



**“We Have a Hard Time Treating
Your Kind Here”:
Negative Health Care Experiences
of Transgender Women
in San Francisco**

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2013 National Transgender Health Summit

May 17-18, 2013

Transgender Health Disparities



- 32% to 41% of all transgender people have **attempted suicide**
- Transgender women are disproportionately likely to be HIV+
- A recent meta-analysis found that **28%** of trans women are HIV+

Kristen Clements-Nolle, et al., 2006; Grant, et al., 2011; Herbst, et al., 2008

What health care problems do transgender people face?

- **19%** of transgender and gender nonconforming people have been **refused health care** due to their gender status
- **28%** have **delayed or postponed needed medical care** out of fear of harassment or discrimination

Grant, et al., 2011

GAPS IN THE LITERATURE

No single study has focused exclusively on qualitatively understanding negative health care experiences of transgender people.

RESEARCH QUESTION



What are the negative health care experiences of transgender women in San Francisco? How have transgender women responded to these experiences?

WHY QUALITATIVE METHODS?



- Qualitative research answers questions such as “why,” “how” and “what”
- Qualitative research produces exploratory and highly descriptive knowledge

Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2006

STUDY METHODS

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graph TD; A[Recruitment] --> B[Semi-Structured Interview]; B --> C[Transcription and Coding]; C --> D[Content Analysis];
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Recruitment

Primarily at transgender-focused clinics in San Francisco

Semi-Structured Interview

Lasting 30-90 minutes

Transcription and Coding

Content Analysis

Predominant themes identified and explored

PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS



- **25** self-identified transgender women
- Ages 29-66, **mean age 46**
- 48% Caucasian, 36% African-American, 8% mixed race, 8% other

PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

- Broad range of socioeconomic status:
 - 25% completed high school or less
 - 42% attended some college
 - 34% completed college or graduate school

- 1 in 5 participants had **moved to San Francisco** in part because of its health care services for transgender people

PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

- Many participants in this study reported:
 - ▣ HIV+ status (28%)
 - ▣ History of sex work
 - ▣ History of alcohol/drug abuse (>50%)
 - ▣ History of homelessness (>50%)

RESULTS



Finding 1: Names & Pronouns

Health care staff routinely refused to use the names and pronouns that patients requested.

Finding 1: Names & Pronouns

- **13 out of 25** participants described the failure of security guards, receptionists, nurses, and physicians to use the correct pronoun or female name of the patient (despite patient's requests)
- Participants described humiliating incidents in which they were called by male names or pronouns **in front of other patients.**
- The emotional burden of these experiences was significant.

*“I spent so much of my life trying to deny that I had this feminine part. And then when I finally, finally I go through all of this living hell to get to the point where I say, okay, this is me. I’m predominantly female, that’s how I’m going to live my life and that’s how I want to present myself, and **then to have someone call you sir.** It’s almost like somebody **stabbing you right** in the middle of your chest. **It hurts that bad.**”*

Study Participant Quote

Finding 2: Negative Stereotypes

Transgender women believe that health care providers hold negative stereotypes about them.

Finding 2: Negative Stereotypes

- Many of the women interviewed believe that health care providers view all transgender women as:
 - “sluts”
 - “whores”
 - “all HIV+”
 - “junkies”
 - “drama queens”

*“I had to stay in a hospital, because as a junkie, I got cellulitis. I had to stay in there for two weeks, and they were having their little interns come into the room and talking. **I felt really like a circus freak.** They would talk about me and transgenders and all this stuff like it was an illness. I mean, literally just talk about it like I’m just this case study. **The part that I remember most is that it was actually surprising that I didn’t have HIV or full-blown AIDS, because most transgenders that are drug addicts do, and they said that right in front of me. It was really shocking.**”*

Study Participant Quote

Finding 3: Wide Range of Experiences

Study participants report a wide range of negative experiences in the health care setting.

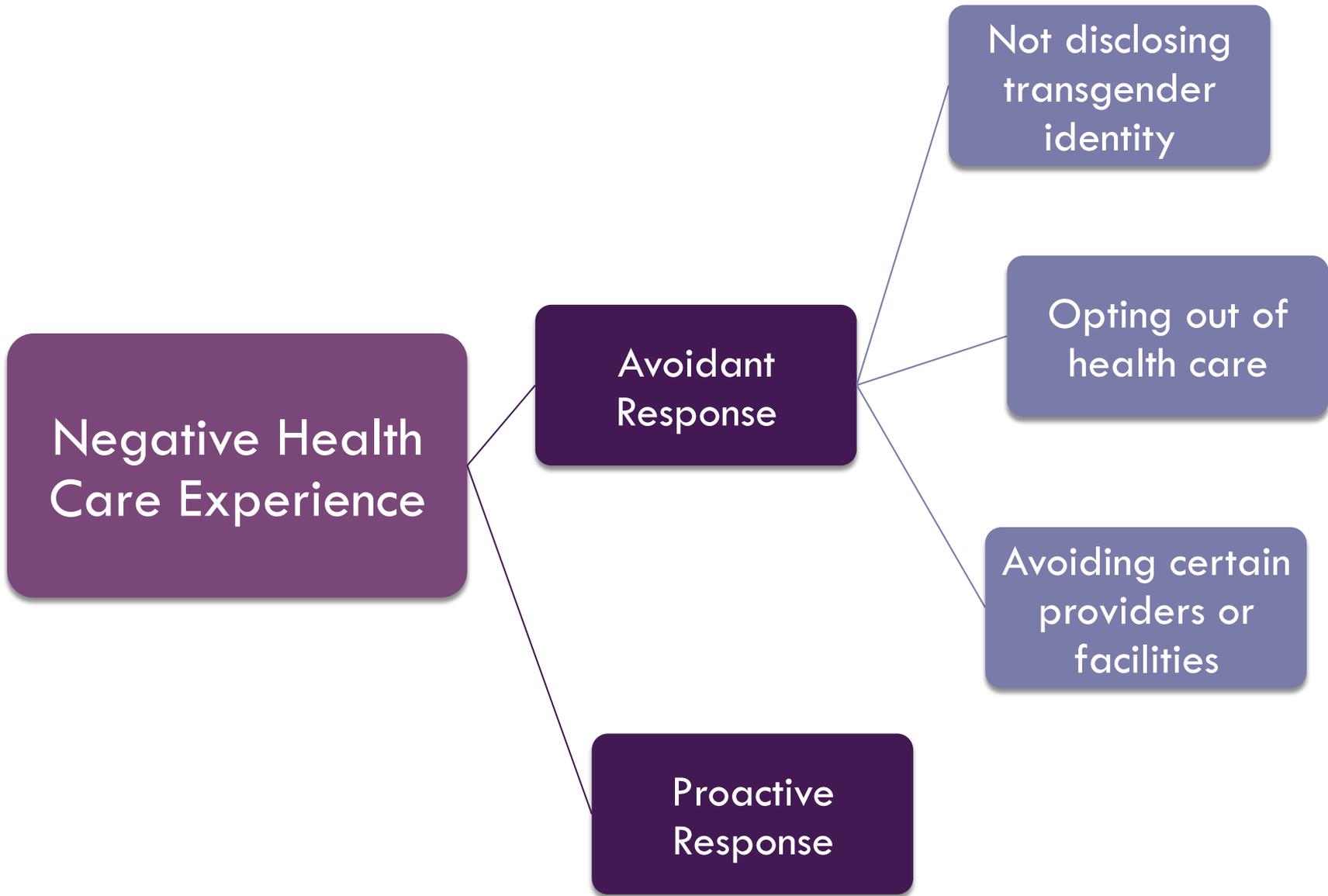
Finding 3:

Wide Range of Negative Experiences

- ❑ Inability to obtain a referral for surgery
- ❑ Difficulty finding psychiatric services
- ❑ Victim of sexual violence placed in a room (at a medical facility) with a mentally retarded man
- ❑ Denied hormone therapy
- ❑ Forced to use male bathroom
- ❑ Receptionist used a homophobic slur towards a patient

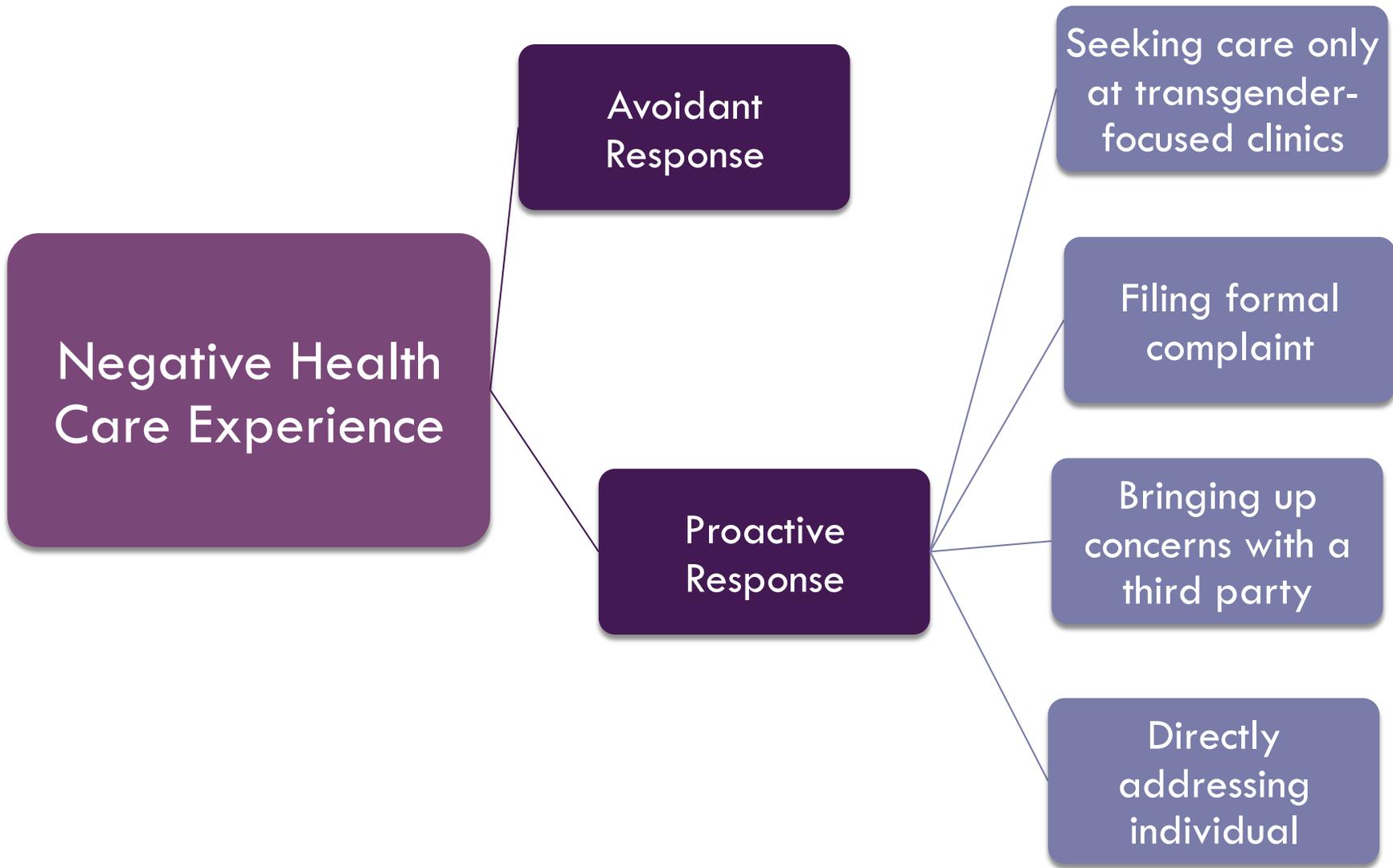
Responding to Negative Experiences

Responses to negative health care experiences were characterized as either proactive or avoidant.



“After all these experiences, I was just like, ‘Forget it. Whatever happens, happens.’ I wasn’t going to the doctors. I said, ‘I’m losing more T cells coming in here than I am just walking around the street, just taking care of myself.’ So I started walking every day and eating more healthy. That’s what I was basically doing instead of going to the hospital. I tried to eat like all fruits and vegetables, stuff like that.”

Study Participant Quote



*“The admissions clerk at [East Bay hospital], kept putting ‘he’ everywhere on my paperwork. I’m like, ‘Girl, I’m not signing that.’ She’s like, ‘Well, your paperwork said...’ I said, ‘No, my paperwork said ‘female.’ If you would read, you would see that.’ **I’m quick to address issues.**”*

Study Participant Quote

STUDY LIMITATIONS

- ❑ Only transgender women already in contact with the health care system interviewed (sampling bias)
- ❑ This presentation focuses exclusively on negative health care experiences, despite the fact that many positive health care experiences were discussed!

IMPLICATIONS

1. All persons working in the health care setting—including security guards, receptionists, nurses, and doctors—need **gender sensitivity training!**
2. Health care facilities should have formalized processes for transgender patients **to report negative experiences,** and ways of **following up on those reports.**

IMPLICATIONS

3. Research focused on HIV/AIDS among transgender women may actually **reinforce stereotypes** about transgender women.

4. Transgender women need to be educated about the potential health impacts of **NOT disclosing their gender identity** to health care providers.

FURTHER RESEARCH



→ What are the attitudes/beliefs of health care providers about transgender patients?

→ What clinic or provider-based interventions improve treatment of transgender patients?

→ What role do health care experiences have on health outcomes in this population?

References

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THANK YOU!!!

- **Mentors:** Professor Steve Eyre, Professor Jae Sevelius, Professor Eric Stover, Dr. Colette Auerswald
- **Funders:** UC Berkeley Human Rights Center, JMP Grant, UCSF Dean's Grant, Tenderloin Clinical Research Center at CTSI (UCSF), Schoeneman Fellowship
- Dr. Karen Sokal-Guiterrez & Dr. Lori Kohler
- Please contact me at Leah.Rorvig@ucsf.edu with any questions or comments!



dedicated to **Monika Ramos**

