory, and Reese were all born into families of "normal" marital union between a man and a woman. Literature says that their socio-cultural backgrounds had the heaviest influence on their sexual orientation. However, the narratives proved that the process is different for every person whether straight, homosexual, or transgender.

According to technology and the daily changes being made to our society, life and experiences are evolving more quickly than ever. What was once considered unheard of and rare is becoming more accepted in everyday life. Transgender. Although it is not yet considered a third gender in American society, it is becoming a term that people are willing to accept. With further education, research, and social scientific study, the transgender movement will be able to make strides in society. Being accepted as a cultural "norm," becoming a third gender on demographic identifications, and having the right to ultimately live comfortable in the appropriate gender role are not only hopes I see for society but well-researched predictions. The research shows that the homosexual identity was once as confusing and unaccepted as the current state of the transgender identity. With time, research, and further education of homosexuals in America, it

became accepted. Currently, homosexual and gay rights are increasing almost daily. They have become widely broadened and the general societal opinion of homosexuality has developed greatly.

The LGBTQ group will continue to suffer oppression and be prejudiced and stereotyped. However, education about this group and how they identify with their gender and sexual orientation is crucial for their implementation into society. The research and education devoted to the gay community has given society the proper information it needs to make actual perceptions of homosexuality, rather than stereotypes. Stereotypes develop from second-hand information that people make about others who stray from societal and cultural norms. A homosexual male and female go much further beyond their masculinity and feminine behaviors. Their gender identity is not determined by their sexual orientation, and vice versa. Each has an influence on one another but they are completely obsolete. For example, Shane's gender behavior would indicate that he is homosexual, if he were to base his orientation off of his gender. He identified with more feminine gender roles and behaviors but he was only attracted to females. It contradicted the stereotypes of a heterosexual male. Likewise, the man in Kenya who remained in a loveless marriage because he was afraid to break the gender "norm" of a heterosexual male in his community. The transgender evolution is much more complicated and is still in the process of becoming as homosexuality is today. There is much political argument about the term "transgender." Whether it means that a male or female has gone through the gender reverse process or whether it refers to someone who is unsure of which gender he or she identifies with is the question behind the term's general meaning.

Ultimately, gender identity and sexual orientation have become more defined as they have become more difficult to define. Specifically, as gender roles have become more intertwined and less objective, gender identity has become more complex. It is no longer specific to one's physical gender and behaviors. It is developed and evolved through personal experience. As illustrated by the five narratives, every identity journey takes a different route. With sexual orientation, biology is not a factor. It is a developing concept that comes with life experiences. The five narratives show how five unrelated people developed their sexual orientation through what they saw, felt, and experienced in their own lives. A correlation between gender identity and sexual orientation does exist. But contrary to the stereotypical societal belief, they do not determine one another. Transgender is a movement that still needs more research and further education in order to be explicitly be defined. The transgender population will continue to grow, as it becomes a more accepted concept in society. Gender identity and sexual orientation in the 21st century has become a topic of conversation in American society that is difficult to ignore. It once was an idea that people kept to themselves about and was difficult to discuss openly. Today, it is both politically and socially a concern in society. As people continue to evolve and develop their own identities, whether through gender or sexuality, the perception of LGBTQ will continue to broaden. The fine line between gender identity and sexual orientation has just begun being defined and accepted. It is impossible to predict exactly what the future stores for identity and expression but we can be sure that society will be forced to accept future of the third gender, transgender.

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